

Editorial

## Forty Contributors: A Response

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In July of 2021, I finished guest-editing a Special Issue for *Religions* on the topic of my book *Is a Good God Logically Possible?* That Special Issue contained what was then an unprecedented sixteen contributors, alongside my response. As it turns out, the editors at *Religions* were so pleased with the contributions to this Special Issue that they asked me to guest-edit another one. I accepted their offer and picked a topic closely connected to the topic of the first Special Issue. Since the argument of my book purports to be a logical argument from evil, one that shows that the God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world, I proposed as the topic for this new Special Issue “Do we now have a logical argument from evil?”

That we would now have a logical argument from evil would itself be an unprecedented event in light of Alvin Plantinga’s refutation of John Mackie’s purported logical argument from evil more than 50 years ago in *God and Other Minds* (1967). From that time to the present, it was unclear how anyone inclined to defend atheism could continue to approach the problem of evil as Mackie had done. This helps explain why philosophers who still wanted to defend atheism turned their attention to a new strategy—that of developing what came to be called evidential arguments for atheism. Atheists were no longer trying, as Mackie had, to add necessary premises to their arguments in support of atheism. A consensus had formed that “logical” formulations of the problem of evil were untenable.

In 2019, however, with the publication of *Is a Good God Logically Possible?* I challenged this consensus. Drawing on yet untapped resources from moral and political philosophy, I claimed to have put together a Mackie-style logical argument from evil. Not surprisingly, my challenge has itself been challenged.

In 2020, there was an author meets critics session at the annual meeting of the Society for Philosophy of Religion in San Diego. The papers from that session, my responses, and another set of afterthoughts from my critics, along with a response from me, were then fast tracked for publication and came out in a Special Issue of the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* early in 2021. The main argument of my book was also presented and discussed over Zoom at a number of places and debated over Zoom at Princeton University in 2021, the same year that the Special Issue of *Religions* on the topic of my book was completed. In 2022, I made more Zoom presentations of the argument of my book and then debated the argument in person at the annual meeting of the Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES) Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, before an audience of over 800. Now, we have just completed the Special Issue of *Religions* on the topic of whether we now have a logical argument from evil, with its even more than unprecedented forty contributors, together with this response.

Need I say that writing this response has truly been a Herculean task. When I thought it would be useful, I sent a draft of my response to particular contributors, asking them to evaluate it for accuracy and cogency. Frequently, this produced a flurry of e-mails back and forth; sometimes, a Zoom meeting; and in one case, two such meetings, which led to improved or better-understood responses. All these responses taken together have turned out to be almost as long as my contribution will be to a debate book with Richard Swinburne on essentially the same topic as this Special Issue, which is now being copyediting. If successful, my response here, together with the debate book to be published with OUP, should serve to reverse the consensus that has persisted among both theists and atheists ever since Plantinga’s refutation of Mackie’s argument from evil more than 50 years ago.



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My plan is to discuss the contributions to this Special Issue in the order in which they now appear in the volume.

### 1. Mark Johnston

Mark Johnston allows that my God argument has achieved “something significant”. It has succeeded, he thinks, as an argument against further consideration of the Mackie-style conception of an omni-God that “has haunted analytic philosophy of religion since 1955”. Still, Johnston also thinks my argument fails because it does not consider how an account of creation affects our understanding of what an all-good, all-powerful God can and cannot do.

As it turns out, my God argument does incorporate a distinction between ethics before creation and ethics after creation that can be used to meet Johnston’s challenge. Yet, rather than show how this distinction can be so used, I want to focus on how Johnston thinks his own account of an ethics of creation undermines my argument.

According to Johnston, we face a difficult challenge in coming up with a defensible answer for why God would create, which in turn places limits on what God could create. Johnston, through a process of elimination, comes up with “to manifest the glory of God” as the only possible reason that God could have to create. He also reasons that the anti-life, ill-designed material universe in which we live could hardly be God’s creation. He concludes that God would need to have created more perfect beings lacking any material embodiment, which he calls archons, and it would have to be through the sinful rebellion of one of these archons that the material world with all its life forms including ourselves was created. This is how, on Johnston’s account, all the natural and moral evil enters the world, not through God’s direct creation, but either through the action of one of those archons that God did directly create or through the action of humans, like ourselves, whose bodies were created by an archon but whose souls were directly created by God and embedded in the bodies the archon did create.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, we might ask did God not know that horrendous evil might result from giving the beings that he did create the unconstrained freedom and power to create other life forms and give them full reign over ourselves, whom he did not fully create? Johnston’s answer seems to be the following:

Antecedent to such free choices [of the beings God did create] there is nothing settled as to how they will turn out. Thus, God does not create free rational wills while knowing that they will make [evil choices].

Now, Johnston also takes this answer to be directed at an objection coming from an archon who, after conforming his will to evil, might then ask God “Why did you make me, knowing I would freely reject you.”

Yet after receiving the above response from God, surely a wiser and more inquisitive archon would have further asked: “So, knowing that I might turn to evil as I have, why did you not commit yourself at creation to restraining the amount of evil and that I and other archons like me might later inflict on others and each other?”

Notice that something like this implicit commitment to restrain later if necessary happens with human procreation. When parents bring children into the world, they surely do not know at birth whether their children will attempt to do something horrendously wrong later in life. Good parents just do what they can to care for and to protect their children as they grow up. If, however, later on, one of their children, now a teenager, is about to use a hammer on a younger brother to settle a score, surely good parents know it is time to step in and stop a serious assault from occurring when they are able to do so.

So, why is God not in a comparable situation when an archon or one of us is about to inflict horrendous evil consequences on an innocent victim? Of course, no one, not even God, let us assume, could have known at creation or at birth that years later, we would be making a choice as to whether to inflict horrendous evil consequences on an innocent victim. But, that is irrelevant. What is relevant is that God, if he exists, would know at creation for archons and at birth for us that if either of us later in our lives chooses to inflict

horrendous evil consequences on innocent victims, especially if that interferes with both archons and ourselves having an equal freedom to accept or not God's offer of friendship, he could have chosen to prevent just such horrendous evil consequences. Accordingly, God need not, at their creation, give archons the unconstrained freedom and power to create other life forms and to have full reign over ourselves whom, according to Johnston's story, God did not fully create.

Interestingly, Johnston himself employs a parent example that is very similar to the one I have just used for the purpose of supporting his own view. Here is Johnston's example:

Two parents may reasonably adjure from strict oversight of their 16-year-old son. Suppose the son purchases a baseball bat and uses it to bash a schoolmate, so badly that the schoolmate never recovers cognitively. A teacher who could intervene looks on and does nothing. The teacher's failure to intervene is, or is at least morally equivalent to, his permitting the act to occur. He could have intervened, but he let it happen. In that sense he permitted the bashing of the schoolmate to take place. But the parents have not permitted the bashing of the schoolmate. What they permitted was scope for their son's free action not hemmed in by their oversight.

Now, as it turns out, I agree with the conclusion that Johnston draws from his example. In it, the parents are justified in adjuring from strict oversight of a 16-year-old son with respect to his purchasing and using a baseball bat. By contrast, the teacher who could have intervened to stop the assault is grossly negligent for failing to do so.

However, Johnston's example is relevantly different from the parent example I used. To make the cases relevantly similar, imagine the parents in Johnston's example are now standing right next to the teacher as their son starts to lower the bat onto his schoolmate, and imagine that the parents, like the teacher in Johnston's example, do nothing to stop the assault. Surely, when the example is so modified, we cannot help but judge the parents, like the teacher, to be grossly negligent for not preventing the horrendous assault, even more negligent than the teacher, given that they are the boy's parents.

Of course, the point of my example, which now holds of Johnston's modified example, as well, is that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, would always be in an analogous situation to the parents and the teacher and, so having the relevant knowledge but standing by and doing nothing. Hence, God would be grossly negligent for failing to prevent the consequences of horrendous evil assaults, other things being equal.

Now in his example, Johnston talks about the parents reasonably abjuring when they leave their son free with respect to his purchasing and using a baseball bat. But, we clearly do not think that the earlier reasonable abjuring of the parents extends to the situation where they are standing right next to the teacher as their son starts to lower the bat onto his schoolmate. That is why we would strongly condemn the parents if they do nothing. Their reasonable abjuring no longer continues to hold in this new situation.

Yet could it be different for God with respect to his dealing with the archons and with ourselves? Could it be that God could reasonably abjure in order for us both to be equally free to accept or not God's offer of friendship?

Let us reflect back on my original example of the parents and their children. Surely good parents would want to establish a loving relationship with their children. So, imagine again that one child, a teenager, is about to use a hammer on a younger brother to settle a score. If the parents intervene and stop their child's attack, and they would do the same for their other children, the result would be an equalizing of freedom for all their children. However, if the parents do not intervene to prevent their children from inflicting such horrendous evil consequences, the parents would not be engaged in a loving relationship with their children. Accordingly, just as a loving relationship with one's children requires parents to equalize the freedom of their children by preventing the infliction horrendous evil consequences on them, likewise for the God of traditional theism, if he exists, to provide us with an equal opportunity to be friends with himself must ensure that none of us are constrained by the imposition of horrendous evil consequences from being equally

free to accept or reject his offer of friendship. Of course, given all the horrendous evil consequences that obtains all around us in the world, we know that that its prevention has not taken place (in violation of my MEPRs). Therefore, we can only conclude that the existence of the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with the all the evil that exists in the world.

## 2. Marilie Coetsee

While Marilie Coetsee thinks that I am approaching the problem of evil from a Kantian or nonconsequentialist perspective, I consider the three Moral Evil Prevention Requirements (MEPRs I–III) that are central to my approach to be acceptable to both consequentialists and nonconsequentialists alike. I should also mention that MEPRs I–III have been recently changed so that they better avoid the moral kindergarten objection that William Hasker has raised to my God argument on three separate occasions.<sup>2</sup> Coetsee should also be aware of this change since she cites my contribution to the first Special Issue of *Religions* where I make it.

Now, Coetsee objects to my God argument, claiming that it would be reasonable for would-be victims of the infliction of horrendous evil consequences to consent to God's permission of that infliction if it were logically necessary for them to receive a great good in a heavenly afterlife, a possibility that Coetsee maintains, appealing to skeptical theism, for all we know, might well be the case.

In response, I argue in support of MEPR II that the would-be victims of the inflictions of horrendous evil consequence are morally required to prefer not to have such consequences inflicted on them, given that God could provide us all with the greatest good of the opportunity to be friends with himself without permitting horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on us. If this were not the case, God would not be perfectly free to offer his friendship to us, and hence, he would not be the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism. God could also provide us with the resources for a decent life and equally good opportunities for soul-making without permitting horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions to be inflicted on us. Given then that in any heavenly afterlife, victims of the infliction of horrendous evil consequences would know that this is the case, it would be totally unreasonable for them to consent to the tradeoff that Coetsee favors.

The second objection Coetsee raises to my God argument is to claim that if God actually did prevent wrongdoers from completing the final step of their wrongdoing and inflicting horrendous evil consequences on their would-be victims, as needed, eventually, wrongdoers would no longer be able to form the intention to impose horrendous evil consequences on their victims.

But, is that a problem? Consider how something similar would likewise obtain if we lived under an ideally just and powerful political state. In that case, imagine that the various structures and agents of the ideally just and powerful state had effectively prohibited wrongdoers from inflicting horrendous evil consequences on their would-be victims to a degree that it became difficult to impossible for wrongdoers to even intend to inflict such consequences on their would-be victims. I do not think that if that were the result of effectively prohibiting the infliction of horrendous evil consequences on would-be victims, the good people in an ideally just and powerful state would object to such measures on the grounds that the ideally just and powerful state's prevention of the infliction of horrendous evil consequences on innocent victims had gone too far.

Moreover, notice that assessing the different stages of free actions differently is something we do ourselves through our political institutions. For example, notice that those of us with bad thoughts and intentions who, for various reasons, never go on to threaten or take significant steps to impose bad consequences on others do not, on that account, make it into the criminal justice systems of the political states to which we belong. This is because our political institutions are focused on preventing and deterring that final stage of immoral actions, the stage that takes away the significant freedoms of would-be victims, thus punishing only those who are found guilty of inflicting or are about ready

to inflict such bad consequences on others. Hence, just as we morally expect an ideally just and powerful political state to prevent, where possible, the final stage of especially horrendous evil actions; likewise, we should morally expect the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism to prevent the final stage of especially horrendous evil actions, as needed.

It is also important to recognize that without God's prevention of horrendous evil consequences, as needed, people will not be able to equally exercise their freedom to be virtuous or vicious, a freedom that Coetsee champions in her essay. Instead, some of us will be able to exercise far more such freedom while others of us will only be able to exercise far less or none at all—a fundamentally unjust outcome for which God, if he exists, would be responsible.

### 3. Erik J. Wielenberg

Erik J. Wielenberg credits me with “reinvigorating” the logical argument from evil against the God of traditional theism. Still, after summarizing my argument, he claims to have found a weakness in it, which he then devotes most of his paper to attempting to remedy. As I see it, however, Wielenberg's summary misses key elements of my argument, and when those elements are taken into account, my argument works without Wielenberg's proposed remedy.

Now, Wielenberg recognizes that I want to substitute something from the Pauline Principle into my Mackie-style argument in place of the failed moral and metaphysical principles that Mackie had employed in his own argument and which Plantinga had so devastatingly critiqued more than 50 years ago.

Accordingly, Wielenberg offers the following as capturing what I want to take from the Pauline Principle for my argument:

It is immoral for God to intentionally permit horrendous evil caused by immoral actions in order to attain some good or to prevent some evil.

Let us then consider the objection that Wielenberg raises to this principle and see how the three Moral Evil Prevention Requirements (MEPRs I–III) that I actually claim to derive from the Pauline Principle would deal with it. Wielenberg asks us to consider a case in which a good that vastly outweighs the evil can be attained only by intentionally engaging in the evil. This is a case where evil is carried out or permitted to achieve a vastly greater good. So, how do my MEPRs apply to this case?

Now it is often thought that the greatest good that God could provide us with is friendship with himself, and Wielenberg says as much in his paper. It is also understood that God could not just make us his friends. Thus, if God were to offer us friendship with himself, the highest sort of friendship, we must be free to accept or reject that friendship and God must be free to offer or not offer it to us.

In the case of God, this implies that his provision of the opportunity to be friends with himself could not be logically conditional upon his permission of especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions. The God of traditional theism could not be constrained in this way with respect to his offer of friendship; otherwise, he would not be all-powerful and, hence, not the God of traditional theism. This means that the opportunity to be friends with God must fall under the domain of MEPR III as a good that is not logically connected to God's permission of especially horrendous evil consequences. From this, it follows that there are countless logically possible and morally unobjectionable alternative ways that God could provide this opportunity to us if he wanted to do so. Thus, according to MEPR III, God would be morally required to use one of the many alternative ways of providing the opportunity instead of providing it by allowing especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions.

Likewise, we ourselves cannot be completely free to accept or reject God's offer of friendship if God were allowing horrendous evil consequences to be imposed on ourselves and others to get us to turn to him. That would clearly be a coercive influence on our choice,

depriving us of the opportunity to be completely free to accept or reject the opportunity to be friends with the God of traditional theism.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, what of those cases to which Wielenberg refers where people do turn to God and seek his friendship even while believing that this God of theirs does allow horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on the innocent, themselves and others included? What these people are clearly failing to recognize is that if God had permitted horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on them to get them to turn to him, God would thereby be taking away their ability to completely freely and lovingly respond to his offer of friendship.<sup>4</sup> In addition, those who would only turn to God if he allows horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on themselves and others would not be turning to God for the reasons God wants, and so, they would not be appropriate candidates for friendship with him.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Bruce Russell

Bruce Russell and I have been discussing the problem of evil since 2013 when I invited him to defend his views at a one of the two conferences on Ethics and the Problem of Evil that I organized at the University of Notre Dame with a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. At the time, Russell was a long-time defender of a probabilistic argument against the existence of God, and I was just a neophyte to discussions of the problem of evil, one who was just beginning to explore the possibility of a nonprobabilistic argument against the existence of God. As it turns out, it is because my discussions with Russell have continued intermittently over the years and, in fact, continued right up to just before Russell's submission of his contribution to this Special Issue that I am able to get right to the heart of the disagreement between the two of us.

Unfortunately, at the heart of our disagreement is a misunderstanding. Consider my MEPR III:

Do not permit rather than prevent especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions (which would violate someone's rights) in order to provide such goods when there are countless morally unobjectionable ways of providing those goods.

This requirement is supposed to be an exceptionless (necessary) moral requirement. Consider what it claims. Put colloquially, it says the following: Do not secure a good using morally objectionable means when you can easily secure the same good by using morally unobjectionable means. What then is there not to like about this requirement? Is it not an unobjectionable moral requirement? Somehow, Russell fails to understand it for what it is. He wants to add a clause to it, which he claims would turn the requirement into one that is similar to the requirements in his own argument against the existence of God. Yet, unfortunately, by his own admission, that would make my requirement into a much weaker one than I have just shown it to be. In my argument, violations of the requirement imply that God is logically incompatible with the evil in the world, whereas in the transformation Russell proposes, he claims, the requirement only implies that God is unlikely given all the evil in the world. But, why should I adopt Russell's transformation of MEPR III, when the interpretation I have just provided and shown to be a necessary moral requirement supports a much stronger conclusion?

Now, consider my MEPR I:

Prevent rather than permit especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions without violating anyone's rights (a good to which we have a right) when that can easily be done.

MEPR I, as I explain, should be interpreted to include another clause: "when no other good or goods are at stake." Then, the requirement, put more colloquially, is as follows: Prevent horrendous evil consequences when one can easily do so without violating anyone's rights and no other goods are at stake. Here too, what is there not to like about the requirement? Surely, like MEPR III, it is a necessary moral requirement. Unfortunately, here too, Russell

wants to transform MEPR I into, by his own admission, a much weaker requirement than the one I have just shown it to be. Untransformed, violations of MEPR I imply that God is logically incompatible with the evil in the world, whereas with Russell's transformation, he claims that MEPR I only implies that God is unlikely given all the evil in the world. But, why should I adopt Russell's transformation of MEPR I when my untransformed MEPR I can be clearly seen to be a necessary moral requirement that supports a much stronger conclusion?

What then about MEPR II? The requirement is as follows:

Do not permit rather than prevent especially horrendous evil of immoral actions simply to provide other rational beings with goods they would morally prefer not to have.

Now, I have to admit that MEPR II cannot as easily be shown to be a necessary moral requirement as MEPRs I and III. Much of my argument is designed to show that it is just that. However, as Russell begins his interpretation, my clause "they would morally prefer not to have" becomes simply "they would prefer not to have", which significantly affects the meaning of the requirement. Here and elsewhere, Russell needs to interpret MEPR II the way I have set it out if he is to properly evaluate it.

Thus, I content that Russell has his work cut out for him if he is to properly evaluate my argument. He needs to recognize that MEPRs I and III, as I have interpreted them, can be seen to be necessary moral requirements and not analogues of the admittedly weaker moral requirements that are found in Russell's own argument. He also needs to focus his attention on MEPR II to see whether, under my interpretation, it too can be seen to be a necessary moral requirement and thereby help to secure the conclusion of my logical argument against the existence of God.

Now, I happen to know that Russell has been invited to provide just such a new evaluation of my logical argument against the existence of God for a future publication. So, stay tuned.

## 5. Elif Nur Balci

Elif Nur Balci thinks my argument that God is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world works against Plantinga's Free-Will Defense but not against a structuralist Free-Will Defense that is complemented by the ethical views of the Mu'tazila school of Islamic theology and its great scholar Qadi Abd al-Jabbar.

Now, Balci rightly indicates how a structuralist approach directs our attention away from individual evil actions and their consequences toward structural evils and their consequences. Such an approach, however, does not evade my critique of traditional theism because my Moral Evil Prevention Requirements (MEPRs I–III) apply both to individual evil actions and their consequences as well as to structural evils and their consequences.

Accordingly, the most relevant part of Balci's challenge to my view comes from the ethical views of the Mu'tazila school of Islamic theology and its great scholar Qadi Abd al-Jabbar, who, like myself, is concerned about both the individual and the structural evils in our world. Comparing the two views, Balci opposes my freedom critique of God's permission of especially horrendous evil consequences to Abd al-Jabbar's defense of God's permission of such consequences on grounds of justice. Here, Balci argues that justice is served for Abd al-Jabbar if "God commands and prohibits, sends prophets commanding good and forbidding evil, and gives moral responses in the form of interrogation, reckoning, and punishment". God need not do more.

Yet, suppose that God could prevent a young child from being violently assaulted and rendered painfully crippled for the rest of her life. Suppose further that God has already done all the things with respect to the would-be perpetrator that Abd al-Jabbar claims justice requires, except for reckoning and punishment in an afterlife. Now, I claim that justice requires that God still do more in this case, as do my MEPRs. I have also argued that a just and powerful state would do more too.

Interestingly, Balci has also allowed that a just and powerful state would do more, but then, she contends that this is because such a state is not concerned enough about the moral agency of its members. In contrast, I contend that it is actually to secure sufficiently adequate moral agency for all its members that a just and powerful state would intervene to prevent horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions from being inflicted on its innocent members, thereby taking away the significant freedom those members require in order for the virtue of all its members to be fairly tested. Of course, I further argue that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, should be doing the same, as needed.

## 6. Matthew Flannagan

Focusing on my use of the Pauline Principle to construct a logical argument from evil, Matthew Flannagan seeks to show that while we humans, because of our fallibility, are required to abide by the Pauline Principle and thus should not directly pursue the maximization of utility, God, who would not at all be constrained by fallibility when pursuing the maximization of utility, would, accordingly, not be similarly bound by the Pauline Principle.

Along the way, Flannagan presents a form of divine command theory that would turn Plato's Euthyphro dilemma into an empty choice. On Flanagan's construal, Euthyphro's choice becomes as follows:

Are actions right because God, who always acts in accord with impartiality and benevolence, commands them, or does God command actions because they are required by impartiality and benevolence?

Nevertheless, the real problem with Flannagan's critique of my God argument is that he fails to take into account that I do not endorse the Pauline Principle as it is usually understood but only endorse what I take to be three minimally demanding necessary moral requirements that I derive from the principle and call Moral Evil Prevention Requirements (MEPRs I-III). It is these three moral requirements that, I claim, apply both to God and ourselves. Unfortunately, Flannagan never considers my defense and application of these requirements, which are so central to my God argument, although he does mention them once.

## 7. Robin Collins

The first thing to note about Robin Collins's critique of my God argument is that it is contradictory to describe my argument as attempting to show "that for some evils, it is morally wrong for God to allow them even if they are necessary for a greater good." This is because assuming that the greater good is understood to be a morally better outcome, then the claim would be that it is morally wrong to do what is morally better, which cannot be correct. To remove the contradiction, my view would have to be understood as claiming that it is morally wrong for God to allow certain evils even if permitting them were necessary to achieve some (great) good.

Collins goes on to raise two counterexamples to my Moral Evil Prevention Requirement II, which is as follows:

Do not permit rather than prevent especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions simply to provide would-be beneficiaries with goods they would morally prefer not to have.

Focusing on the would-be victim of especially evil consequences, Collins asks us to imagine that that this person, when pre-existent, might well consent to enter this world of ours and suffer horrendous evil consequences for the sake of some (great) good, either for themselves or others.

But, who is it that is making this choice? Is it our 10-year-old selves or our 20-, 40-, 80-year-old selves with the values and character we had at each of these or other stages of our lives? Just suppose it is your 40-year-old self that is making the choice. Surely that self



could not be consenting to start your life all over again. The past of your 40-year-old self is set. Even God cannot change what happened to you in the past.

Nor would it help to hypothesize a non-developing pre-existent self, whose nature is determined by God, who is consenting to enter this world of ours and suffer horrendous evil consequences for the sake of some (great) good, either for themselves or others.

Arguably, the best way to understand Collins's consent counterexamples is to imagine consent being given in an afterlife where one has a chance to reflect back on that time of one's life when God permitted horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on you to provide you with a good that is logically dependent on God's permission of that evil, and then ask, would you now consent to or approve of God's action?

My contention is thus that you would morally prefer that God had prevented rather than permitted the horrendous evil consequences on which that good depends given that you did not need and could easily do without that good because you had available to you the greatest good of the opportunity to be friends with God, the resources for a decent life, as well as equally good opportunities for soul-making, without that good on which God's permission of horrendous evil would depend. Since you find yourself in a heavenly afterlife while knowing that God did not respect your moral preference in this regard, you would know that whatever God put you there could not be the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism. The God of traditional theism would not have allowed horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on you in such a case.

Collins also objects that a God who respected my MEPRs would be interfering too much in our lives. Yet, under the best of conditions, the God of traditional theism, if he exists, would only be the enforcer of last resort for the ideally just and powerful political states in our world, and there is no way we could morally object to living with an ideally just and powerful political state functioning in our lives. Nor would it be reasonable to object to God's preventing horrendous evil consequences to assist us in bringing about such ideally just and powerful political states where none existed.

Collins objects to the idea that God would be morally required to respect MEPRs I-III. However, I do not think he appreciates how minimally demanding these necessary requirements of morality are. They are so minimally demanding that we humans rarely, if ever, violate them. Surely, what is easy for us to do cannot be difficult for God to do. Yet, maybe the objection is that God cannot be subject to anything, even the requirements of logic. But, if God is not constrained by the laws of logic, then the justification for permitting evil consequences as the only logically possible way of achieving some good would no longer obtain to justify God's permission of evil. And, if God is subject to the minimally demanding laws of logic, why then would he not be subject to the minimally demanding requirements of morality as well?

## 8. IBruce R. Reichenbach

IBruce R. Reichenbach objects to my God argument on the grounds that the moral principles it appeals to "are much too stringent to function to determine moral obligations and moral goodness." However, the central principles of my God argument are my three moral evil prevention requirements:

### Moral Evil Prevention Requirement I

Prevent rather than permit especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions without violating anyone's rights (a good to which we have a right) when that can easily be done.

### Moral Evil Prevention Requirement II

Do not permit rather than prevent especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions on their would-be victims in order to provide would-be beneficiaries with goods they would morally prefer not to have.

### Moral Evil Prevention Requirement III

Do not permit rather than prevent especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions (which would violate someone's rights) in order to provide goods to which we do not have a right that are not logically dependent on God's permission of those consequences when there are countless morally unobjectionable ways of providing those goods.

Now, these MEPRs are defended as exceptionless minimal components of the Pauline Principle never to do evil that good may come of it that would be acceptable to consequentialists and nonconsequentialists alike, and, it turns out, they are not very demanding at all, as evidenced by the fact that we rarely, if ever, act in violation of them and that no moral requirement that is not very demanding on us could be too demanding for the God of traditional theism.

Moreover, given that in my contribution to the first Special Issue of *Religions* that I guest-edited on the topic of my God book, I limited these MEPRs so that they apply to just "especially horrendous evil consequences" rather than "significant and especially horrendous evil consequences" in response to an objection, William Hasker raised in his contribution to that first Special Issue an objection that Hasker has now chosen to no longer press against my argument.<sup>6</sup> This change makes these MEPRs which we rarely, if ever, violate even less demanding than they were before in my argument.<sup>7</sup>

How then could Reichenbach think that the moral requirements of my God argument "are much too stringent to function to determine moral obligations and moral goodness." It is because he introduces into my God argument conflict resolution principles which I defend in my work in environmental ethics as applying to humans only and not to God at all. While it is true that some of these conflict resolution principles are morally demanding, none are put forward as necessary moral principles that apply to God as well as humans, as is the case for my MEPRs and Natural Evil Prevention Requirements (NEPRs).

Hence, once Reichenbach's criticism of my God argument is directed away from my principles of environmental ethics, as it should be, and directed instead against the MEPRs and NEPRs of my God argument, it totally fails.<sup>8</sup>

## 9. Stephen T. Davis

According to Stephen T. Davis, my God book is "full of fascinating arguments." Surprisingly, however, Davis has not yet found a way to agree with any of them. In particular, he does not agree with the arguments I give for my central thesis that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, should prevent rather than permit especially the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions, as needed. Against this argument, Davis contends that if God had made a world such that his existence and desires were known to us, then we would no longer be rationally free to go wrong. But, if knowing of God's existence and desires renders us no longer rationally free to go wrong, what about knowing of the existence and desires of parents and political states? Would knowing that parents and political states exist and have desires for us, if and when they do, also render us no longer rationally free to go wrong? How then could we want none of these to exist so that we could be completely rationally free in some strange sense? Furthermore, is it not what parents and political states do to us, not simply whether they exist and have desires for us, that is relevant to how free we are? And, if this is the case, do we not want parents, political states, and even a God, if he exists, as a last resort, to impose appropriate restraints on our freedom rather than not to impose any restraints at all?

Another reason that Davis provides for not accepting the arguments I give for my central thesis is that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, could compensate for whatever horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions he permits in this world by providing us with the opportunity to be friends with himself, particularly in an afterlife.

Now let us allow that God's providing us with the opportunity to be friends with himself is the greatest good that God could provide to us. Of course, we must be free to accept or not accept God's offer of friendship and God too must be free to offer it or not. This means that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, cannot be logically constrained

to permit the horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on innocent victims before he could offer his friendship to us. Given then that God could offer us his friendship without permitting the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions to be inflicted on innocent victims, then, being all-good, that is exactly how God would provide us with this opportunity to be friends with himself. Of course, we know that has not happened given the horrendous evil consequences that obtain all round us in the world.

We also know that God could not provide us with the opportunity to be friends with himself in order to compensate us for his permitting horrendous evil to be inflicted on us because that would mean God was compensating us for something he should not have done in the first place, and that is not something the all-good, all-powerful God could ever be doing, although imperfect creatures that we are, we do that sort of thing all the time.

Davis points out that in what he calls a “Sterba-world,” which is a world where the God of traditional theism does what I claim he should be doing, there would be few atheists, and Davis takes that to be a criticism. As it turns out, I agree with Davis’s inference, but I do not take it to be a criticism. This is because I only think that it is reasonable to be an atheist in a nonSterba-world, like our own, where the presence of horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions all around us is logically incompatible with the existence of the God of traditional theism.

Lastly, Davis is mistaken in thinking that God, if he exists, would be free to offer his friendship to just anyone, independently of what the would-be recipients have done with their lives. For example, even the God of traditional theism, could not offer his friendship to a child molester unless that person was committed to reforming, thereby making himself somewhat less unworthy of friendship with God.

#### **10. Raphael Lataster**

Raphael Lataster, the author of a 332-page defense of an evidential argument against the existence of God, attempts to give a fair assessment of my logical argument from evil. He starts out well, noting the God, whose existence, my argument claims, is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world, is the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism. But then, very quickly, he loses focus on the God of traditional theism by citing as a critic of my argument, Elizabeth Burns, who endorses a limited God hypothesis and by suggesting that defenders of theism can simply alter their notion of God to escape the conclusion of my argument.

Lataster gets back on track when he suggests that the God of traditional theism’s reasons for permitting horrendous evil may be inscrutable to us. But here, it would have been necessary for Lataster to consider the way I attempt to show how we have sufficient knowledge to show that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, would be logically incompatible with all the evil in the world. Thus, in Chapter 6 of my God book, I show how all the goods that God could provide to us are either goods to which we have a right or goods to which we do not have a right, each of which further divides into either first-order goods that do not logically presuppose the existence of some serious wrongdoing or second-order goods that do logically presuppose the existence of some serious wrongdoing. This gives us a fourfold classification of all the goods that God could provide to us. I then show by the application of my MEPRs I-III to this fourfold classification of goods that the God of traditional theism would be logically incompatible with all the horrendous evil in the world. Unfortunately, Lataster does not even consider this argument, which is something he needs to do to have a defensible critique of my logical argument from evil.

#### **11. Jacqueline Mariña**

In her thoughtful paper, Jacqueline Mariña claims that the ultimate goal for beings like ourselves is “to enter the divine life.” I would call this entering into friendship with God. I would further contend that if God is the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism, then he must be free to offer us his friendship to us. This would mean that it could not be the case that the God of traditional theism must first permit the horrendous evil

consequences of immoral actions before he could offer us the opportunity to be friends with him. It is also understood that God could not just make us his friends. Thus, if God were to offer us friendship with himself, the highest sort of friendship, we must be free to accept or reject that friendship and God must be free to offer or not offer it to us.

In the case of God, this implies that his provision of the opportunity to be friends with himself could not be logically conditional upon his permission of especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions. The God of traditional theism could not be constrained in this way with respect to his offer of friendship; otherwise, he would not be all-powerful and, hence, not the God of traditional theism. This means that the opportunity to be friends with God must fall under the domain of MEPR III as a good that is not logically connected to God's permission of especially horrendous evil consequences. From this, it follows that there are countless logically possible and morally unobjectionable alternative ways that God could provide this opportunity to us if he wanted to do so. Thus, according to MEPR III, God would be morally required to use one of the many alternative ways of providing the opportunity instead of providing it by allowing especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions.

Likewise, we ourselves cannot be completely free to accept or reject God's offer of friendship if God were allowing horrendous evil consequences to be imposed on ourselves and others to get us to turn to him. That would clearly be a coercive influence on our choice, depriving us of the opportunity to be completely free to accept or reject the opportunity to be friends with the God of traditional theism.

Yet, what of those cases where people do appear to turn to God and seek his friendship even while believing that this God of theirs does allow horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on the innocent, themselves and others included? What these people are clearly failing to recognize is that if God had permitting horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on them to get them to turn to him, God would thereby be taking away their ability to completely freely and lovingly respond to his offer of friendship.<sup>9</sup> In addition, those who would only turn to God if he allows horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on themselves and others would not be turning to God for the reasons God wants, and so, they would not be appropriate candidates for friendship with him.<sup>10</sup> Finally, those who turn to God under these circumstances should realize that the God to which they are turning, if he exists, could not be the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism.

Mariña also objects to my God argument that reincarnation could provide the perpetrators of horrendous evil consequence sufficient opportunities to "make up for what they have done" and for victims "to continue their progress in virtue" after they have suffered from horrendous evil consequences. Here, Mariña seems to imagine each of us having a continuous conscious awareness of the many beings we inhabit over the course of our multiple incarnations. Although this is an unusual way to conceive of reincarnation—usually the re-incarnate are not understood to be continuously consciously connected to their previous lives—still, our having many reincarnated lives could not serve to justify God's permission of horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions from being inflicted on us in each of our multiple reincarnations. This is because God could have provided us with the opportunity to be friends with himself, the resources for a decent life, as well as equally good opportunities for soul-making without permitting such horrendous consequences. Hence, we would be morally required to prefer not to have such goods that are logically conditional on such horrendous consequences.

In addition, Mariña objects to my God argument, stating that I fail to take into account all the goods, particularly the spiritual goods that God could provide us only by permitting horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions. What is relevant here is that Mariña herself fails to take into account that in Chapter 6 of my book, I divide all the goods that God could provide to us, his creatures, into a fourfold classification of goods.<sup>11</sup> (For more on how I use this fourfold classification of goods to evaluate all the goods that God could possibly provide us, including spiritual goods, using my three necessary Moral Evil Prevention Requirements (MEPRs I–III) to conclude that God is in widespread violation

of these exceptionless components of the Pauline Principle, see my responses to Perry Hendericks and Michael Beaty in this Special Issue.)

## 12. Gili Kugler

Gili Kugler presents a striking interpretation of the God of Ezekiel 16 as a malignant narcissistic deity and of his chosen people who see themselves as being trapped in an abusive relationship with him. While what we see as immoral, even evil, actions of the God of the Hebrew Bible are usually interpreted by theists as the mistaken views of the people of the times as to what is immoral and evil, Kugler shows that the author of Ezekiel 16 saw the people of Israel as trapped in an abusive relationship with a narcissistic deity. I find this shocking.

Moreover, it does raise the related question where one is to go if one recognizes, as one should, the success of my logical argument from evil. Accordingly, at the end of my God book, I asked whether it might help to avoid the conclusion of my logical argument against the existence of an all-good, all-powerful God to hypothesize a limited god? I argued that such a god would have to be either extremely immoral or extremely weak, and I recommended against taking either option. Kugler's contribution to this Special Issue further provides us with the strongest of reasons against taking the God of Ezekiel 16 as a viable option, although at the time the text was written, it may have seemed to those for whom the text was written as though this was only option available.

## 13. Carlo Alvaro

Carlo Alvaro contends that God should have made us noncorporeal beings, like himself, so that we would have been without the evil and suffering we have experienced due to our embodied existence.<sup>12</sup> He argues that given that God, if he exists, has not done this, it shows that he is not the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism. Hence, Alvaro's argument, like my own, purports to be a logical argument that shows that the God of traditional theism is incompatible with all the evil in the world.

Now, Alvaro allows that as unembodied beings we could still go wrong and rebel against God. Nevertheless, Alvaro argues the following:

even if creatures that were created directly in heaven could rebel against God or turned away from God, God could simply discipline and rehabilitate the naughty and the insubordinate. And the advantage of creating human beings directly in heaven is obvious—they would never experience horrendous evil and suffering [of our embodied existence].

Yet, how would we know that the evil and suffering we would experience as unembodied beings would not be at least as great as the evil and suffering that we now experience as embodied beings? The Bible tells us that angels, or the unembodied intelligent beings that God is said to have created, have been able to do a great amount of evil and impose a great amount of suffering after they rebelled against God. So, why should we not think that as unembodied beings, we would not be able to do at least as much evil and impose at least as much suffering? If so, there would be no moral advantage to God's creating us as unembodied beings rather than as embodied beings, as Alvaro maintains.

In addition, near the end of his paper, Alvaro himself raises a serious objection to his own logical argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism:

It is always possible that God, if he exists, might have some morally sufficient reasons, which we might not yet or might never fully understand, for allowing evil and suffering and not creating us in heaven in the first place.<sup>13</sup>

Since Alvaro raises this possibility and then fails to show that it is not really possible, he thereby has undermined his own logical argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism. This is because such an argument must show that there are not morally sufficient reasons for what, if God exists, would have to be his permission of all the evil and suffering in the world, and Alvaro does not even try to do this here. By contrast, my logical

argument shows that God, if he exists, by permitting all the horrendous evil consequences in the world, would be in violation of exceptionless moral requirements (my MEPRs I–III) and so would not be the God of traditional theism.

Hence, it follows from the objection that I raised to Alvaro’s argument and from Alvaro’s own objection that he has not provided us with a logical argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism. Of course, this still leaves, Deism, Alvaro’s preferred option, as an open possibility even in the face of the success of my logical argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism. Nevertheless, this possibility would have to be weighed against competing scientific explanations for the origin of the universe, and it is not likely that Deism would fare well in that comparison.

#### 14. Jeffrey Jordan

Jeffrey Jordan groups together my argument from natural evil against the existence of God and Michael Tooley’s argument from natural evil against the existence of God as both incompatibility arguments, both claiming that God is incompatible with the existence of all the natural evil in the world. In doing this, Jordan has neglected a more established way of classifying arguments against the existence of God as either logical or evidential. According to this more established classificatory scheme, my argument would be regarded as a logical argument while Tooley’s would be regarded as an evidential argument. What makes my argument a logical argument is that beyond its assumption that moral and natural evil exists (without which there would be no problem of evil) and its assumption that an all-good, all-powerful God exists (which is made for the sake of argument), its only other premises are purportedly necessary premises.

Now, almost everyone in philosophy knows that when John Mackie tried to defend a logical argument from evil, so understood, Alvin Plantinga decisively overturned it. As a consequence, for more than fifty years, virtually no philosopher has ventured to put forward another Mackie-style logical argument from evil until the publication of my *Is A Good God Logically Possible?* in 2019. Consequently, I think it would be much more informative to retain the distinction between logical and evidential arguments, rather than group my argument together with many other arguments from evil, and maybe with all such arguments, if we also recast probability arguments from evil as incompatibility arguments, which we seemingly could do.

Turning to Jordan’s critique of my logical argument from evil, Jordan rightly concludes that if God did not violate my MEPRs and my NEPRs, every rational person would know that the God of tradition theism exists. Moreover, Jordan thinks the following:

A knowledge of God’s existence however would result in an evaporation of the space necessary for free moral development in much the same way that crime decreases in those areas known to be under closed-circuit TV surveillance.

But, surely Jordan does not think that the closed-circuit TV surveillance of ATM machines is morally objectionable on the grounds that it constrains free moral development. What Jordan is failing to recognize here is that having the option to do great good and great evil is not needed for the exercise of high virtue. In fact, having one’s own freedom constrained as well as the freedom of others to do evil is what is required to be more virtuous.

To see why this is the case, compare the capacity for being virtuous of wealthy individuals acting alone to meet the needs of the starving, possibly in a state of nature, to the capacity of the same individuals for being virtuous when they are constrained and empowered through a political state’s requirement that all its members fairly contribute to meeting the needs of the starving. Political states are thus used to collect resources, both from those who would otherwise be willing and from those who would otherwise be unwilling, to fairly contribute to meeting the needs of the starving. Accordingly, wealthy individuals who willingly act through such political states would, other things being equal, be more effective at meeting the needs of the starving than those who just act alone to do so as in a state of nature. Hence, these individuals would turn out, other things being equal, to be more virtuous in this regard as well. Accordingly, if the God of traditional theism

were to further support just and powerful political states by being the enforcer of last resort, virtuous behavior could flourish, as never before.

### 15. Daniel Lim

Daniel Lim takes up two critiques of my God argument that were raised by William Hasker and Cheryl Chen, respectively, in their contributions in 2021 to the Special Issue of *Religions* that was devoted to the argument of my book *Is A Good God Logically Possible?* In so doing, Lim makes some interesting critical points against Hasker and Chen, as well as against myself. Here, I will just respond to the critical points Lim raises against my own view.

Concerning Hasker's critique, Lim thinks my response to the kindergarten objection works against the way that objection has been raised by Swinburne, and Murray and Rea, but not against the way that Hasker has recently employed the objection against my view. Thus, he quotes Hasker:

But if all the significant evil consequences of all immoral actions were thus prevented, agents would surely become aware that actions that would seriously harm other persons would fail to accomplish their ends; exercise of that sort of free choice would then become impossible. To be sure, some exercise of free will, even in immoral actions, would still occur, but only on relatively trivial matters. I once described this as a situation in which God was in effect running a moral kindergarten, allowing us to develop our characters by arguing over the blocks, but ready to intervene before anyone actually gets hurt! (Hasker 2021, p. 210)

Yet, Hasker raised this objection, as he had on two previous occasions, before I had made a significant revision in my view to deal with it. What I did is propose to further limit God's intervention to allow soul-making to also range over significant evil consequences. After I made this revision, Hasker stopped raising his kindergarten objection to my account, including turning down the opportunity to do so in this Special Issue. Thus, for Hasker, at least, it would appear that the revision I made sufficed to answer his kindergarten objection.

Lim also objects to my account on the grounds that if God did prevent horrendous evil consequences as needed, we would no longer suffer from the expectations that the significant evil consequences we experience might turn into horrendous evil consequences. Surely, this might well happen, but where is the objection? If we were living in an ideally just state that with very limited surveillance was able to detect and prevent all violent assaults among its citizens, as needed, could its citizens still reasonably object that they no longer feared that they might suffer from such assaults, as had previously been the case? I think not.

Concerning Chen's critique, Chen had objected to my view, claiming that it was logically possible that in a hypothetical world where God prevents all the horrendous evil consequences, as needed, everyone would intend to do horrendous evil actions all the time. In response, I had argued if this were the case, it would show that the inner morality of people in the actual world is just as bad as that of people in the hypothetical world because people's intentions would no longer have the normative significance we normally take them to have. Hence, the morally best that God could do for either world under such an assumption is to prevent people from suffering from the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions. Of course, this is something God would only do in Chen's hypothetical world, thus supporting my argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism in the actual world in which we live.

In opposition, Lim claims that the intentions of people in the actual world in Chen's example are morally better than those of people in the hypothetical world. However, Lim does not explain how they could be morally better given that they are assumed to share a common moral structure in both worlds.

At the very end of his paper, Lim argues in favor of my view that even if the actual world were morally preferable to my hypothetical world in Chen's example, as I argued it is not, it could still be the case that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, would not

have created the actual world since it violates my MEPRs. But, here, I much prefer my own way of supporting my argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism.

### 16. David Kyle Johnson

David Kyle Johnson thinks that the logical problem of evil, as I understand it, either commits one to atheism or to a version of theism that practically all theists would regard as a heresy. But, why does he not think, as I do, that the problem of evil commits us to the conclusion that the God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world? It is because he thinks that theists have the option of being committed to open theism according to which “God does not know what the free creatures he creates will choose or what the subsequent consequences of their choices will be.” Given what Johnson takes to be the constraint of open theism on what God could know, he thinks that it would be reasonable for God to adopt a policy of absolute noninterference, or what he calls a Divine Prime Directive, as God’s best option for relating to creation. If this were the case, there would then be a way of evading my conclusion that the God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world.

Clearly, a god who is committed to a Prime Directive of absolute noninterference would be logically compatible with all the evil in the world, contrary to the conclusion of my argument. Yet, in what sense is open theism committed to the view that the God of traditional theism does not know what the free creatures he creates will choose or what the subsequent consequences of their choices will be? Suppose we distinguish between inner acts and outer acts, which include the consequences of our actions, and suppose we focus on outer acts just as they are occurring or about to occur. Here, it is clear that the God of traditional theism could know about people’s outer acts, especially the consequences of their acts when they are occurring or about to occur, just as we ourselves can come to know about each other’s outer acts including their consequences when they are occurring or about to occur. Yet, this is all the knowledge that is required for MEPRs I–III to apply and deliver their conclusion that the God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world. Hence, while under open theism, God does not know what the free creatures he creates will choose or what the subsequent consequences of their choices will be until those choices are made, the view does not preclude the knowledge that is needed for my argument to reach that conclusion that the God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world.

### 17. Joe Milburn

Joe Milburn thinks that there are two ways that theists might successfully respond to my God argument. The first is by denying that a perfect being needs to act in accord with my MEPRs I–III. This, he calls the exceptionalist response. The second is to deny that God’s acting in accord with my MEPRs would imply an absence of especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions in the world. This, he calls the compatibilist response.

Now, with respect to the exceptionalist response, Milburn argues that God in his greater wisdom may have ways of exempting himself from MEPRs I–III that we lack. Yet, consider MEPR III:

Do not permit rather than prevent especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions (which would violate someone’s rights) in order to provide such goods when there are countless morally unobjectionable ways of providing those goods.

This requirement is supposed to be an exceptionless (necessary) moral requirement. Consider what it claims. Put colloquially, it says the following: Do not secure a good using morally objectionable means when you can easily secure the same good by using morally unobjectionable means. What then is there not to like about this requirement? How could one take exception to it? Would it not be like taking exception to  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and why would God do that? Moreover, I maintain that MEPR I is similarly unobjectionable, and while I



have to admit that it does take more to establish the same for MEPR II. Still, I claim to have done that as well.

Now, in support of his compatibilist response, Milburn argues that if “God always, or for the most part, prevented the evil consequences of immoral actions from taking place, we would not be the radically interdependent creatures we essentially are.” But, here. Milburn fails to take into account that my MEPRs I–III apply only as a last resort and, thus, only after all measures to foster such interdependence that are morally justifiable to the would-be victims of such evil consequences have been exhausted.

Milburn goes on to assess how well MEPRs I–III work in support of an evidential argument against the existence of God, concluding that they work better for Creator Theology than Perfect Being Theology, hence the title of his paper. However, since I think I have just undermined Milburn’s critique of my God argument as a logical argument against the existence of God, I think I can put off assessing his comparative merits of my God argument as an evidential argument against the existence of God.

### 18. Daniel Molto

Daniel Molto begins by surveying mainly the critiques of my God argument that are found in the first Special Issue of *Religions* that I guest-edited that were published on the topic in 2021. He does not similarly survey my responses to those critiques, except for my response to Janusz Salamon because it is just Salamon’s line of critique that Molto himself wants to pursue.

Molto, like Salamon, argues that God has given humanity as a whole the right of sovereignty analogous to the way that our practice of international law bestows the right of sovereignty on de facto separate political states, providing them with considerable authority vis-à-vis themselves and stateless people. However, Molto, unlike Salamon, argues that such a right is logically compatible with my MEPRs I–III and with all the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions that obtain in our world. Of course, if Molto were right about this, if his critique worked, that would totally undermine my logical argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism. But, does Molto’s critique work?

Molto thinks his critique easily delivers the compatibility of MEPRs II and III with all the horrendous evil consequences in the world but contends that its compatibility with MEPR I depends on how the reference to “anyone” in the requirement is interpreted. If it can refer to “humanity as a whole,” then Molto maintains that this requirement too is compatible with all the horrendous evil consequences that obtain in our world.

What is my assessment? At least initially, it would have been more promising for Molto to make his compatibility claim against MEPR I and MEPR III rather than against MEPR II and MEPR III. This is because both MEPR I and MEPR III are concerned with avoiding rights violations and that could include avoiding violating humanity’s right to sovereignty if that right could be defended.

In contrast, MEPR II makes no direct reference to rights violations but instead is concerned with the moral preferences of the would-be beneficiaries of God’s permission of horrendous evil consequences. So, MEPR II raises a special problem for Molto’s critique, as it did for Salamon’s. Molto even quotes part of the objection I had to Salamon’s critique on just this point:

So how morally plausible, then, is Salamon’s theodicy? Not morally plausible at all, I think. Here is why. It is because good people would morally prefer that God would have prevented the especially horrendous evil consequences of moral wrongdoing from being inflicted on innocent victims to their receiving goods that logically depend on God’s permitting those consequences to be inflicted on those victims. Even the perpetrators themselves, if they even repented their wrongful deeds, would have always morally preferred that God would have prevented especially the horrendous evil consequences of their immoral actions from being inflicted on their innocent victims. (Sterba 2021, p. 6).

How then does Molto respond to this objection I raise to Salamon's critique? Molto responds that my argument requires that people's preferences be constant when they are not. But, my argument was not about people's preferences generally, which surely can be inconstant, but about the moral preferences of the would-be beneficiaries of goods that are logically dependent on God's permission of horrendous evil consequences, goods which the would-be beneficiaries do not need and can easily do without, given that they can have the greatest good of the opportunity to be friends with God, the resources for a decent life, as well as equally good opportunities for soul-making, without being provided with those goods on which God's permission of horrendous evil depends. Hence, the moral preference not to have goods that are logically dependent on God's permission of horrendous evil consequences under these conditions is a preference it would be morally wrong for the would-be beneficiaries not to have. This should suffice to show that Molto's critique fails to satisfy MEPR II, which should also suffice to defeat his critique.

### 19. J. Brian Huffling

J. Brian Huffling is responding to an earlier critique I made of his view. His response, I think, serves to bring our views closer together. Huffling maintains that when he applies various terms to God, he is speaking analogically and that is my view as well. Accordingly, when Huffling calls God just and merciful, he wants these and other claims about what moral virtues God has to be understood analogically, and so would I. So, how then can Huffling claim that God has moral virtues analogous to the way we have moral virtues without God's also being a moral agent analogous to the way we are moral agents. I do not think Huffling can consistently do this.

So, why then does Huffling not admit that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, would have moral virtues, be a moral agent, and have moral obligations analogously to the way you and I have moral virtues, are moral agents, and are subject to moral obligations? Huffling wants to resist this inference because he does not think that God could be subject to standards such as the standard requirements of morality. However, Huffling does think that God is subject to the standard of logic, analogous to the way we are. For example, even in this paper, Huffling maintains that "God cannot will to create x and will not to create x". So, why then would God not, like us, also be required to abide by the moral requirement, Do not torture innocent beings for the fun of it.

My MEPRs I–III are likewise similarly minimally demanding moral requirements. In fact, we humans rarely, if ever, fail to abide by them. So, why then is God not bound by these requirements as well? Surely, requirements that are easy for us to abide by cannot be difficult for God to abide by. Of course, if the God of traditional theism was abiding by these minimal moral requirements, our world would be radically different from the way it is.

### 20. Jonathan C. Rutledge

The overwhelming majority of defenders of traditional theism endorse an all-good, all-powerful God who, like ourselves, is subject to moral reasons and thus is a moral agent. Nevertheless, there is a small minority of defenders of traditional theism endorsing an all-good, all-powerful God who is not, like ourselves, subject to moral reasons and thus is not a moral agent. For the most part, Jonathan C. Rutledge aims to support this minority perspective in his contribution to the Special Issue.<sup>14</sup>

In my God book, most of the argument is directed at the majority perspective, although I do, in Chapter 6, critique Brian Davies's defense of the minority perspective, and elsewhere in the book, I have a brief critique of Mark Murphy's defense of that same perspective.<sup>15</sup> In his contribution to this Special Issue, Rutledge seeks to undermine my critique of Davies's defense of the minority perspective by utilizing Murphy's defense of that perspective.

A central thesis of Murphy's defense is that (1) X is fundamentally good (bad) for A does not entail that (2) X is a reason for all agents to promote (prevent) X. Rutledge then attempts to support this thesis with the following example:

[H]aving sufficient nutrition is a valuable state for my dog, and I tend to think, in virtue of the relationship I bear to my dog, that this value gives me a requiring reason to feed her (a requiring reason not shared widely if at all). Indeed, were someone to try and feed my dog without my permission, I might be reasonably upset. It is my responsibility to take care of her, and, on the assumption that I am fulfilling that responsibility, other agents are precluded from doing so. In other words, other agents seem to have requiring reasons not to feed my dog (despite the fact that doing so is to aim at a valuable state of affairs for my dog).

Yet, does this example really support Murphy's thesis? Imagine I learn that Rutledge is seriously ill, and soon thereafter, his dog shows up on my doorstep gaunt and agitated. Would I not have a moral reason to feed the animal despite, under normal conditions, it being the case that Rutledge's special caretaker relationship to the dog overrides that reason? Is this not a clear counterexample to Murphy thesis?

Rutledge wonders how I might try to defeat Murphy's thesis head on by showing that (1) does entail (2). Actually, to find what Rutledge is looking for here, he needs to go no further than the book I published just a few years before my God book with the suggestive title *From Rationality to Equality*. In the first half of the book, I argue from a seemingly nonmoral ideal of rationality to morality, and in the second half of the book, I extend the argument to endorse a deeply egalitarian morality. This is, I think, the kind of argument that Rutledge was looking for me to provide.

Of course, I did not introduce this rationality to morality argument into my God book because I did not really need any such argument to deal with the overwhelming majority of theists at which my God argument was directed. Moreover, I think the argument I used against Davies's minority perspective in Chapter 6 shows Davies's view to be inconsistent without having to appeal to my rationality-to-morality argument. Nevertheless, that argument was always there prominently in my work in moral and political philosophy in case it was ever needed.

Now, Rutledge thinks I can get the same logical incompatibility results I get from my God argument by dropping the assumption that God is moral and just assuming that God is loving. While I do appreciate the offer of help, I am concerned that the noncomparativeness that Rutledge wants to incorporate into his understanding of loving will render it unable to do what would be required of it.

## 21. Patrik Hrmo

Patrik Hrmo seeks to contrast the approach to the problem of evil that I take in my God book, which, I claim, leads to the conclusion that the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world with a Thomistic approach to the problem of evil, which, he claims, is perfectly compatible with the God of traditional theism.

Hrmo, while agreeing with me that God, if he exists, would be a moral agent, faults my approach for attributing obligations to God and for not recognizing that God's nature is the standard of goodness. Now, I will not repeat my argument here that the God of traditional theism is analogously subject to moral obligations just as he is subject to the laws of logic and so cannot do what is logically impossible to do.

With regard to God's nature being the standard of goodness, I contend that the standard for goodness, especially the standard for moral goodness, must be a norm, a requirement that one ought to act or be in a certain way. In the case of morality, the ultimate norm is something like treat all relevant interests fairly. By contrast, the God of traditional theism, if he exists, would be a concrete rational entity not an abstract norm. Such a rational entity, if he exists, like ourselves, would be subject to the requirements of morality just as he would be subject to the requirements of logic and cannot do what is logically impossible for him to do.

Furthermore, Hrmo, in his attempt to defend God as a moral agent maintains, "Permission of evil can be ascribed to God only accidentally because God does not will evil

essentially (since he essentially wills the good not the privation of good).” But, if this exonerates God from responsibility for the evil in the world, then it exonerates wrongdoers as well. This is because we could also claim that the actions of wrongdoers are directed at something good, and that wrongdoing is just a privation of goodness in their acts which they do not essentially will. We can further maintain that this privation in the actions of wrongdoers is simply a byproduct or a means of achieving the good toward which their acts are directed. Given then that we can parallel both God’s and wrongdoers’ relationship to evil, we would have no reason for not exonerating both God and wrongdoers for the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions in the world, an outcome that would be morally unacceptable.

## 22. Michael S. Jones

Michael S. Jones’s contribution to this Special Issue is an outcome of a discussion we have been having over the last few years. Jones argues that in my work in ethics, I reject cultural relativism on the grounds that there is a sorites objection to it. To maintain consistency, he contends that I should reject my own God argument on the grounds that a similar sorites objection can be raised to it. Yet, I contend that I do not use a sorites objection against moral relativism nor can a sorites objection be used against my God argument.

One of the reasons I have for rejecting moral relativism is the problem that the view has in determining exactly what the requirements of morality are supposed to be relative to. It is said that they are relative to and a product of a particular cultural group. Yet, must that group be a society as a whole, or could it be a subgroup of a society? And, why can morality not be relative to each individual? Why can moral requirements not be determined just by each individual’s own personal reflection and thereby be relative to and applicable to that individual alone? If we allow all of these possibilities, then, any act (e.g., contract killing) could be wrong from the point of view of some particular society (e.g., U.S. society), right from the point of view of some subgroup of that society (e.g., the Mafia), and wrong again from the point of view of some particular member of that society or other subgroup (e.g., law enforcement officers). Now if this were the case, then obviously, it would be extremely difficult for us to know what we should do, all things considered.

This is one of the reasons, but not the main reason, I have for rejecting moral relativism, but it is not a sorites objection. This is because I am not claiming that a society as a whole, subgroups within that society, and individuals are no more distinct from each other than grains of sand, as obtains when a sorites objection applies. Rather, I am saying that moral relativism offers us no reason for not specifying morality in terms of one of these distinct entities rather than the other, and this creates an insolvable problem about what we morally should do.

By contrast, in my God argument, I provide moral reasons, in fact, morally exceptionless reasons, for preventing horrendously evil consequences of immoral actions but not, say, the trivial evil consequences of immoral actions. Nor are paradigm cases of horrendous moral evil, with their characteristic features of structural injustice, related to paradigm cases of trivial moral evil, without any such features of structural injustice, no differently than grains of sand are related, as would have to obtain if a sorites objection applied here.

Jones also raised a different, nonsorites objection to my God argument, claiming that if God were to prevent all the horrendous evil consequences in the world, then the most evil consequences that remained would become the new horrendous evil consequences and that this could happen again and again until what are trivial evil consequences for us became the new horrendous evil consequences. It turns out that Bruce Reichenbach raised this very same objection to my argument in his contribution to the first Special Issue of *Religions* that I guest-edited. Accordingly, I think the response I gave to Reichenbach in that first Special Issue holds here for Jones as well.

### 23. Andrea Aguti

Andrea Aguti begins his paper with a useful history of the logical argument from evil from Mackie to the present. The first claim that Aguti makes against what he calls my attempt to “resurrect” the argument is that my attempt does not work against the possibility of limited gods. Yet, as Aguti himself recognizes, I never claim that it did. I am only arguing against the all-good, all-powerful God of tradition theism. So, my argument is directed just at the possibility of the God of traditional theism.

Aguti then does go on to directly challenge my argument. He claims it has two components. The first is an argument that the Free-Will Defense does not work if one accepts a morally qualified conception of freedom. The second argument appeals to obligations that I claim the God of traditional theism would have that are derived from the Pauline Principle.

Against the first argument, Aguti claims the theist should recognize the limitations I find in a Free-Will Defense and turn instead to a Greater Good Defense to justify God’s permission of horrendous evil consequences in our world. Yet, at the end of Chapter 2, I propose to take up the possibility of such a Greater Good Defense in subsequent chapters. Unfortunately, Aguti never considers the logical argument that I go on to develop against just such a defense.

With respect to my argument that the God of traditional theism would have obligations derived from the Pauline Principle, Aguti initially endorses the view that God is simply not subject to obligations, but then, he takes a step back, maintaining instead that while God has no moral obligations, “he cannot do certain things that are morally significant.” For example, God cannot lie or want to do evil. Aguti then opts for a combined natural law/divine command theory where presumably natural laws impose obligations except where divine commands require something else, as Aguti suggests, was the case in the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. Applying then his natural law/divine command theory to MEPRs I–III, Aguti seemingly maintains that God, like us, does abide by these requirements, but, in God’s case, these requirements are subject to a few divine command exceptions.

Yet this interpretation will not work. First, MEPRs I–III are minimally demanding requirements, and we rarely, if ever, are in violation of them. So, why would it not be even easier for God to adhere to them as well? Nor would it make sense to appeal to divine command theory to create just a few permitted violations for God. This is because any god who exists would not just be engaged in a few violations but in widespread violations of these requirements due to what would have to be, if any such god exists, his widespread permission of horrendous evil consequences in our world.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, this cannot be accounted for by appealing to a few exceptions for God grounded in divine command theory, such as, for example, Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac, which arguably is itself not even a morally justified exception.

### 24. Richard Carrier

Richard Carrier thinks I have put together “a very good evidential argument from evil—arguably a decisive one.” Still, he claims I have not shown what I claim to have shown, which is that the God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil, especially the horrendous evil in the world. Carrier further believes that the argument of my book succeeds everywhere against theistic defenders except where I come up against Michael Bergmann’s skeptical theist challenge in Chapter 5. I find this surprising when you take into account that my developing argument against theism is only fully set out in Chapter 6 and thereafter. To me, this shows that Carrier has not yet gotten my God argument fully in his sights.

Even so, Carrier goes on to provide just the kind of skeptical theist challenge that he thinks my God argument fails to address. He asks us to consider the following scenario:

It so happens, unbeknownst to us, that it is logically impossible for God to create a paradisiacal world without a concomitant purchase through a particular array of suffering. Accordingly, the reason God cannot undo this feature of existence

is that it cannot be undone; no power can logically exist that would overcome it. And it so happens that if God alleviates any of that suffering, by intervening or even speaking to the persons who, collectively, must pay this price, the effect is at once undone, like touching an electrical current to ground. And this, too, unbeknownst to us, is logically necessarily the case, and thus no power of any god can undo it.

Here, I would argue that the God of traditional theism could not be constrained with respect to his offer of friendship in a paradisiacal world; otherwise, he would not be all-powerful and, hence, not the God of traditional theism. This means that the opportunity to be friends with God must fall under the domain of MEPR III as a good that is not logically connected to God's permission of especially horrendous evil consequences. From this, it follows that there are countless logically possible and morally unobjectionable alternative ways that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, could provide this opportunity to us if he wanted to do so. Thus, according to MEPR III, the God of traditional theism would be morally required to use one of the many alternative ways of providing the opportunity instead of providing it by allowing especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions.

But then, at the end of his paper Carrier further argues the following:

[E]ven if you can come up with some genuine proof of the logical impossibility of the scenario I just described—because you still have infinitely more unknown scenarios to similarly disprove before you can prove them all impossible. Perhaps one day someone will come up with a sweeping proof that proves all such unknown scenarios impossible; and perhaps that will complete at last the logical disproof of a good God's existence. But that day has not yet come. There is no such proof in Sterba.

It is just here that Carrier's failure to have my argument fully in his sights comes into play for my argument does have a way of dealing with all the possible scenarios that Carrier is envisioning. This is because, as I show in Chapter 6 of my God book, all the goods that God could provide to us are either goods to which we have a right or goods to which we do not have a right, each of which further divides into either first-order goods that do not logically presuppose the existence of some serious wrongdoing or second-order goods that do logically presuppose the existence of some serious wrongdoing. This gives us a fourfold classification of all the goods that God could provide to us. I then show by the application of my MEPRs I–III to this fourfold classification of goods that the existence of the God of traditional theism would be logically incompatible with all the horrendous evil in the world.

## 25. Christian Danz

Christian Danz proposes a novel solution to the debate over the logical problem of evil. Reflecting on our inability to resolve this debate between theists and atheists, Danz suggests that we treat "statements about God not as factual or representational statements, but as descriptions of the structure of religious communication".

He begins by illustrating the intransigency of the debate with the opposing arguments of John Mackie and Richard Swinburne. Rather than continuing what he regards as an irresolvable debate over the logical argument from evil, Danz argues that it makes more sense to interpret God to be "an expression and representation of religion, more specifically for our purposes, an expression and representation of the Christian religion." The Christian religion, as Danz sees it, is not an explanation of the world, but its own form of communication besides other cultural modes of communication. Its objects come into existence only in the Christian religion and are not given outside of it.

However, the attractiveness of Danz's proposal is a function of what he takes to be the irresolvable character of debate between theists and atheists over the logical argument from evil understood objectively, especially as it unfolded between John Mackie and theists, particularly the debate Mackie had with Alvin Plantinga. However, at the time that debate took place, it was not thought to be irresolvable. In fact, soon after the debate between

Mackie and Plantinga took place, it was widely held by theists and atheists alike that Plantinga conclusively showed against Mackie that it may not be within God's power to bring about a world containing moral good but no moral evil, and so that God was logically compatible with at least some moral evil in the world. Moreover, Mackie himself agreed about the failure of his argument.<sup>17</sup> Thus, a consensus held among philosophers of religion, and even among philosophers generally, that Plantinga had succeeded in his debate with Mackie. Given the widespread agreement over Plantinga's success coming from a profession in which there are few points of widespread agreement, I do not think that this is a place where we should refuse to give such debates an objective interpretation. The debate has one empirical premise that there is evil in the world, especially horrendous evil consequences. After that, the debate is just about entailment relations between conceptual claims. Philosophers and theologians should be able to achieve objective results in such a domain.

Of course, my God argument is going against this more than 50-year consensus, maintaining as it does, that the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil, particularly all the horrendous evil, in the world. I even challenge Plantinga's claim about God's compatibility with just some evil in the world when that some evil is understood to be horrendous evil consequences.

What my argument has going for it is that I have been able to bring the resources of moral and political philosophy to bear on the problem which tended not to be done, and I also have had access to many of those working on this problem today who are publishing in English, as is evidenced by these two Special Issues in *Religions*. Surely, if someone puts forth a conclusive objection to my God argument, as was true in the case of Mackie's God argument, it should soon be recognized as such. As far as I can tell, that has not yet happened.

## 26. Adam Noel Wood

In his contribution to this Special Issue, Adam Noel Wood challenges my claim that the God of traditional theism is required to abide by my MEPRs I–III and NEPRs I–IX, which Wood, lumping together, calls Evil Prevention Requirements (EPRs). Now, Wood's overall conclusion is that EPRs involve "too robust assumptions about God's purpose in creation" and so can be rejected on that grounds. He gives an example of a requirement that does not involve such assumptions:

Don't allow sin (moral evil) and suffering for the sake of one's own amusement.

Let us call this Wood's EPR. So, how does Wood's EPR compare to my EPRs? Let us take a closer look at just one of those requirements, MEPR III:

Do not permit rather than prevent especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions (which would violate someone's rights) in order to provide such goods when there are countless morally unobjectionable ways of providing those goods

Now, put colloquially, MEPR III says:

Do not secure a good using morally objectionable means when you can easily secure the same good by using morally unobjectionable means.

What then is there not to like about this requirement? Is it not an unobjectionable moral requirement?

So, if all of my EPRs can be seen to be like MEPR III, what would be objectionable about them? Accordingly, my EPRs, particularly MEPRs I–III need to be carefully examined before rejecting them as "too robust assumptions about God's purpose in creation." Wood has not done this. (For more on how to do this, see my response to Bruce Russell in this Special Issue.)

## 27. Perry Hendricks

Perry Hendricks thinks my argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism fails because it focuses on “known facts about evil” (an expression I never use) and neglects logical possibilities and logical connections. However, I divide all the goods that God could provide to us, his creatures, into a fourfold classification of goods. There are goods to which we have a right and goods to which we do not have a right, each of which further divides into goods that are logically dependent on God’s permission of especially horrendous evil consequences and goods that are not dependent on God’s permission of especially horrendous evil consequences. This being the case, my view clearly does not neglect logical possibilities and logical connections.

To better see that this is the case, consider the following skeptical theist challenge to my argument and then how I would respond to it. This challenge has the same structure as the challenges that Hendricks raises to my own argument and my response to it parallels the response I would want to make to Hendricks’s own challenge.

The challenge asks us to consider the possibility that knowledge of the Lisbon earthquake could make its way to some distant planet where it functions as the basis for soul-making among the inhabitants of that planet. Why then is this not a possible good that could justify God’s permission of the Lisbon earthquake here on our earth? Surely, it seems like the kind of good that is thought to be beyond our ken that skeptical theists like to appeal to as providing a possible justification for the horrendous evil consequences that God is acknowledged to permit on Earth. It is just here that I would want to go on to explain that when the skeptical theist appeals to goods that are thought to be beyond our ken to justify the evils of which we are aware, I would want to employ my fourfold classification to determine which type of good it is. Then, I would argue that for all goods of that type, we still know enough about them to determine that the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism cannot justifiably permit especially horrendous evil consequences in order to secure goods of that type.

For example, in the case of the Lisbon earthquake, described above, there is a second-order good that logically depends on God’s permitting the consequences of the Lisbon earthquake. Yet, given that this good is one to which its beneficiaries do not otherwise have a right but one that is logically dependent on God’s permission of the consequences of the Lisbon earthquake I would apply to it the following requirement, which is an exceptionless minimal component of the Pauline Principle to establish its impermissibility:

### Moral Evil Prevention Requirement II

Do not permit, rather than prevent especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions simply to provide would-be beneficiaries with goods they would morally prefer not to have.

My contention is thus that the would-be beneficiaries on the distant planet would morally prefer that God prevent rather than permit the horrendous evil consequences on which the good depends given that they can easily do without that good because they can still have the greatest good of the opportunity to be friends with God, the resources for a decent life, equally good opportunities for soul-making, and all other goods that are not logically dependent on God’s permission of horrendous evil consequences. Moreover, the would-be beneficiaries are also morally required to oppose the provision of goods they do not need and can easily do without when those goods come at the high cost of the infliction of horrendous evil consequences on innocent victims, and the high cost of undermining an equal opportunity for soul-making, as would be the case here. Accordingly, by virtue of MEPR II, God, if he exists, would respect the moral preferences and the moral requirements of the would-be beneficiaries and prevent rather than permit the horrendous evil consequence on which the goods in question logically depends.

Given, then, the way my argument works against this particular skeptical theism challenge, it follows that it would similarly work against the structurally similar examples that Hendricks raises in his paper to challenge my argument. Hence, there is no need to



go thorough each of Hendricks's examples separately. My fourfold classification of goods used with my MEPRs works against them all.

### 28. Amir Horowitz

Amir Horowitz seeks to defend my God argument against two objections that have been raised against it. The first is that God cannot "logically" prevent all evils. The second is that the moral requirements that my argument defends may not apply to God.

Now, to deal with the first objection, Horowitz critiques the way Perry Hendericks deploys this objection against my God argument in this Special Issue. It turns out that I have my own way of dealing with this objection, which I suggested in my response to Hendericks provided just previously. Unfortunately, I do not think that Horowitz's way of dealing with Henderick's objection on my behalf works because it relies on the claim that "God can (in both the causal and the 'logical' senses) create any good without permitting any evil." The 'logical' sense here taken from Hendericks means to do something by doing something else that logically entails it, from which it follows that God logically cannot create for us the soul-making opportunity to care for a victim of serious assault without permitting that assault. Consequently, God cannot causally or "logically" provide that soul-making opportunity to care for a victim of serious assault without also permitting that assault. So, I do not think Horowitz's objection to Hendericks works here. Instead, I would rely on the objection I used against Hendericks earlier in this essay.

Happily, I can completely endorse the various ways that Horowitz defends my view against the second objection that the moral requirements that my argument defends may not apply to God. I would just add to Horowitz's defense the reply that I made to Toby Betenson in the first Special Issue of *Religions* I guest-edited, where he argued that the grounds for obligations to God and the grounds for our obligations to an ideally just political state are different. There, I argued that two authorities are completely analogous. Legitimate divine authority is understood to be grounded in the will of God. Hence, in order for the will of the people or the will of God to ground legitimate authority, they have to accord with the constraints of morality. Moreover, this is just what we would expect to be the case in order for my analogy of an ideally just and powerful political state to work.

### 29. Michael Douglas Beaty

I think Michael Douglas Beaty has the distinction of having the second longest essay of all the contributors to either of the two Special Issues that I have guest-edited for *Religions* (Mark Johnson has the longest). His contribution is also notable for not ever mentioning my Moral Evil Prevention Requirements (MEPRs I–III), which together with my fourfold classification of all the goods that God could provide to us (also not mentioned), are used to constitute my main argument that the God of traditional theism is logically incompatible, especially with all the horrendous evil consequences in the world. In my book, I only present this argument for the first time in Chapter 6 and thereafter. Interestingly, Beaty does not cite anything from my book that appears in Chapter 6 or thereafter.

So, what is my main argument? In Chapter 6 of my God book, I provide a fourfold classification of all the goods that God could provide to us. I then show by the application of my MEPRs I–III to this fourfold classification of goods that the God of traditional theism would be logically incompatible with all the horrendous moral evil consequences in the world. In this way, the various possible goods that Beaty speculates may provide a justification for God's permitting of horrendous evil consequences are shown not to serve this purpose.

For example, the great good of the beatific vision understood as the opportunity to be friends with God can be provided to us without God's permitting horrendous evil consequences to be inflicted on us or anyone else, and so this should be the morally preferred way for God to provide us with that great good. And, when I pointed out to Beaty in an e-mail that this great good of having the opportunity to be friends with God cannot be conditional on God's permission of horrendous evil consequences, he responded

by claiming that friendship with God/Christ (or, I might add “getting into it”) can be “costly.” Yet, even if that were true, what I have shown is that it cannot be conditional of God’s permission of horrendous evil consequences, and that is all that is needed here for the success of my logical argument from evil.

It is also the case that assuming the incarnation, redemption, and glorification of Christ, there was no need for Christ to suffer from God’s permission of the infliction of horrendous suffering that was said to be imposed on him. From a theological perspective, any way that Christ could have lived a good life would have sufficed to bring about our redemption. Moreover, if God had prevented the horrendous suffering that was said to be imposed on Christ, his life on Earth would be more like that of a Nelson Mandela, a Dolores Huerta, or a Mohandas Gandhi (without his assassination), each of whom in different ways provided a powerful example of how we should live our lives. Accordingly, for those of us whose Earthly lives resembled the lives that we are now assuming that Christ along with the likes of Mandela, Huerta, and Gandhi would be able to live because God was preventing, as needed, especially all the horrendous evil suffering in the world, it would be possible to experience a deep sharing with Christ as well as with these other moral heroes, both now and in any afterlife, a deep sharing that Beaty, following Marilyn Adams, affirms is a way of experiencing the greatest good that God could provide to us.

Moreover, in the first Special Issue of *Religions* on my God book, I limited my MEPRs so that they apply to just “especially horrendous evil consequences” rather than “significant and especially horrendous evil consequences” in response to an objection William Hasker raised in his contribution to that Special Issue, an objection that Hasker has now chosen to no longer press against my argument.

This change makes these MEPRs which we rarely, if ever, violate even less demanding than they were before. In fact, I do not think Beaty has recognized how minimally demanding my MEPRs really are. For example, put colloquially, MEPR III says the following:

Do not secure a good using morally objectionable means when you can easily secure the same good by using morally unobjectionable means.

What then is there not to like about this requirement? Is it not clearly an unobjectionable moral requirement?

And, what about MEPR I? Put more colloquially, it says the following:

Prevent a significant evil when one can easily do so without violating anyone’s rights and no other goods are at stake.

Here too, what is there not to like about the requirement? Surely, it too, like MEPR III, is a necessary moral requirement.

Now, I have to admit that MEPR II cannot as easily be shown to be a necessary moral requirement as MEPRs I and III, but I think I have shown how it can be done, as well.

Of course, if you do not pay any attention to my MEPRs and do not come to understand how minimally demanding they really are, then you are not going to be able to appreciate the force of my argument.

So, Beaty definitely needs to take into account the heart of my argument: my MEPRs I–III and their application to the fourfold classification of all the goods that God could provide to us. Moreover, I am confident Beaty will do so in what I expect will be his next attempt to undercut my logical argument from evil.

### 30. Eric Reitan

Eric Reitan raises two challenging arguments to my logical argument against the existence of God. First, he argues that God’s justification for constraining freedom can be undercut by the fact that God, by virtue of an unlimited divine power to redeem evils, has an alternative means of guaranteeing that horror victims have lives whose value is undiminished by horror. That God can effectively erase the evil from the world after it has occurred by fully redeeming it (something none of us can do), Reitan contends, could arguably entail

that preventing the evil from happening in the first place no longer functions as a sufficient justification for violating the prima facie prohibition against freedom-constraining acts.

Second, Reitan argues that given divine omnipotence, God would become the de facto governing authority of the world unless God does far, far less in terms of freedom-policing than God is capable of doing. In fact, even a tiny fraction of the power at God's disposal would, if implemented in the project of policing misuses of freedom, reflect a level of sovereign authority over the world that swamps what any elected human authorities could achieve. Hence, if there are moral principles that require consent of the governed before someone may adopt the role of sovereign governing authority over the world, God may be morally precluded from exercising even a fraction of the policing power at God's disposal absent such consent.

With respect to his first argument, Reitan contends that evil can be redeemed either by being engulfed through the bestowal of that great good of the beatific vision or by becoming an integral part of a greater good as anyone who suffers from horrendous evil could experience a deep sharing with the resurrected and glorified Christ, at least in the next life, given that they have both suffered horrendous evil in this life. This is a deep sharing that those who have not suffered horrendous evil in this life would lack even if they too enjoyed a heavenly afterlife.

Nevertheless, the beatific vision understood as the opportunity to be friends with God can be provided to us without God's permission of horrendous evil consequences being inflicted on us or anyone else, and so that should be the morally preferred way for God to provide us with that great good. It is also the case that a deep sharing with Christ in this and in any afterlife could still be had if Christ's redemptive suffering in this life had not ended with his horrendous passion and death. Clearly, this too would have been a morally preferred way of achieving a deep sharing with Christ.

Moreover, with respect to his Reitan's second argument, even though God, being all-powerful, could dominate all aspects of our lives, God's goodness should lead him, as I have argued, to just prevent the especially horrendous consequences of immoral actions, as needed.

### 31. Christopher J. Insole

Does Kant have a theistic solution to the problem of evil? Christopher J. Insole hopes to have shown that he does. First, Insole argues that if God were to secure the Kantian greatest good for us after we have acted by making happiness proportionate to virtue, this would also ensure that my MEPRs would be met. But, that is not the case. Ensuring that happiness is in proportion to virtue is perfectly compatible with failing to prevent the infliction of horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions on innocent victims when that can easily be done and no greater good is at stake. But, such failure to prevent horrendous evil consequences would, of course, be a clear violation of my MEPRs, making it logically incompatible with the God of traditional theism.

An analogy here is a political state that left its citizens perfectly free to do whatever good or evil they wanted until they all reached the age of forty, and only then restricted their freedom by distributing happiness in accord with virtue and unhappiness in accord with vice. Surely, such a political state would have failed to prevent serious harm from being inflicted on innocent citizens during the first 40 years of their lives (analogous to our life on earth) and would have been blameworthy on that account. Hence, the first Kantian line of argument that Insole employs fails to provide a theistic solution to the problem of evil.

Now, the second Kantian line of argument that Insole employs to save God from the problem of evil is different. Here, Insole directly relates this line of argument to the following Mackie-style formulation that I give my God argument in *Is A Good God Logically Possible?*

- (1) There is an all-good, all-powerful God.

- (2) If there is an all-good, all-powerful God, then necessarily, he would be adhering to Moral Evil Prevention Requirements I–III.
- (3) If God were adhering to Moral Evil Prevention Requirements I–III, then necessarily, especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions would not be obtaining through what would have to be his permission.
- (4) Horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions do obtain all around us, which, if God exists, would have to be through his permission.
- (5) Therefore, it is not the case that there is an all-good, all-powerful God, which contradicts (1).

Clearly, Insole's first attempt to save traditional theism attempted to undercut premise (3) of this argument by maintaining that if God were to distribute happiness in accord with virtue and unhappiness in accord with vice, that would likewise secure God's adherence to my MEPRs. Now, I have showed why this is not the case.

In his second attempt to save the God of traditional theism, Insole contends that Kant could reject premise (4). As Insole puts it, "The Kantian argument will hold that we are able to believe that, in some sense, such horrendous evil consequences do not really obtain, although they appear to." Insole also notes that in the *Groundwork*, Kant says that we can never recognize whether an action is actually grounded on conformity with the moral law, rather than happening to coincide with it. This argument seems right because we can never show with logical certainty that there is horrendous moral evil in the world. That there is such evil in the world has to always be an inference to the best explanation from the evidence we do have. It is just a highly supported empirical claim, again, not something we know with logical certainty.

Nevertheless, the argument from evil was always understood to have one empirical premise in it—that premise being that evil, especially horrendous evil, exists. Theists, when attempting to undermine the argument, have almost always been willing to concede this one empirical premise to atheists, given that they would not wish to deny it themselves. Of course, denying this premise remains an option for the theist to use to undercut the argument from evil. Yet, this was not an option I was willing to allow with respect to my God argument. I was concerned with coming up with an argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism under the assumption that evil, especially horrendous evil, consequences exist in the world. An argument from evil cannot proceed without some such assumption.

Nor is it clear that Kant himself was willing to entertain the possibility that evil, especially horrendous evil consequences, do not exist in reality in his noumenal world. Kant's remarks about evil could be interpreted as simply affirming that we do not know that evil exists with logical certainty without denying that evil, especially horrendous evil, consequences exist in reality in the noumenal world.

Moreover, only this interpretation which assumes that evil exists in reality in the noumenal world is compatible with Insole's first attempt to save the God of traditional theism from the problem of evil by assuming that God would distribute happiness in accord with virtue and unhappiness in accord with the vice. Obviously, such a distribution presupposes that good and evil exists in reality in the noumenal world. Hence, Insole's two attempts to save the God of traditional theism from the problem of evil not only fail to undercut my God argument, they also are inconsistent with each other.

### 32. Charles Champe Taliaferro

Charles Champe Taliaferro tells us that horrendous evils that occur are not permitted by God in the sense that they are deemed good or justified or approved of by God; they are, instead, against God's nature and will, a violation of what God wills for the creation. Taliaferro further tells us that God has a reason to destroy/annihilate all agents of grave wrongdoing. Yet, while Taliaferro thinks that a retributive response is justified, he claims that this is compatible with God's merciful goodness not to destroy/annihilate grave wrongdoers but to act (in this life and the next) to redeem them through repentance, moral, and spiritual transformation.

Yet, the whole focus of Taliaferro's account is on the perpetrators of horrendous evil and on how God could justifiably annihilate them for their actions but chooses instead to show them mercy and redeem and transform them to bring them into loving union with himself.

What is missing from Taliaferro's account is what it would take for the would-be victims of horrendous evil consequences to be treated justly and mercifully by the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism. For that story to be told and to make sense, the parallel story about God's permission of evil consequences in the world would have to be significantly changed. The change required is that would-be inflictors of horrendous evil consequences would have their wrongdoing significantly constrained because that is what is necessary for the God of traditional theism to have acted justly and mercifully to would-be victims. This is because there is no possible way that even an all-good, all-powerful God could fully restore what is taken from the victims of horrendous evil consequences and because there is no other goods that the would-be victims of such consequences would morally prefer to have that God would not be able to provide to them without permitting the infliction of such consequences on them. This follows from the application of specifically MEPR II to the fourfold classification of goods that God could provide to us. Unfortunately, Taliaferro does not even consider my use of this requirement in his paper.

### 33. Marco Hausmann and Amit Kravitz

Marco Hausmann and Amit Kravitz begin their paper with what they call a historical digression to the views of Leibniz and Kant. Leibniz, they tell us, had argued from our world's being the best possible world to the conclusion that God is justified in permitting all the evil in our world. Of course, if my argument shows that God is not justified in permitting the horrendous evil consequences in our world, as I claim it does, then, it follows that this is not the best of all possible worlds.

For Kant, Hausmann and Kravitz tell us, God is not in a position to know what a free agent would choose or would have chosen had God not intervened, and so God is not in a position to identify "would be wrongdoers." Hence, they claim God is not well placed to prevent would-be wrongdoers from imposing horrendous evil consequences on their victims. But, remember that my Moral Evil Prevention Requirements only demand that God prevent the (external) horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions, such as stopping the bullet before it reaches an innocent victim, and God would always be able to do that, as you and I sometimes are able to do as well. This is something God would be doing, as needed, if he were all-good. (For more on why Kant fails to deal adequately with the problem of evil, see my response to Christopher Insole's essay in this Special Issue.)

When Hausmann and Kravitz turn to a direct examination of my God argument, they get themselves tied up in logical knots by thinking that I want God to prevent actions that will have horrendous evil consequences when my stated view is that I only want God to prevent the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions, leaving the evil actions simply bereft of their evil consequences, something we ourselves are sometimes able to do when we are confronting evil people in the world. Now, there is more to which I could object, but one way or another, it would come back to the mistake that I have just exposed in Hausmann and Kravitz's argument.

### 34. Daniel Rubio

To undercut my God argument, Daniel Rubio argues (i) God is not subject to moral obligations and (ii) God can defeat evils by incorporating them into an incommensurately valuable friendship with each human. Properly appreciated, Rubio thinks this shows that my new logical argument relies on false premises that cannot easily be repaired.

Now, against (1), I argue that even assuming that God is not subject to moral obligations, as Rubio contends, God's failure, if he existed, to prevent the horrendous evil consequences of all the immoral actions in the world when he could easily have done so without either producing a greater evil or failing to secure a greater good is still morally evil.

It would have resulted in far more evil consequences than has been produced individually by all the greatest villains among us. Hence, all we need here to support a moral condemnation is that God could have acted otherwise and that no sufficient good or prevention of evil would have resulted from his not doing so.

Against Rubio's attempt to support (1) by claiming that there is no world that it would be wrong for God to create, I argue in my God book (p. 191) that it would be wrong for God to create a world whose creatures would be better off not existing. I also address Mark Murphy's attempt to show that God is not subject to moral obligations, to which Rubio appeals for support, in my response to Jonathan C. Rutledge's contribution to this Special Issue, which is focused on Murphy's work.

In his attempt to support (2) and show that despite God's permission of horrendous evil consequences God would still be overall good in relationship to us, Rubio gives us an example modeled after Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens's *Christmas Carol*. Clearly, Scrooge, after a life of moral indifference to the needs of others, did turn out in the end to be good and generous, but clearly, the God of traditional theism cannot start out, like Scrooge, being morally indifferent and then become morally virtuous.

Now, assuming we were to introduce Christian assumptions of the incarnation, resurrection, and glorification of Christ as both God and man into the discussion, Rubio thinks he can use these new assumptions to claim that anyone who suffers horrendously in this life could experience a deep sharing with the resurrected and glorified Christ in the next life, given that they have both suffered horrendous evil in this life. This is a deep sharing that those who have not suffered horrendous evil consequences in this life would lack even if they were enjoying a heavenly afterlife. Accordingly, those who suffer horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions in this life may be said to morally accept, at least in the next life, God's permission of that suffering being imposed on them because they now recognize how it makes a deep sharing with the resurrected and glorified Christ possible who likewise suffered from horrendous evil. Yet, I contend that during the earthly ministry of Christ, there was no need for him to suffer from God's permission of the infliction of horrendous suffering that was said to be imposed on him. From a theological perspective, any way that Christ could have lived a good life would have sufficed to bring about our redemption. Moreover, if God had prevented the horrendous suffering that was said to be imposed on Christ, as he was required to do, Christ's life on Earth would be more like that of a Nelson Mandela, a Dolores Huerta, or a Mohandas Gandhi (without his assassination), each of whom in different ways provided a powerful example of how we should live our lives. Accordingly, for those of us whose Earthly lives resembled the lives that we are now assuming that Christ along with the likes of Mandela, Huerta, and Gandhi would be able to live because God was preventing, as needed, especially all the horrendous evil suffering in the world, it would be possible to experience a deep sharing with Christ as well as with those other moral heroes, both now and in any afterlife.

### 35. Timo Koistinen

In his paper, Timo Koistinen explores DZ Phillips's criticism of the Free-Will Defense and mainstream theodicies, claiming that Phillips's critique is partly relevant to my own God argument. Specifically, Koistinen maintains that Phillips's criticism of traditional defenses of theism is more radical than mine because he thinks I share a consequentialist ethical perspective with traditional theists that is wrongheaded from the beginning. Yet, as I repeatedly point out in my book, the moral framework I utilize, captured by my MEPRs I–III, is acceptable to consequentialists and nonconsequentialists alike. Accordingly, my view would not be subject to Phillips's critique of the excesses of consequentialism, which do not obtain in the context in which I am applying them.

Now, while both Phillips and I reject the attempt by traditional theists to find morally adequate arguments to show why God can allow (or could possibly allow) horrendous evil and especially horrors, such as the Holocaust, Phillips finds them absurd, while I find them

logically incompatible with the exceptionless minimal requirements of morality captured by my MEPRs I–III. Here, I think, my critique is stronger.

However, Phillips does go beyond my view in the rejection of a God who is all-powerful in favor of a limited God whose power is a love that is unable to prevent the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions, as needed. Of course, I cannot show that such a limited God is logically incompatible, especially with all the horrendous evil in the world. Nevertheless, I see no good reason to postulate a God more limited than we are with respect to his ability to prevent horrendous evil consequences.

### 36. Gerald Harrison

Gerald Harrison argues that my God argument fails because he claims it is logically possible that we all live in a penal colony that an all-good, all-powerful noncreator God established to prevent himself and good people from being harmed by the bad people in the world. According to Harrison's account, God, a noncreator God, started out abiding by MEPRs I–III with respect to all the inhabitants of our world, but then, the task became so arduous that God, acting in the spirit of MEPRs I–III, moved all bad people to a penal colony where he justifiably gave up enforcing MEPRs I–III anymore. Harrison presents this as counterexample to my God argument, which maintains that God is morally required to abide by MEPRs I–III in our world.<sup>18</sup>

Here are two reasons for thinking that Harrison's imaginative counterexample does not work against my God argument. First, it is impossible for the all-powerful, all-good noncreator God that Harrison is imagining to be exhausted and put upon by adhering to MEPRs I–III. These requirements are rarely, if ever, violated by ourselves, and it would be unbelievably easier for an all-good, all-powerful God to abide by them. Hence, that is just what such a God, if he exists, would be doing. Second, Harrison fails to take into account how my often appealed to analogy of an ideally just and powerful political state provides a model for how good people should be collectively involved, each doing their fair share in maintaining a social structure that does generally effectively prevent horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions with God functioning only as the preventer of last resort. Moreover, when such just institutions are not in place, an all-good, all-powerful God could serve as an initiator of practices that would effectively move us toward just such institutions. In so doing, an all-good, all-powerful God would thereby involve at least good people in the implementation of MEPRs I–III. He would do this not to meet a nonexistent obligation to do it all by himself, but rather because this would be the way that we could be most virtuously involved in the task.

### 37. Luis R. G. Oliveira

Luis R. G. Oliveira finds himself in what he regards as a somewhat awkward position of being an atheist while supporting Alvin Plantinga's Free-Will Defense of theism against my logical argument from evil in support of atheism. Let me see if I can help him out.

At the end of the first chapter of my book after the Introduction, I conclude that we cannot say that God's justification for permitting the moral evil in the world is the freedom that is in it because God could have reduced the moral evil in the world by increasing the significant freedom in the world, and that has not been done. Hence, I concluded there that there is no Free-Will Defense of the degree and amount of evil in the world. In the chapter, I point out that whenever vicious assaults occur, they result in a morally unacceptable distribution of freedom. What happens is that the freedom of the assaulters, a freedom no one should have, is exercised at the expense of the freedom of their victims not to be assaulted, an important freedom that everyone should have.

Now, Oliveira seeks to undermine this argument by contending that while the freedom of the assaulters are significant freedoms, the freedom of their victims not to be assaulted do not have that same status. This is because, Oliveira tells us, significant freedoms are "a necessary condition for desert and responsibility" and that they "involve power and opportunity." This seems right. But, while this holds true for the freedom that vicious

assaulters exercise, it is no less holds true for the freedom that victims of vicious assaults are denied. The same kind of freedom that is being badly exercised by assaulters is being denied to their victims.

Nevertheless, recognizing that the exercise of freedom by wrongdoers logically entails the suppressing of those same freedoms of their victims does not suffice to show that some other goods with freedom embedded in them, like the opportunity to console the victims of vicious assault, might not justify God's permission of those assaults. Further argument is required.

Now, in my God book, I characterized this pursuit of possible justifications for God's permitting especially the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions as searching for a greater good justification, but it can also be characterized as continuing the pursuit of what, assuming the God of traditional theism exists, would be a Free-Will Defense for God's permission of especially the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions that obtain in our world.

Accordingly, in Chapter 6, I provided a fourfold classification of all the goods (with freedoms embedded in them) that God could provide to us, and then using the necessary Moral Evil Prevention Requirements (MEPRs I–III) that I carve off from the Pauline Principle, I apply them to show that for all such goods, it is not logically possible for God to permit especially horrendous consequences of immoral actions to attain those goods. Thus, it is only by fully developing my argument for the logical incompatibility of the God of traditional theism with especially all the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions that obtain in our world that I am able to fully establish that Plantinga's Free-Will Defense, taken up at the beginning of my book, is a failure.

### 38. Asha Lancaster-Thomas

I am in complete agreement with Asha Lancaster-Thomas critique of Jerry Walls's attempt to use an account of the compensation that the God of traditional theism could provide in an afterlife to undercut my God argument. I particularly like the way Lancaster-Thomas shows that, on Walls's account, freedoms that would still be valuable to people in the afterlife are inconsistently denied to them there, but not denied to them while they are in this life.

Overall, Lancaster-Thomas maintains that "God should adopt a principle of limited intervention not only in the earthly life but also in the afterlife." Here too, I could not agree more. In the same year that I published my God book, I published an article in *Religious Studies* in which I argued that God should use a principle of limited intervention to do justice in the afterlife, leaving unsaid in that article, to make publication more likely, that my fuller view, like Lancaster-Thomas's, is that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, would be doing the same in this life with respect to wrongdoing as he would in any morally defensible afterlife.<sup>19</sup>

### 39. James Henry Collin

James Henry Collin proposes to undercut MEPRs I–III, which are the normative requirements that I claim support my logical argument against the existence of God by providing a viable alternative moral framework derived from the writing of Issac Qatraya, a 7th Century writer also known as Issac the Syrian.

According to Issac, participation in the life of God (theosis), which for him seems to go beyond just friendship with God is something to which we all have a right and also something for which Issac, being a universalist, thought we would all eventually partake. Issac further held that suffering, even terrible suffering, is required to forge a saintly moral character, which was required for theosis. From this, it is said to follow that God needs to permit especially the horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions if we are to attain that theosis to which we have a right. The right we all have here, Collin tells us, is analogous to a right to welfare, to which welfare liberals are committed. However, I think



that there are good reasons to think that this is not an alternative moral framework but rather a grossly immoral one.

First of all, a God who must, as a matter of right, provide his friendship, even a share of his inner life, to all is not as free as we view ourselves to be in choosing intimate friends and so this could not obtain for the all-powerful God of traditional theism. Second, to attain theosis and participate in the inner life of God, God must arrange that there are sufficient inflictors of horrendous evil consequences in the world and that these inflictors themselves, and everyone else, suffer sufficiently from horrendous evil consequences, presumably by incentivizing would-be inflictors of horrendous evil consequences, in order to make theosis possible for all. However, I think this would involve the God of traditional theism in a morally horrendous project.

Now, Collin thinks that my alternative moral project would permit large numbers of people to fool the God of traditional theism by coming close to imposing horrendous evil consequences on others, thus forcing God to engage in many unnecessary preventions of actions that would never have morally evil consequences. Yet, I contend that the God of traditional theism would never be so fooled. He would always be able to detect the external beginnings of horrendous evil consequences that we creatures fail or are unable to prevent, and then prevent just those consequences himself. Hence, what we would have, under my moral alternative, is not moral chaos, but, in its best manifestations, ideally just and powerful political states with God functioning as a preventer of last resort.

#### 40. The End

Forty contributors are surely a lot to respond to in one paper, but I think I have done my best. Responding to the contributors of these two Special Issues (56 contributors all tolled) has led me to change my argument in variety of ways:

1. Willian Hasker has helped me see the need to narrow the scope of my Moral and Natural Evil Prevention Requirements to especially horrendous evil consequences in order to more clearly avoid kindergarten objections.
2. Luis Oliveira has led me to see that my argument against the Free-Will Defense that I take up in Chapter 2 is not complete until it merges with my argument against the Greater Good Defense that I take up throughout the rest of the book.
3. A number of contributors have led me to see the need to deepen my reliance on an ideally just and powerful state with its goal of providing equal significant freedom to all of its members as well as to see the need to provide greater clarity as to how my MEPRs I–III apply to all the goods that the God of traditional theism, if he exists, could provide to us.

Nevertheless, the main conclusion of my argument has remained unchanged. I still hold that the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism is logically incompatible with all the evil in the world.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In order to explain how the nonmaterial beings whom God creates could themselves produce so much evil, Johnston relies upon a mistaken view of practical reason that Henry Sidgwick defended at the end of his *Methods of Ethics*. Moreover, correcting what is mistaken about Sidgwick's view immediately suggests a better way to think about how God or any of his creatures could do evil; see (Sterba 2013, pp. 48–49).
- <sup>2</sup> The change I made to more clearly avoid a Hasker's kindergarten objection is to limit the evil consequences that God should prevent to just "especially horrendous evil consequences" rather than "significant and especially horrendous evil consequences."
- <sup>3</sup> Wielenberg's usage here, borrowed from Peter van Inwagen, is somewhat suggestive of Jean Jacques Rousseau's paradoxical idea that we should be "forced to be free", which employed two contrasting senses of freedom to work. (See *On the Social Contract*, Book 1, Chapter 7). Here, however, only the noninterference sense of freedom is being employed throughout. So, we just get a contradiction.

- 4 It is worth noting here that neither God's complete freedom nor our complete freedom is understood here to be absent moral constraints. For example, God is constrained in not offering his friendship to a committed child molester without a moral transformation.
- 5 Peter van Inwagen has stressed our need to turn to God for the right reasons. See most recently the summary of the exchange between van Inwagen and myself that took place in 2022 on a *Religions* webinar *Atheist/Theist: Point/Counterpoint*. <https://www.mdpi.com/about/announcements/3315> (accessed on 3 October 2023).
- 6 After pressing this same objection in three successive publications, Hasker was invited to object, if he still saw the need, to my now modified view in this current Special Issue, but he chose not to do so.
- 7 Reichenbach cites Hasker's contribution. So, I assume he saw my response as well.
- 8 Now, in *Is a Good God Logically Possible?* I did refer to one of my environmental conflict resolution principles on one occasion just to illustrate how we could have moral obligations to nonhuman living beings, while at the same time noting that this illustration was not part of my God argument.
- 9 Again, it is worth noting here that neither God's complete freedom nor our complete freedom is understood here to be absent moral constraints. For example, God is constrained in not offering his friendship to a committed child molester without a moral transformation.
- 10 See #5 above.
- 11 Since all but one of Mariña's many citations to my book are to passages that come earlier than Chapter 6, it may be that Mariña did not even notice this fourfold classification of goods that I first introduced in that chapter and employ thereafter.
- 12 Note that Alvaro is assuming that there are two radically different ways that *we* could be—an embodied way and an unembodied way. He is not comparing a world of embodied creatures with another world of unembodied creatures. This second alternative is open to an objection: better for whom? This is because there is no existent for whom things could have been made better. However, that objection does not hold against Alvaro's account, provided that we can make sense of ourselves as being either embodied or unembodied.
- 13 As I mentioned at the beginning of this response paper, after a contributor's paper was published, I sent that contributor a draft of what was going to be my response to see if the contributor had any objections that I should take into account so as to then revise the responses I would be publishing.
- That is what I did for Carlo Alvaro. Now one of my criticisms of Alvaro's paper was directed at the passage to which this note is attached. As it turns out, when I told Alvaro that I was going to criticize this passage, unbeknownst to me, he had the passage removed from his paper so as to remove the basis for one of the two main criticisms I was going to make of his paper.
- Alvaro and I both knew that authors should not change their papers after publication in order to remove passages that they found out were going to be criticized. But that is just what was allowed here. In response, I have retained in my paper the passage I quoted from Alvaro's originally published paper, and I have also attached this note to allow readers to know what happened in this case.
- 14 I say "for the most part" because at the end of his paper, Rutledge provides me with an alternative way of defending my own view.
- 15 J. Brian Huffling, who has contributed to both of the Special Issues I guest-edited for *Religions*, is attempting to develop Brian Davies's defense of the minority perspective.
- 16 Nor would this god be the all-good, all-powerful God of traditional theism.
- 17 Responding to Plantinga's argument, Mackie himself conceded "that the problem of evil does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another" (Mackie 1982, p. 154).
- 18 Now Harrison thinks that God's being noncreative is helpful to his defense of theism against my logical argument from evil, but what is crucial for my argument is whether God can be claimed to be all-good and all-powerful rather than whether he can be claimed to be a creator or not.
- 19 See (Sterba 2020).

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