A DEFENSE OF GLOBAL THEOLOGICAL VOLUNTARISM[i]

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Abstract: In this paper, I challenge the recent consensus that global versions of theological voluntarism—on which all moral facts are explained by God's action—fail, because only local versions—on which only a proper subset of moral facts are so explained—can successfully avoid the objection that theological voluntarism entails that God's actions are arbitrary. I argue that global theological voluntarism can equally well avoid such arbitrariness. This does not mean that global theological voluntarism should be accepted, but that the primary advantage philosophers have taken local views to have over global views is, in fact, no advantage at all.

Introduction

According to theological voluntarists, some significant subset of moral facts are explained by God's actions, broadly construed. They disagree on (among other things) which moral facts are so explained, what kind of explanation is involved, and which of God's actions do the explaining. One of the disagreements that has somewhat receded into the shadows—because virtually all theological voluntarists have come to agree on the issue—is whether *all* moral facts, or only *some* get explained by God's actions. Theological voluntarists are virtually all *local* theological voluntarists now: they think that only some moral facts are explained by God's actions. Global theological voluntarism— the claim that all moral facts are explained by God's actions—is taken to be a failure.

Why the consensus? Since the *Euthyphro*, philosophers have worried that if all moral facts are explained by God's actions, then in some important sense, morality is arbitrary. Many philosophers have argued that only local theological voluntarism can avoid this worry. In this paper, I'll argue that this objection fails to motivate local theological voluntarism over global theological voluntarism. I'll argue that both forms of theological voluntarism share the advantage of being able to explain God's reasons for bringing about our obligations, while neither can explain why God is rationally constrained to bring about a determinate set of moral facts. So the worry puts both forms of theological voluntarism in the same boat. That much doesn't yet establish whether the objection is decisive or not—it might be that while both versions of the view are in the same boat, that boat is sinking—but I end by offering some cursory thoughts on why the objection is far from decisive. Thus, the Arbitrariness Objection doesn't tell strongly against either global or local theological voluntarism.

1. Theological Voluntarism and the Arbitrariness Objection

Many theists think that there is some sense in which at least some moral facts are explained by God's actions, broadly construed. Call this kind of view "theological voluntarism".[ii] Views within this category differ along three dimensions: the nature of the *explanandum*, the nature of the *explanans*, and the nature of the explanatory relation.[iii] Views may specify the *explanandum* as all or merely some moral facts. One of the most popular contemporary views is that only deontic moral facts get explained by God's actions,[iv] while far fewer think that all moral facts get so explained.[v] The *explanandum* can also differ in another way: the level of generality of the moral facts in question. Does God's action explain particular moral facts, such as that I ought to make my child breakfast this morning, or moral principles, such as that moral agents ought to nurture those dependent on them?[vi] The *explanans* might be God's commands, his intentions, his desires, or his preferences

(among other things).[vii] The explanatory relation could be causation[viii], analysis[ix], reduction[x], or grounding.[xi] (I will use a host of phrases here—"grounding", "explanation", "bringing about"—but nothing I say depends on a particular understanding of the relevant explanatory relation.) So in other words, theological voluntarism is a fairly broad family of views.

I want to focus here on one particular distinction among theological voluntarisms: global vs. local theological voluntarism. Take those views as follows:

Global Theological Voluntarism:	All moral facts are explained by God's actions in the relevant way.
Local Theological Voluntarism:	Some proper subset of moral facts are explained by God's actions in the relevant way.

I say "in the relevant way" because the issue I'm focusing on here is the extent of the *explanandum* in divine explanation of moral facts. We can thus kick the can down the road on the issues of the nature of the explanatory relation and the nature of the *explanans*.

My definition of Local Theological Voluntarism also abstracts away from exactly *which* proper subset of moral facts are explained by God's actions. The reason why we don't need to get specific here is that, with regard to the Arbitrariness Objection, which I explain below, it's no particular version of Local Theological Voluntarism that supposedly has an advantage over Global Theological Voluntarism. But just so that we have a concrete view on the table, consider Adams's local view: Adams thinks that only deontic facts—those concerning obligation, permissibility, etc.— are explained in the relevant way by God's actions (in Adams's case, commands). Moral facts outside those deontic facts—especially facts about goodness—are also explained by God, but by his nature as opposed to his commands.[xii]

Local views are supposed to have a marked advantage over global views in responding to a longstanding and very popular objection to theological voluntarism. According to that objection,

which goes back at least to the *Euthyphro*, if moral facts are explained by God's actions, then morality is in some sense objectionably arbitrary. In more formal terms:

1. If theological voluntarism is true, then God lacks reasons to bring about the moral facts he brings about.
2. If God lacks reasons to bring about the moral facts he brings about, then morality is arbitrary.
3. Morality is not arbitrary.
4. Therefore, theological voluntarism is false.[xiii]

Call this *the Arbitrariness Objection*. (1) is supposed to hold since God's actions explain the reasons—so those reasons cannot explain God's actions. With regard to (2) and (3), we need to get clear on what sense of arbitrariness is in play here. Particular moral facts could be called "arbitrary" if they do not obtain in virtue of any non-moral facts. Particular moral facts clearly cannot be arbitrary in this way.[xiv] But that can't be the sense of arbitrariness used here: on any form of theological voluntarism, the target moral facts are not brute. They may be directly explained by God's actions, or perhaps they are explained by non-moral (and non-divine) facts, where the *connection* between the two is explained by God's action. Regardless, particular moral facts will have an explanation, on any theological voluntarism.

Rather, (2) is supposed to be true because *God's action* of bringing about the moral facts would be arbitrary, if he had no reasons to do so. His action would be arbitrary by standards of rationality: it is not only undetermined by reasons, but is not even influenced by them. Morality would inherit this arbitrariness—either because particular moral facts obtain in virtue of God's arbitrary action, or because the God-wrought connection between moral and non-moral facts is arbitrary.

2. The (Extent of the) Local Theological Voluntarist's Reply

Local Theological Voluntarists have heralded their view's superiority to global views in answering the Arbitrariness Objection. Going local, they claim, affords them special purchase on a denial of (1). Since only *some* moral facts get explained in the relevant way by God's actions, that leaves it open whether other moral facts—not explained in the relevant way by God's actions—can be or explain the reasons God could have to bring about the target moral facts. To take the view on which only deontic facts are explained in the relevant way by God's actions: such a view allows that God would bring about an obligation to Φ rather than an obligation not to Φ *because God is good.* More fully, assuming for concreteness that God's relevant action is commanding, for some actions:

a. God is perfectly good.
b. A perfectly good being would have reason to command us not to Φ.

This is not the only reply a Local Theological Voluntarist could give, and even this one is underspecified—(b) could be developed in a number of ways—but this is enough to give the general strategy.

But how strong is the rational explanation for God's action, on Local Theological Voluntarism? It seems to me that God's goodness can rationally *influence*, but cannot rationally *determine*, God's action of bringing about the deontic moral facts.[xv] More generally: non-target moral facts can never rationally determine God's bringing about the target facts (unless we do some gerrymandering[xvi]). Put more precisely, and assuming that deontic moral facts are the target:

Wiggle Room: Deontic moral fact Δ obtains, yet a perfectly good (omniscient, omnipotent) being could have failed to bring about Δ.

Wiggle Room is supported by the following claim:

Indecisive: God did not have decisive reason to bring Δ about.

Indecisive entails Wiggle Room on the assumptions that God is perfectly rational and that, for any action Φ in which one brings about some state of affairs, a perfectly rational being could have failed to Φ if he lacks decisive reason to Φ in the actual world.[xvii] I'll assume these latter two claims. Before getting into the argument for Indecisive though, I'll say a word on the significance of Wiggle Room.

I deal more fully with the significance of Wiggle Room in Section 4. But briefly, Wiggle Room is most worrisome for those varieties of theological voluntarism on which the *explananda* are the fundamental moral principles. After all, we are all fine with the contingency of particular moral facts—I ought to go to the store today so that I can feed my children, but I could have easily failed to have this obligation if I had enough food already.

That Wiggle Room is only worrisome for a proper subset of theological voluntarisms is not a problem here, for two reasons: first, I agree with Murphy that we ought to understand theological voluntarism as attempting to explain fundamental moral principles.[xviii] So Wiggle Room will be a problem for theological voluntarism *simpliciter*, properly understood. Second, I'll ultimately argue for a parity thesis with regard to local and global theological voluntarism: they are in equally (dis)advantaged positions when replying to the Arbitrariness Objection. This will be true regardless of whether Wiggle Room is worrisome or not: whether it is or not, it is equally worrisome for both views, since both views are committed to it to the same degree.

I'll support Wiggle Room directly with an example and then give a formal argument for Indecisive. Here's the example: it might be that God brought about an obligation for people in my sort of financial situation to donate 8% of their income to charity, when the world is such as it is now. He brought about this obligation because he is good—good beings care about the suffering in the world and want to see it alleviated—and his goodness prevented him from bringing it about that people in my financial situation have *no* obligation to give, when the world is such as it is now. Yet

plausibly, God could have brought about the same obligation, but at 8.2% of my income—and he would not have been less good for it. Doubts about the specifics of the example aside, the sloganized question is this: is there rational wiggle-room for the deontic within the evaluative, or does the evaluative determine the deontic? Examples like the above suggest the former.

The argument for Indecisive depends on the following insight: there's a very close connection between deontic facts and decisive reason attributions, or facts about what we have most overall reason to do. I think there's a solid case that this connection is one of identity, but ultimately my argument for Indecisive need not commit to this stronger claim. But since the argument is simpler when relying on the identity claim, I'll present that version of the argument first, before introducing complexity. Here's the formal argument for Indecisive (assume that all explanations are of the relevant kind according to the theological voluntarist):

1. Assume that God's action explains all deontic facts.
2. Deontic facts just are attributions of decisive reasons.
3. If deontic facts just are attributions of decisive reasons, then there is at least one deontic fact that God did not have decisive reason to bring about.
4. Therefore, there is as least one deontic fact that God did not have decisive reason to bring about.

The kind of Local Theological Voluntarist I'm concerned with here not only accepts (1), but also that deontic facts are the *only* normative facts explained in the relevant way by God's action. The argument thus shows that at least such theorists are committed to Indecisive, and thus Wiggle Room. (Interestingly, the Global Theological Voluntarist is also committed to (1), and thus (4).)

Facts attributing decisive reasons (e.g., that A has decisive reason to Φ) have a close connection with deontic facts. While it's controversial what that connection is, there's obviously some connection. Decisive reasons settle the matter of how to act, just as deontic facts do; they are opposed to contributory reasons, which merely weigh in favor or against an action.[xix] Many philosophers think that deontic facts *just are* decisive reason attributions.[xx] According to Erik

Wielenberg, "to have an obligation just is to have decisive reasons to perform a certain action".[xxi]

Mark Schroeder puts it more formally:

> Ought: For it to be the case that X ought to do A is for it to be the case that $S_{X,A} > S_{X,\sim A}$, where $S_{X,A}$ is the set of all the reasons for X to do A and $S_{X,\sim A}$ is the set of all the reasons for X to not do A.[xxii]

So, (2) is a plausible specification of an even more plausible idea, that there is strong connection between deontic facts and attributions of decisive reasons.

Now consider (3). Call the explanatorily fundamental deontic facts Δ_1—these are the deontic facts each of which is at least as explanatorily fundamental as any other deontic fact. If deontic facts just are decisive reason attributions, then no decisive reason attribution will be explanatorily prior to Δ_1. So, in bringing about Δ_1, if God relied on a decisive reason, he would have to be acting on the basis of a reason that is identical to some fact within Δ_1 itself, or some fact derivative of (a subset of) Δ_1.[xxiii] But I take the following to be near-undeniable:

> Basing: A's Φing cannot be done on the basis of any reason identical to a fact explained by A's Φing (or any fact even partially explained by those facts).

So, given the connection between the deontic and decisive reasons, when God brings about Δ_1, he cannot have decisive reason to do so.

Of course, the close connection between deontic facts and decisive reason attributions may not be identity. It may be that (i) every deontic fact explains a decisive reason attribution, and every decisive reason attribution is explained by a deontic fact. Or, it may be that (ii) every decisive reason attribution explains a deontic fact, and every deontic fact is explained by a decisive reason attribution. Either way, we still ought to conclude that, assuming God explains all deontic facts, there is a deontic fact God did not have decisive reason to bring about.

First, assume (i). There will thus be at least one deontic fact explanatorily prior to all decisive reason facts. When God brings about this deontic fact, he will have to rely on a decisive reason explained by the very fact his action brings about (or some other fact explained by the same action). This would violate the parenthetical clause of Basing.

What about (ii)? Here things get hairy. There will be at least one decisive reason attribution that is explanatorily prior to all deontic facts, so God could rely on it, as far as Basing is concerned. However, here, we get a strange overdetermination of explanation. For wherever a decisive reason attribution R is not explained by God's action, but the deontic fact Δ which R explains is, by stipulation, so explained, we'll get the following explanatory structure:

$$\Delta$$

$$R \qquad\qquad \text{God's Action}$$
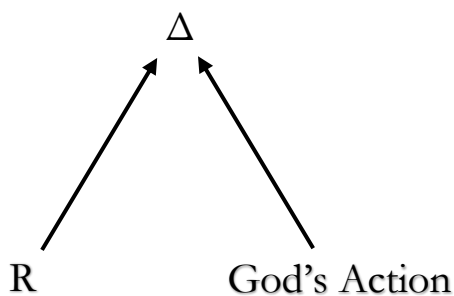
Here, each solid arrow represents a full explanation. Of course, such overdetermination of full explanation is not impossible, but I take it to be an unpalatable necessary companion to this form of Local Theological Voluntarism. Putting aside the oddness of being committed to explanatory overdetermination in itself, the motivation for any form of theological voluntarism is that God's action is *necessary* to explain the explananda. But on (ii), decisive reason attributions are sufficient to explain deontic facts, which for the Local Theological Voluntarist, are the relevant explananda.

What follows, to bring this long vine to fruition, is that there's at least one deontic fact that God did not have decisive reason to bring about. So Indecisive is true. And combined with our assumptions, this entails that God could have brought about a different set of deontic facts than he

actually did bring about—i.e., Wiggle Room. So what this means generally is that even though Local Theological Voluntarists can justifiably claim that God had reason to bring about the deontic facts he brought about—thus denying (1) in the Arbitrariness Objection—they cannot claim that *necessarily*, he brought those facts about. He could have failed to.

3. What Global Theological Voluntarism Can Do

In the last section, I established that Local Theological Voluntarists can deny (1) in the Arbitrariness Objection, claiming that God has reasons to bring about the deontic facts he does, in fact, bring about. This is because they target only *some* moral facts for the relevant kind of divine explanation, leaving the others to rationally constrain God's action. But we saw that this strategy has its limits: God could have failed to bring about the deontic facts he brought about. In this section, I argue that there is an avenue for Global Theological Voluntarists to lay claim to the same kind of benefit, though it comes with the same kind of limit. The basic insight here is that God could be constrained by non-moral, yet still normative reasons.

3.1 Non-Moral Reasons

Consider the following claims:

> The city had reason to try to save as much of the cathedral as possible, because of its great beauty.
>
> David had reason to avoid hitting the deer on his drive home, because hitting the deer would put him at greater risk of injury than avoiding it.

Both are claims that are of a commonplace nature. Claims like the former were made or implied when the Notre Dame Cathedral caught fire in 2019. Thoughts resembling the latter went through my mind when my friend David recently told me he tried (and failed) to avoid hitting a deer on his drive home from the lake. Both claims assert the existence of reasons, yet neither is obviously a *moral* reason.

Neither case is clear cut: we might have moral reasons to preserve something beautiful, or to preserve our own lives or health. But I don't mean to be giving some sort of conclusive argument here, as much as pointing in the direction of something I think we can all, if vaguely, sense is a distinct source of normativity. Beauty can generate reasons independently of moral reasons, as can self-interest.[xxiv]

Perhaps even less controversially, there are reasons which are neither moral, nor clearly aesthetic or prudential in nature. Consider this kind of claim:

> Katie had reason to buy the slightly more expensive of the two houses, because she wanted it much more.

Again, such reasons seem entirely commonplace. Our desires—here I'll use "desire" as a catch-all for "pro-attitude"—explain many of our reasons. And such reasons seem to come apart from the moral (Katie might not have any moral reason to buy the more expensive house), the aesthetic (the more expensive house might be aesthetically worse than the cheaper one in every respect), and the prudential (it might be worse for Katie in every respect to buy the more expensive house). Call such reasons "desire-based reasons".[xxv]

It may be that desire-based reasons are a sub-species of prudential reasons—i.e., if it is always good for one to have a desire satisfied. But it's important to keep the categories separate in case they come apart: it might be that I can get what I want and it not be *at all* good for me. And it might be that, even in such cases, that something would satisfy the desire is still a reason for me to do it. The answers to these questions depend on hard questions concerning the nature of well-being.[xxvi] For now I'll just treat them as distinct kinds of reasons.

3.2 Desire-Based Reasons and the Global Gambit

So we potentially have three fundamentally distinct kinds of reason that are non-moral. Global Theological Voluntarism is consistent with the claim that such non-moral reasons explain God's commands. Global Theological Voluntarists, after all, are only committed to all *moral* facts being explained by God's action. So it could be that these kinds of non-moral reasons rationally influence God's actions, in the way that non-deontic moral reasons rationally influence God's actions for the Local Theological Voluntarist. And of course, that was the move that allowed the Local Theological Voluntarist to deny (1) in the Arbitrariness Objection:

1. If theological voluntarism is true, then God lacks reasons to bring about the moral facts he brings about.

The promise of the current approach, then, is that *all* theological voluntarists can deny (1).

But are aesthetic, or prudential, or desire-based reasons even the kind of thing that could help explain God's action? If not, then the Global Theological Voluntarist still can't deny (1): while we all should grant that such reasons exist, a denial of (1) requires that such reasons could explain God's commanding some things rather than others.

There are (at least) two relevant questions to consider here. First, is it even possible for God to have the kind of reason in question? Second, if the answer to this first question is "yes", *does* God have such reasons to command certain actions that thereby become obligatory? With regard to the first question, we might worry about prudential reasons, insofar as these are distinct from desire-based reasons. Plausibly, God necessarily has maximal well-being. And plausibly, in order for A to have a prudential reason to Φ, Φing must result in a higher level of well-being for A than A would have in *some* other possible world in which he didn't Φ.[xxvii] In that case, God could not have prudential reasons to act.

Not so with desire-based reasons, at least insofar as they come apart from prudential reasons: I can have a reason to drink a Dr. Pepper just because I want to, even if this (counterfactually) won't increase my well-being. And surely God, at least in many mainstream traditions, has desires. It would be strange to say "God wants to Φ, but this gives him no reason to Φ." Similarly, there seems to be no in-principle problem with God having aesthetic reasons. God can Φ just because Φing makes the world a more beautiful place.

So now the second question: can the Global Theological Voluntarist make the case that God had non-moral reason to command certain things rather than others? I'll avoid appeal to prudential reasons, as they come apart from desire-based reasons, because of the problem noted above: if God can't have prudential reasons, then he certainly can't have prudential reason to command certain things over others.

While God can have aesthetic reasons, and maybe even aesthetic reasons to command certain things over others, I don't think such reasons can do all the explanatory work Global Theological Voluntarists need them to. Consider the best kind of case: God might command that we preserve nature, or that we not destroy it, etc. And he might only command this because of the beauty of nature, such that his reason to so command is purely aesthetic. But try to extend this strategy to other cases, and it gets mired in murkiness. Consider our obligation not to kill innocents: is it a more beautiful state of affairs when innocents don't die? Is it ugly (in a purely aesthetic sense) when they die? Perhaps, if there is the right sort of deep tie between moral properties and aesthetic ones—e.g., morally horrific states of affairs are thereby aesthetically ugly—but I do not wish to lead the Global Theological Voluntarist into the fog, here.

Rather, I want to propose that the Global Theological Voluntarist can make an appeal to a certain kind of desire-based reason, arguing that God always had such reason to command what he

did rather than something else. This tactic will be limited to those voluntarists who accept the following claim: God loves people, and his creation more generally. Accepting this assumption, however, the Global Theological Voluntarist can argue that God's love for his creation gives him a non-moral reason to benefit that creation and protect it from harm. This reason generates a reason to command actions that benefit/protect that creation from harm. We can call this *The Global Gambit*:

The Global Gambit

1. When A loves B, A has a reason to promote B's well-being, and to protect B from harm.
2. God loves every entity in his creation.
3. **It follows that**: God has reason to promote the well-being of every entity in his creation, and protect it from harm.
4. If God has reason to promote B's well-being and to protect B from harm, and our Φing either benefits or prevents harm to some entity in God's creation, then God has reason to command that we Φ.
5. **It follows that**: If our Φing either benefits or prevents harm to some entity in God's creation, then God has reason to command that we Φ.
6. If we are morally obligated to Φ, then Φing (either individually or collectively) either benefits or prevents harm to some entity in God's creation.
7. Therefore, if we are morally obligated to Φ, then God has reason to command that we Φ.[xxviii]

A few notes: first, the argument clearly is geared toward those who think the relevant divine action is *commanding* (see (4)). While I think the argument could easily be modified to reflect alternate views, I won't do that work here. Second, B need not be a person in this argument, only something that can be benefited or harmed. Third, Φ should be read broadly, to include refraining from actions. Finally, I have tried to keep the argument readable, but (6) and (7) really should be read as making claims about benefits/harms and God's consequent reasons *antecedent* to the existence of our moral obligations. I.e., if we are morally obligated to Φ, then *antecedent to/independent of that obligation*, Φing benefits some entity in God's creation, and (given the other premises) God therefore has reason to command that we Φ (*mutatis mutandis* for harm).

3.3 God's Love for Creation

Let's look more closely at the premises. (2) represents a substantive assumption that, while plausible on most mainstream forms of theism, is nonetheless not strictly essential to theism, as is (e.g.) God's omnipotence. As an assumption then, it merely slightly constrains what *kinds* of theists can defend Global Theological Voluntarism as I suggest here. I therefore leave it as an assumption, with just one more thing to say about it: it does *not* require the theist to commit to God's perfect moral goodness. That would be problematic, since we're looking for purely non-moral reasons that could explain God's commands: if those reasons are ultimately explained in terms of God's moral goodness, of course we would not have hit our target.

But while it is possible to defend (2) by appeal to God's goodness—together with the substantive claim that perfect goodness requires one to love one's creation—this is not the only basis on which to hold (2). I don't think there's any reason to tie the Global Theological Voluntarist down to any one story here, though an example might help: perhaps the Global Theological Voluntarist will say that we have independent revelation-based evidence that God is loving—independent in the sense that the power of the evidence does not depend on thinking that God is perfectly good.

3.4 Love-Based Reasons to Benefit and Prevent Harm

Concerning (1): it is clearly essential to loving someone or something—at least any thing that can be benefited or harmed—that one thereby has reason to benefit that thing and protect it from harm. This follows from the popular claim that love entails the desire to benefit the beloved, combined with my assumption that desires can generate reasons.[xxix] That much does not seem to me in need of defense. However, it is incredibly important for this argument that the reason generated by love (or the desire therein involved) be *purely* generated by love/desire—or, at least, that love needs no help

from morality. And this is part of the larger issue of whether attitudes can *by themselves* ground reasons to act.

The answer, I believe, is "yes". There certainly is a substantive debate in the vicinity here, concerning whether *all* reasons are fully grounded by attitudes or mental states.[xxx] But we should all grant that *some* reasons are so grounded: if I want a Dr. Pepper, that desire fully grounds my reason to get one.[xxxi] If I love my dog, I thereby have a reason to pet him. And—more generally—if I love something that can be benefited (or harmed), I thereby have a reason to benefit it (or protect it from harm).

A good test here is to imagine the moral error theorist. The error theorist claims that no positive moral claims are true.[xxxii] So it's not the case that I morally ought to Φ, or that it's morally wrong to Φ, or that it's morally good/bad to Φ, for any Φ. Yet the error theorist can still consistently think that she has reason to buy a house, or to drink a Dr. Pepper, or to pet her dog. And that's because such reasons need not depend on the truth of any positive moral claim.

It might be pointed out that, while in general attitudes often generate reasons without the aid of any moral truth, this can't be true in the case of God's love. This is because, if God's love generates his reasons to benefit us, I can't allow that he loves us for any moral reasons—e.g., because it is good to do so, or because we are good, etc. This is because, of course, the global theological voluntarist is trying to appeal to God's love to account for all moral reasons. But if God loves us, but not for any moral reason, then God's love seems arbitrary. And not only is that problematic in itself—it reintroduces the very problem we were trying to solve, just at a different level of explanation.[xxxiii]

The first thing to say in response here is that this is actually *not* the same problem we were trying to solve. The original problem was that global theological voluntarism couldn't allow for God

to have reasons for his commands. Even leaving love arbitrary, he still has reasons for commanding, here. Suppose I ask my son to bring me a Dr. Pepper, and the reason that I ask is because I love Dr. Pepper. Even if my love of Dr. Pepper is arbitrary, it doesn't follow that I have no reason to ask my son for one.

But even if it is argued that the arbitrariness of love is a separate cost for my answer—or that the arbitrariness of love is inherited by any command based on it—the global theological voluntarist is still not without recourse, here. She can simply say that God loves us *for non-moral reasons*. And here, we have a plausible candidate to fill that role: aesthetic reasons. God loves us because we are beautiful. Thus, even granting that God's love must be based on reasons, we have a plausible way of accepting this without relying on moral reasons.

3.5 A Reasons-Transfer Principle

Next, consider (4): if God has reason to promote something's well-being or prevent harm to that thing, then he has reason to command actions which benefit or prevent harm (respectively) to that thing. This may not be true at a more general level, such that if *anyone* has reason to promote something's well-being or prevent harm to it, she has reason to command actions which benefit or prevent harm (respectively) to that thing. This is for a number of reasons: some people are not the right kind of authority to command; some people are in a better position to benefit/prevent harm *themselves* rather than commanding it; some commands would be ineffective in securing the relevant benefit/protection from harm.

However, there do seem to be conditions under which, if A has reason to promote B's well-being and prevent B's harm, then he has reason to command C to perform actions which do so. Such conditions include:

a. A has authority to issue commands to C

b. A has special reason to prefer that C promote B's well-being or prevent B's harm
c. A has special reason to think that, if he so commands C, C will be more likely to perform the relevant actions

Perhaps (a-c) aren't necessary, but they are sufficient for reasons to benefit/prevent harm to transfer to commanding such. And it seems like God meets these conditions. As long as we grant the motivating assumptions common to all forms of theological voluntarism, (a) and (c) will hold. Condition (a) is an entry-level assumption for any theological voluntarist. And concerning (c), if God had no reason to think his commands would be efficacious—that we will be no more likely to Φ for his commanding that we Φ—it would be strange for him to have issued them. Condition (b) may be slightly contentious, but is easily motivated on many theistic traditions: in the Christian tradition, God wants humans to image him, and so would desire that they share his motives, desires, and intentions.

3.6 The Creation-Affecting Principle of Obligation

Finally, consider (6). (6) expresses a broad view about the extent of moral obligation: we cannot be morally obligated to do things that neither benefit nor prevent harm to some entity in God's creation. And we cannot be obligated to refrain from something unless so refraining would benefit/prevent harm to some entity in God's creation.[xxxiv] (6) is qualified to account for any obligations to Φ where an individual Φing would neither benefit nor prevent harm to anything, but where if enough people Φ, such benefits or preventions will obtain. (And similarly for obligations to refrain from Φing.) Suppose we have an obligation to vote: this is not because our action alone will benefit or prevent harm. Rather, it is because *if enough people vote*, there will be some benefit or harm-prevention.

(6) is not a grounding claim: it does not entail that obligations obtain *in virtue of* such benefits and harms. The claim is merely that benefit/harm facts *supervene* on obligation facts: there can be no

change in whether the action benefits or prevents harm without a change in the obligation facts. This could be for a number of reasons other than obligations being exclusively grounded in benefit/harm facts, though that grounding view is certainly compatible with (6). As an example, consider a virtue ethicist who thinks that our obligation to Φ in circumstances C is grounded in the fact that a virtuous agent, acting in character, would Φ in C.[xxxv] It seems open to such a theorist to then claim that, whenever a virtuous agent would Φ, Φing would either benefit or prevent harm to something in creation. Obligation is exclusively grounded in what virtuous agents would do, but since virtuous agents always benefit/prevent harm when acting in character, (6) is still true.

The virtue ethics example highlights the extreme that (6) is compatible with obligation not being grounded in benefit/harm facts at all, merely being correlated with them. But there's nothing special about virtue: obligations may be grounded in some other kind of normative fact, such as goodness facts, fittingness facts, or facts about reasons. And it could be that it's good (or fitting, etc.) to benefit/prevent harm, which would explain why (6) is true. So (6) is a very ecumenical claim.

Even still, it might be claimed that we are obligated to do some things that don't benefit or prevent harm to anything, or that we are obligated to refrain from some things that would harm no one. Some think that it's wrong to conceive a person whose existence is deeply and inevitably flawed, when the alternative is not bringing anyone into existence or to bring someone else into existence who would be better off. Yet it's strange to say that the person is *harmed* by being brought into existence (or benefited by not being brought into existence) since they wouldn't exist otherwise.[xxxvi]

First off, however, such examples are marginal, and depend on substantive assumptions—not least of which the view that harm consists in making someone worse off than they otherwise would have been. We can thus set such cases to the side, at least provisionally. But second, and more

importantly, once we see what role (6) is playing in the argument, we'll see that even if (6) is false (because of examples like those above), the argument can be modified to still achieve the conclusion. For (1) could just as plausibly claim that loving some (possible) thing gives one reason not only to benefit/prevent harm to it, but also to prevent it from coming into existence under certain conditions. And (6) could be modified to claim that if we are morally obligated to Φ, then Φing (either individually or collectively) either benefits or prevents harm to some entity in God's creation, *or else prevents such-and-such entities from coming into existence*. Regardless of the particular story, the point is that God's love can explain reasons beyond those relating to benefit and harm-prevention.

In summary, the Global Theological Voluntarist needs to appeal to non-moral reasons to explain why God would command some things over others. Yet it seems like God's desire-based reasons fit that bill—in particular, his love for his creation. That love gives God a reason to command those actions which would benefit or prevent harm, and I've argued this accounts for all of our obligations.

3.7 Wiggle Room Again

It is a big step for the Global Theological Voluntarist to be able to argue that God has reason to command all those things we are obligated to do. It shows, in some sense, that Global Theological Voluntarists need not be committed to the arbitrariness of morality—they can deny the first premise of the Arbitrariness Objection. Yet recall that there was a limitation on the Local Theological Voluntarist's reply to the Arbitrariness Objection:

Wiggle Room: Deontic moral fact Δ obtains, yet a perfectly good (omniscient, omnipotent) being could have failed to bring about Δ.

Wiggle Room was supported by Indecisive:

Indecisive: God did not have decisive reason to bring Δ about.

In summary, the argument ran: whatever reasons God has to bring about the deontic facts, not all of them can be decisive reasons, since this would entail that one deontic fact is not explained by God's action. This is because of the close relationship between deontic facts and decisive reasons.

But note that the argument assumes nothing the Global Theological Voluntarist isn't committed to. What gets the argument going is (1):

1. Assume that God's action explains all deontic facts.

But of course, (1) doesn't say that God's action explains *only* deontic facts. Global Theological Voluntarists are committed to something stronger than (1), but which entails (1): God's action explains all moral facts. And so, insofar as the argument from Indecisive to Wiggle Room works, the Global Theological Voluntarist is just as committed to Wiggle Room as the Local Theological Voluntarist.

The big point here: while Local Theological Voluntarists have always claimed superiority in replying to the Arbitrariness Objection, it seems that there is a parity between their position (vis-à-vis the objection) and the Global Theological Voluntarist's position. Both can justifiably claim that God has reasons to bring about the deontic facts, yet both must claim that for some deontic facts, they might have been otherwise. So it seems that Global Theological Voluntarists are at no disadvantage in replying to the Arbitrariness Objection.

4. The State of Play

Establishing this parity doesn't tell us (i) whether either position is defensible with regard to the Arbitrariness Objection, or (ii) whether either position has an advantage over the other independently of the Arbitrariness Objection. I want to spill just a little ink cursorily investigating these questions.

With regard to (i), I don't think that either Global or Local Theological Voluntarism is off the table, just in virtue of their (similarly) limited responses to the Arbitrariness Objection. Both can deny that God's action is arbitrary, though neither can claim that God's commanding is always rationally determined, and this entails that some deontic facts are contingent.

That some deontic facts are contingent is not problematic at all: my duty to Φ may depend on my Φing bringing about some harm, where that fact that it does so is contingent. So let's consider the subset of theological voluntarisms which take God's commands to bring about the fundamental deontic principles (as I said, in my opinion this is the right way to construe theological voluntarism anyway). It is more intuitively worrisome if the fundamental deontic principles are contingent; yet on this subset of views, at least one such principle must be.

Two clarifications: first, this does not mean that such theological voluntarists are committed to the contingency of *all* fundamental deontic principles. Second, this does not commit the theological voluntarist to the denial of the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral. According to the latter thesis—without getting mired in which technical version is the correct formulation— there can be no change at the moral level without a change at the non-moral level. Theological voluntarists are committed to there being possible changes at the fundamental deontic level, but they are always accompanied by a change in the state of God's commanding—a non-moral change. So, theological voluntarists may still endorse supervenience, even if they deny the necessity of all fundamental deontic principles.

Neither does the contingency of a deontic principle mean that, in place of that principle, *any* deontic principle could be true. Suppose that the principle of utility is true, and singularly fundamental. Suppose that this principle could have been false. But the theological voluntarist need not say that, in those possible worlds in which it's false, we ought to maximize the balance of pain

over pleasure—call this the principle of disutility. The principle of disutility of course doesn't follow from the falsity of the principle of utility. Furthermore, on the kinds of responses to the Arbitrariness Objection we've explored, the theological voluntarist is in a good position to say that the principle of disutility is *impossible*. Whether because of God's goodness or his love for his creation, he would never bring about such a principle—even if he could have failed to bring about the (true, let's suppose) principle of utility.

Still, it may seem strange that there is any contingency in the fundamental deontic principles. Perhaps in actuality, we ought to maximize expected utility, but it might have been that we ought to maximize actual utility, or that we ought to make sure utility hits a certain threshold. I don't think there's much to say here, except "Well, that's the view". This commitment seems to me somewhere in-between a deal-breaker and a welcome perk. It is in an interesting—controversial but not obviously false—commitment of both forms of theological voluntarism I've been considering here.

Now to consider (ii): whether either Global or Local Theological Voluntarism has an advantage over the other independently of the Arbitrariness Objection. Of course, this is a huge question, and one I can only touch on here. But it seems to me that what I say here—that Global and Local Theological Voluntarisms are on equal footing with regard to the Arbitrariness Objection—applies equally well to another objection to theological voluntarism. Here is that objection:

The Moral Horror Objection

1. If theological voluntarism is true, then God could bring it about that we are obligated to perform actions that are intuitively morally horrendous.
2. It is impossible for God to bring it about that we are obligated to perform such actions.
1. Therefore, theological voluntarism is false.[xxxvii]

The sorts of action in mind: torturing babies, genocide, rape, etc. Surely (says (2)) it could not be permissible, much less obligatory, to perform such actions. It is normally thought that, just as with the Arbitrariness Objection, Local beats Global Theological Voluntarism in replying to the Moral Horror Objection.

But as I said in addressing (i), it is *both* Local and Global Theological Voluntarism that entail that God could not have commanded morally horrendous things, given his goodness (Local) or lovingness (Global). He could not have brought it about that we are obligated to minimize overall utility, or that your action causing pain is a reason to perform it. So there is at least one other influential objection that Local and Global Theological Voluntarism are on par with regard to. This is not to say that they are on equal footing altogether—just that what holds with regard to the Arbitrariness Objection is in fact at least slightly more general.

Conclusion

Many philosophers writing on theological voluntarism have arrived at a comfortable equilibrium regarding Global Theological Voluntarism: it clearly commits its adherents to the arbitrariness of morality. Local Theological Voluntarism escapes scot-free, and so the Arbitrariness Objection favors the latter form of voluntarism over the former. But I've argued that this equilibrium needs to be upset: Local Theological Voluntarism has limits that many have not realized, while Global Theological Voluntarism can actually avoid the arbitrariness of morality to the same extent as Local Theological Voluntarism by turning to non-moral, desire-based reasons for action. This puts the two views on par with regard to the Arbitrariness Objection, and I have argued that though the extent of the reply either view can give to that objection is limited, we should not be too worried by this limitation.

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[i] For helpful feedback on this paper, I'd like to thank two anonymous referees and the editors of this journal.

[ii] I follow Quinn, "An Argument for Divine Command Ethics; Murphy, *God and Moral Law*; and Schroeder, "Cudworth and Normative Explanations in this terminology, over "divine command theory". As we shall shortly see, many of the views in question don't take the relevant divine action to be commanding.

[iii] See Murphy, "Theological Voluntarism."

[iv] See, e.g., Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*; Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists"; Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*; Hare, *God's Call*; Quinn, "Divine Command Theory."

[v] Brown, "Religious Morality"; Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*; Wierenga, "A Defensible Divine Command Theory."

[vi] Murphy, *God and Moral Law*, chs. 1-2. Murphy is one of few to recognize the importance of this distinction.

[vii] Regarding the first, see Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Regarding the second, see Quinn, "Divine Command Theory." Regarding the third, see Miller "Divine Desire Theory and Obligation" and Miller, "Divine Will Theory: Desires or Intentions?" Regarding the fourth, see Carson, "Divine Will/Divine Command Theories and the Problem of Arbitrariness."

[viii] E.g., Quinn, "Divine Command Theory."

[ix] E.g., Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Conception of Ethical Wrongness."

[x] E.g., Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again."

[xi] E.g., Wierenga, "A Defensible Divine Command Theory," 389—though he doesn't use this term, grounding just is an "asymmetric relation of dependence."

[xii] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, ch. 1.

[xiii] Plato, *Euthyphro*; Murphy, *God and Moral Law*, 102-103; Carson, "Divine Will/Divine Command Theories and the Problem of Arbitrariness"; Sullivan, "Arbitrariness, Divine Commands, and Morality"; Young "Theism and Morality"; Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, ch. 5.

[xiv] See Morton, "Grounding the Normative"; Enoch, "How Principles Ground"; Rosen, "What is a Moral Law?"; Rosen, "Metaphysical Relations in Metaethics."

[xv] Murphy, *God and Moral Law,* 103-105 makes a very similar claim, though he does not defend it—he is concerned there with whether/to what extent it would be bad for the theological voluntarist if the claim were true.

[xvi] What I have in mind: the target fact is just that we ought to give to charity, where some more general obligation—e.g., we ought to maximize net goodness—is independent of God's actions. Such *extremely* local views are not sufficiently independently motivated to matter here.

[xvii] The latter follows trivially if a perfectly rational being never *actually* performs such actions without decisive reason to do so.

[xviii] Murphy, *God and Moral Law,* 60-61.

[xix] See Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles,* ch. 2; Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other,* ch. 1.

[xx] In addition to those quoted below, see also Parfit, *On What Matters,* 33, though it's less clear there whether he's endorsing an identity claim.

[xxi] Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics,* 57.

[xxii] Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions,* 193.

xxiii Or, even worse, a decisive reason less fundamental than Δ_1–a reason identical to some deontic fact derivative of Δ_1.

xxiv See, e.g., Copp, "The Ring of Gyges"; Baker, "Skepticism About Ought Simpliciter."

xxv See Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*.

xxvi For a desire-satisfaction theory of well-being, see Heathwood, "Faring Well and Getting What You Want." For an objectivist theory of well-being that would allow for desire-satisfaction *not* to always contribute to well-being, see Kazez, *The Weight of Things*, ch. 5. Of course, standard hedonism would also entail that desire-satisfaction is not always good for one, insofar as desire-satisfaction does not necessarily increase pleasure.

xxvii There are controversial accounts of benefit/harm in the area, such as the counterfactual comparative account--see Carlson, "More Problems for the Counterfactual Comparative Account of Harma and Benefit"; and Klocksiem, "A Defense of the Counterfactual Compariative Account of Harm." But my claim here is considerably weaker than those.

xxviii Adams's early work at first glance appeals to God's *love* without appealing to any explicitly moral properties of God—see Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Conception of Ethical Wrongness" and "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again." (Brown, "Religious Morality," 241 *very* briefly alludes to something like my strategy here.) But the Global Gambit is unique for a number of reasons. First, it's not clear that even in his early work, Adams truly means God's lovingness to operate independently of his moral goodness. He says on p. 468 of his "A Modified Divine Command Conception of Ethical Wrongness": "The modified divine command theory clearly conceives of believers as valuing some things independently of their relation to God's commands." See Carson, "Divine Will/Divine Command Theories and the Problem of Arbitrariness" on this point. Second, it seems to me that Adams has not given a full account of exactly how God's love explains his reasons, such that morality is not arbitrary. He has at most shown that (a loving) God will command certain things rather than others; the bigger question, and the one I pursue here, is how to explain how he has reason to do so, given his love.

xxix Aristotle says this of the kind of love between friends: to have such love for someone, "you must wish goods for his own sake" (1999: 8.2). See also Sidgwick (1981): 244; Carson, "Divine Will/Divine Command Theories and the Problem of Arbitrariness," 10. See the references in Carson, "Divine Will/Divine Command Theories and the Problem of Arbitrariness," 457n11.

xxx You might call this the debate over the truth of normative realism, but many realists take the relevant debate to be over whether *no* normative truths are mind-dependent in the way described, not whether *some* normative truths are not mind-dependent. For a proponent of the first understanding of the relevant debate, see Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, section 1.1. For proponents of the second understanding, see Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, section 1.1; Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," 110.

xxxi It might be that I wouldn't have such a reason if getting a Dr. Pepper required me to act wrongly, but that doesn't make it a part of the grounds of my reason that I am not acting wrongly. See Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, ch. 3.

xxxii It is actually a complicated open question how we ought to formulate error theory. See Olson, *Moral Error Theory*, section 1.3.

xxxiii I owe this objection to an anonymous referee, whom I thank for it.

xxxiv For similar principles, see Parfit, "Future People, the Non-Identity Problem, and Person-Affecting Principles"—the Narrow Deontic Principle—and Bennett "The Fallacy of the Principle of Procreative Beneficence." My creation-affecting principle is significantly weaker than the Narrow Deontic Principle, however: it concerns whether someone is harmed/benefited as opposed whether they are "worse off"; it allows that harms to non-persons could be ground obligations; and it allows that even where an individual act harms no one, it may still be wrong, if some group *collectively* performing that action would still harm someone.

xxxv Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, ch. 1.

xxxvi Parfit, *Reasons and Persons,* ch. 16.

xxxvii See, e.g., Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Conception of Ethical Wrongness"; Pruss, "Another Step in Divine Command Dialectics."