

10-1-2013

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### Recommended Citation

Parker, Ross (2013) "Deep And Wide: A Resopnse To Jeff Jordan On Divine Love," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 4 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol30/iss4/7>

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## DEEP AND WIDE: A RESPONSE TO JEFF JORDAN ON DIVINE LOVE

Ross Parker

Recently Jeff Jordan has argued against the view that divine perfection would require God to love every human with equal maximal intensity. He asserts that his argument depends on principles of perfect being theology which he develops and defends. In this paper I argue that Jordan's case can be better understood as two conceptually distinct arguments, only one of which depends on his proffered principles of perfect being theology. I then critically evaluate each of these arguments, arguing that both are unsuccessful.

In a recent article in this journal,<sup>1</sup> Jeff Jordan argues against the truth of the following thesis:

(L) If God is perfect, then God's love must be maximally extended and equally intense.<sup>2</sup>

Jordan notes that this thesis is widely accepted by theistic and nontheistic philosophers, and that it plays a prominent role in contemporary presentations of the evidential argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness.<sup>3</sup> Jordan presents "a new argument contra (L) . . . based on the notion of divine perfection" claiming that an "exploration into several unnoticed principles of perfect being theology will expedite the argument" (54). In concluding that his argument gives us good reason to reject (L), Jordan considers this conclusion to have important ramifications, since if (L) is false, then "influential versions of both the empirical argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness will be undercut" (54).

Jordan's paper has already elicited replies,<sup>4</sup> but I believe there is more that can be said in response to Jordan. In what follows I offer a critical

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<sup>1</sup>Jeff Jordan, "The Topography of Divine Love," *Faith and Philosophy* 29:1 (2012), 53–69. (Page references in the text are to this article.)

<sup>2</sup>Jordan's initial statement of the thesis has the antecedent say "If God exists and is perfect . . ." but he then states that he will drop the qualifier *if God exists* (53, note 1).

<sup>3</sup>See the literature cited in Jordan, 54–55, note 1 and note 2.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Talbott, "The Topography of Divine Love: A Response to Jeff Jordan," *Faith and Philosophy* 30:3 (2013), 302–316. Jordan Wessling also has a brief response to Jordan's argument in his general defense of God's supreme love for every created person given in his "The Scope of God's Supreme Love," *Philosophia Christi* 14:2 (2012), 347–351. I became aware of both of these works after my initial submission of this article.



evaluation of Jordan's argument against (L). In §1 I clarify how Jordan understands the requirements of (L) and the nature of divine love. Then in §2 and §3, I attempt to show that Jordan's case against (L) is best understood as two conceptually distinct arguments, and that only one of these arguments depends on the principles Jordan derives in his exploration of perfect being theology. I then argue in §4 and §5 that both of Jordan's arguments are unsuccessful.

§1: *Jordan on (L), the Nature of Love, and Intensity of Love*

To evaluate Jordan's case against (L), we must first clarify what exactly Jordan takes this thesis to affirm about God's love. Though not explicit in the initial statement, Jordan understands (L) to be limited to God's love for humans. So (L) requires that God's love be extended to every human, and that every human be loved by God with an equal intensity (Jordan refers to this second requirement as *the flatness requirement*). But if the flatness requirement simply requires equal intensity, God's love could meet it by being of low intensity for all. Jordan accordingly claims that "the flatness requirement should be understood to require not just equality but also maximal intensity—every human is loved by God to the same significant degree" (53).

It seems that Jordan's statement extending the flatness requirement to include maximal intensity could be understood in one of two ways. One way would be that God's love must be as intense as possible *given the equality constraint*. On this understanding, the intensity of love required by (L) would be the maximal intensity compossible with equal love of all humans. This way of clarifying the flatness requirement can be stated as follows:

(L\*) If God is perfect, then God's love must extend to every human and be as intense as possible while remaining equal for each human.<sup>5</sup>

Another way to understand the maximal intensity required would be that God must love all humans with maximal intensity simpliciter. On this understanding of equal maximal intensity, if God's love could be greater for a person, God's love for that person fails to be maximally intense. In his article it is clear that Jordan understands equal maximal intensity in this latter sense.<sup>6</sup> Jordan's understanding of (L) can therefore be stated more precisely as follows:

(L\*\*) If God is perfect, then God's love must extend to every human and be maximally intense for every human.

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<sup>5</sup>This account of (L) could suffer from something similar to the "leveling down" objection against certain accounts of equality. See §5.1 of Stefan Gosepath, "Equality," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring, 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/equality/>.

<sup>6</sup>In correspondence, Jordan has affirmed that this is the correct understanding of equal maximal intensity.

In the remainder of this article, when I discuss (L) I am referring to (L\*\*).

I now want to state Jordan's understanding of the nature of love. Drawing on the work of Harry Frankfurt,<sup>7</sup> Jordan claims that divine love will have two conceptually necessary features (53); he later indicates that these two features are necessary for all personal love (62). I will refer to Jordan's understanding of the necessary conditions of love as follows:

(NCL) For all persons S and P, if S loves P, then (i) S has a disinterested concern for P and (ii) S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P.<sup>8</sup>

Jordan's understanding of how to determine the intensity of love develops out of (NCL). Jordan thinks that the intensity of one's love increases as one's concern for the beloved increases and as one's identification with the interests of the beloved increases. Further, based on his discussion of friendship (62–63), Jordan affirms the following connection between concern for the beloved and identifying with the interests of the beloved:

(C&I) For all persons S and P, the greater the concern S has for P, the more S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P.<sup>9</sup>

(NCL) and (C&I) together imply a proportionate relationship between (i) the intensity of love for the beloved and (ii) identification with the interests of the beloved. Jordan's account of the intensity of love can therefore be summarized as follows:

(IL) For all persons S and P, the greater the intensity of S's love for P, the more S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P.

### §2: Jordan's Divine Perfection Argument Against (L)

With a more precise understanding of Jordan's account of (L), the nature of love, and the intensity of love in place, I can now present his main argument against (L), which I refer to as the *divine perfection argument*. Jordan grounds his argument in a discussion of perfect being theology (see 55–59). Here I will simply list the three principles of perfect being theology advocated by Jordan. Jordan summarizes what he takes to be the fundamental idea of perfect being theology as follows:

(PT) For any property F, God has F if having F increases the positive metaphysical status of God; and, God has F to that degree which

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<sup>7</sup>Jordan states "this characterization of divine love is influenced by the analysis of love found in Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 79–80." (53, note 2).

<sup>8</sup>Jordan's understandings of *the interest of a person* and *identifying with the interests of a person* will be evaluated in §5.

<sup>9</sup>This is Jordan's principle (B) on p. 62; I have simply changed the name of the principle.

maximally contributes to the positive metaphysical status of God when conjoined with all the other properties God has. (57)<sup>10</sup>

Another principle of perfect being theology which Jordan affirms is his “Consequence principle”:

(CP) For all properties  $F$  &  $F'$ , and individuals  $S$ , if  $F$  is a great-making property, and  $F'$  is an entailment of  $F$ , and  $S$  has  $F'$  solely in virtue of having  $F$ , then having  $F'$  cannot be worse-making (a defect) for  $S$ . (59)

The idea of (CP) is that “there is a kind of weak preservation among great-making properties and their consequences—defects cannot flow out of enhancements” (59).

For the purpose of his argument against (L), Jordan’s key principle is his “Transvaluation Denial principle”:

(TD) For all properties  $F$ , if  $F$  is a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by a human, then  $F$  cannot be a great-making property when had by God. (58)<sup>11</sup>

Jordan recognizes that (TD) is the most controversial of these theses in addition to being the foundational principle of his argument. He therefore devotes a section of his paper to defending this thesis (I will evaluate and respond to his defense of (TD) in §4).

With these principles of perfect being theology in place, Jordan presents and defends the final premise of his argument. Jordan states that “a human who loved all other humans equally and impartially would have a life significantly impoverished” (60). For humans, argues Jordan, a life in which all loves are equal is “clearly a defective life” (61). With this premise in place, Jordan summarizes his divine perfection argument against (L) as follows:

According to (L), the love of a perfect being must be as flat and as deep as possible. It’s clear, however, that *having one’s loves perfectly flat* would be a defect for a human. And, given (TD), it follows that God’s love being perfectly flat would not be great-making. Moreover, just as lacking deep relationships

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<sup>10</sup>Jordan initially presents this thesis as the following biconditional:

(PT) For any property  $F$ , God has  $F$  if and only if having  $F$  increases the positive metaphysical status of God, and for any other properties  $F_1, F_2 \dots F_n$  had by God, God has  $F$  to that degree which maximally contributes to the positive metaphysical status of God when conjoined with  $F_1, F_2 \dots F_n$ .

He argues that this biconditional is false because he thinks God clearly has properties which are not great-making properties (e.g., God has the property of *having at least five beliefs* and *not being the number nine*).

<sup>11</sup>Jordan states the principle as

(TD) For all properties  $F$ , if  $F$  is a deficiency when had by a human, then  $F$  cannot be a great-making property when had by God (58).

Jordan goes on to clarify that by “deficiency” he means something that is intrinsically bad when had by a human, so I have added the parenthetical phrase.

would be intrinsically bad for a human, the same holds for God. So if God is perfect, then the divine love need not be as wide and flat as possible, as perfection could not require a property the possession of which would lead to a life defective in significant respects. Proposition (L), in other words, is false. (64, emphasis original)

I take it that this paragraph sums up the argument against (L) that Jordan explicitly sets out to give.

### §3: *Jordan's Nature of Love Argument Against (L)*

After presenting his divine perfection argument, Jordan devotes a considerable portion of his article to responding to potential objections. He first considers an objection questioning his claim that maximally intense love for all humans would be a defect in humans. I take Jordan's response to constitute a new and conceptually distinct argument against (L), one that does not depend on his perfect being theology principles. I will refer to this argument as the *nature of love argument*.<sup>12</sup> Simply stated, Jordan argues that it is impossible for anyone, including God, to love every human with maximal intensity.

Recall from §1 that Jordan affirms the following thesis on the intensity of love:

- (IL) For all persons S and P, the greater the intensity of S's love for P, the more S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P.

Jordan then argues that "persons have different and often conflicting interests" (62). But if people have conflicting interests, and if intensity of love is dependent on identifying with the interests of the beloved, then Jordan thinks it is *impossible* to love everyone maximally. This is so because, according to Jordan, if someone identifies with an interest, she cannot identify with an incompatible interest. Further, this in-principle impossibility applies to God as well as humans:

- If God were to love certain humans, and thereby identify with their interests, then God could not identify with incompatible interests. In other words, even God cannot love or befriend every human in the deepest way. (63)

This argument is conceptually independent of Jordan's proffered principles of perfect being theology, depending instead on Jordan's account of the necessary conditions of love (NCL) and his account of the intensity of love (IL). The argument therefore can and should stand on its own as an independent argument against (L).

Having briefly outlined Jordan's divine perfection argument and his nature of love argument, I argue in the next two sections of the paper why both arguments fail to give us reason to reject (L).

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<sup>12</sup>Wessling claims that there are in fact *three* distinct arguments in Jordan's case against (L) ("The Scope of God's Supreme Love," 348).

§4: *Evaluating the Divine Perfection Argument Against (L)*

The divine perfection argument's fundamental flaw is that even if Jordan's premises of perfect being theology are true *and* his premise concerning the intrinsic badness of human maximally intense love for all other humans is true, a denial of (L) does not clearly follow.

Jordan unfortunately never presents his argument formally. Working from Jordan's summary (quoted above) and his commitment to (TD) playing a fundamental role in the argument, I interpret his argument as follows:<sup>13</sup>

*Divine Perfection Argument:*

(D1) For all properties F, if F is a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by a human, then F cannot be a great-making property when had by God [Jordan's (TD)].

(D2) The property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity would be a deficiency (intrinsically bad) if had by humans.

Therefore,

(D3) The property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity cannot be a great-making property when had by God.

(D4) If the property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity cannot be a great-making property when had by God, it would be a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by God.

Therefore,

(D5) The property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity would be a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by God.

Therefore,

(D6) It is not the case that God's love must be maximally extended and maximally intense.

(D7) If (L), then God's love must be maximally extended and maximally intense.

Therefore,

(D8) (L) is false.

As an initial evaluation of the argument, Jordan has not defended any thesis of perfect being theology that justifies the inference from (D5) to (D6), nor would this inference be justified by an entailment of the theses he defends (recall (PT), (TD), and (CP) listed in §2). I do not take this to be a serious problem for his argument, however. Most proponents of perfect

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<sup>13</sup>The argument assumes that God exists and that God is perfect.

being theology would affirm something like the following divine property denial thesis:

- (PD) For all properties F, if F would decrease the positive metaphysical status had by God, then God does not have that property.

This would support the inference from (D5) to (D6), and I will assume that Jordan affirms something like this thesis.

Jordan focuses his efforts on defending (D1) and (D2). And from these two premises it follows that the property of maximally intense love for all humans cannot be a great-making property of God. The problem for Jordan's argument arises in attempting to go from (D3) to (D5). I've stated my best understanding of Jordan's attempt to do this as depending on the following premise:

- (D4) If the property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity cannot be a great-making property when had by God, it would be a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by God.

The problem for Jordan is that he does not supply any reason for thinking that this conditional is true. Further, what Jordan says in explicating his key principle of perfect being theology (TD) ((D1) in this argument) gives reason to revise the claim of (D4). In his discussion of (TD), Jordan clarifies that there are *two ways* a property which is a deficiency for humans cannot be a great-making property of God (58): (i) because having that property is intrinsically worse-making, or (ii) because having it is not intrinsically good, even if having that property is not worse-making for God (Jordan refers to the latter kind of property as a *neutral property*). Since Jordan thinks that a property which is a deficiency when had by humans can be a worse-making property *or* a neutral property when had by God, (D4) should be revised as follows:

- (D4\*) If the property of loving every person with an equal intensity cannot be a great-making property when had by God, it would either be (i) an intrinsically bad property when had by God, or (ii) a neutral property when had by God.

(D5) would then need to be revised as

- (D5\*) The property of loving every person with an equal intensity would not be a neutral property when had by God, so it would be intrinsically bad when had by God.

The problematic premise now becomes (D5\*). First, Jordan does not give any argument for why one should accept (D5\*). Second, Jordan gives no general way to adjudicate whether a property which would not be a great-making property for God would be a neutral property or an intrinsically bad property. Third, there is no way for Jordan to argue that a property is intrinsically bad for God on the basis of the badness of the property

for humans, since this can only show that the property is either bad for God or neutral for God.

Further, gleaning from what Jordan says about possible divine neutral properties, there is some reason to think that the property *maximally intense love for all humans* would be better thought of as a neutral property rather than an intrinsically bad property for God. Jordan argues that impassibility (58–59) and inability to sin (60), both often understood to be great-making properties of God, cannot be great-making properties of God on the basis of (TD), since these properties would be deficiencies for humans. He nowhere insinuates, however, that these properties are intrinsically bad properties. Rather, he seems to think that these two properties follow from other of God's great-making properties. Recall Jordan's (CP), one of his principles of perfect being theology:

(CP) For all properties  $F$  &  $F'$ , and individuals  $S$ , if  $F$  is a great-making property, and  $F'$  is an entailment of  $F$ , and  $S$  has  $F'$  solely in virtue of having  $F$ , then having  $F'$  cannot be worse-making (a defect) for  $S$ .

This means that if impassibility and inability to sin follow from great-making properties, they *must* be neutral properties of God rather than intrinsically bad properties.

The proponent of (L) can defend a similar analysis of divine maximally extended and equally intense love. Even if one grants Jordan's conclusion that the property *maximally intense love for all humans* is not a great-making property for God because of (TD), the property could plausibly be entailed by one of God's great-making properties (justice or impartiality seem to be good candidates). If this is the case, not only does Jordan not have an argument for (D5\*), the proponent of (L) has a positive case against (D5\*).

To state the problem again: Jordan has focused on defending (TD) and the intrinsic badness of human maximally extended and maximally intense love. But from these premises, it only follows that the property *maximally intense love for all humans* is not a great-making property, which means it could be either intrinsically bad for God or neutral for God. In order to deny (L), Jordan needs to argue that the property is intrinsically bad. But Jordan offers no argument for this, and has no clear way to argue for this on the basis of (TD) or any other of his principles of perfect being theology. Further, there is some reason to think that the property would be a divine neutral property rather than an intrinsically bad property. In light of these considerations, I conclude that a rejection of (L) does not follow from the premises of the divine perfection argument which Jordan has defended.

In attempting to show that the divine perfection argument does not support the denial of (L), I granted (D1) and (D2) for the sake of evaluating the argument. I in fact think there are reasons to question both premises.

First, I think we have reason to reject (D1):

- (D1) For all properties F, if F is a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by a human, then F cannot be a great-making property when had by God [Jordan's (TD)].

Jordan recognizes that (TD) is controversial, and accordingly focuses a section of his paper on defending it (59–60). He states that his support for (TD) will take two steps: “First, the most promising counterexamples to (TD) will be discussed and found wanting. Second, the reason why these alleged counterexamples fail will be explained” (59).

One potential counterexample to (TD) which Jordan examines is the property *being unable to sin*. This property would plausibly be a deficiency for humans, as the ability to sin is a necessary condition for the intrinsic human good of developing morally virtuous character.<sup>14</sup> Yet many theists understand this property to be one of God's great-making properties. In response, Jordan argues that the property *being unable to sin*, while probably an entailment of one of God's great-making properties, cannot be a great-making property itself. This is so because the property could possibly be instantiated through causal or psychological determinism, with the property thereby resulting from a power external to the agent. Jordan thinks that “since there are possible circumstances in which having the property of being unable to sin does not enhance an agent's greatness, the property of being unable to sin is not great-making” (60).

I find Jordan's response inadequate because his statement of the divine property under consideration is imprecise; when the property is stated more precisely, Jordan's response won't work. The great-making property of God which concerns inability to sin is not merely *being unable to sin*—after all, rocks have this property. Rather, God has the great-making property of *impeccability*, which can be understood as *being unable to sin because of necessary moral goodness*.<sup>15</sup> It seems that impeccability would still be a deficiency for humans for the reasons given above. But the property of impeccability cannot be brought about through causal or psychological determinism from an outside source. Therefore, the property of impeccability seems to provide a counterexample to (TD). Since Jordan does not present a positive case for (TD) and his response to a key counterexample is unsuccessful, there is good reason to reject (TD), thereby rejecting premise (D1) of the argument.

Second, I also think we have reason to reject (D2):

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<sup>14</sup>Jordan says in stating his potential counterexample that “Having F [being unable to sin] would be a deficiency for humans, since they would thereby lack libertarian freedom.” I think that, as Michael Murray has argued, libertarian freedom may not be a great good for humans in itself; rather, morally significant freedom is an instrumental good because it is required for humans to engage in soul-making, which is an intrinsic good for humans. Thus I have modified the statement. See Michael Murray, “Deus Absconditus,” in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63–66.

<sup>15</sup>See the discussion of impeccability in Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (Cornell University Press, 1989), 202–212.

- (D2) The property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity would be a deficiency (intrinsically bad) if had by humans.

The fundamental support Jordan initially gives for this premise is his statement that “a human who loved all other humans equally and impartially would have a life significantly impoverished” (60). He supports this initial statement as follows:

Much of the richness of life flows from one’s friendships and one’s spouse and one’s children, and within these attachments there is a love which is neither impartial nor equally shared by all other persons, as one loves her beloved more than she does others. It is not just that one manifests her love for the beloved differently from how one manifests her love for others. No, a person appropriately loves his own children more than other children. (61)

I find myself in general agreement with everything said here. But I don’t think that any of this entails that maximally intense love for all humans would be an intrinsically bad property for a human to possess.

One general claim that Jordan seems to make here is that impartial love would be bad for humans.<sup>16</sup> Given what Jordan has written, it appears that by impartial love he means something like love that does not respond to the uniqueness of the beloved and is not conditioned by the unique relationship with the beloved (in the remainder of this section I will use “impartial” in this sense). I agree that impartial love, understood in this way, is deficient for humans. But again, the divine perfection argument requires that the property *equal maximally intense love for all humans* be a deficiency when had by humans. So if maximally intense love for all humans can be instantiated without impartial love, then the deficiency of impartial love does not support (D2). Perhaps Jordan thinks that all cases of *equally intense love* between two or more humans would require impartiality, which would make every case of equally intense love a deficiency for humans. But this doesn’t seem to be the case. Think about parental love. Proper parental love is not impartial; a parent loves each child by being concerned for his or her unique and individual good. But to love each of one’s children in their unique individuality does not require that the parent love her children with different degrees of intensity—a parent’s love can and should be equally intense without being impartial. Similarly, a man who is a husband and a father should love his wife and his daughter according to the unique relationship he has with each, but this does not require he love one or the other more intensely. These cases show that there is no *prima facie* reason to think that equally intense love *requires* impartiality.

So it seems that Jordan’s case for (D2) must depend on it being the case that to love *all* humans with equal intensity would be intrinsically bad for

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<sup>16</sup>The terms *impartiality* and *partiality* are used in different and nuanced ways in the ethics literature. Impartiality normally is applied to considerations of our moral duties rather than the appropriate way to love. For more on this discussion about how these terms are used, see Marcia Brown, “Impartiality and Friendship,” *Ethics* 101 (1991), 836–857.

humans. I think, however, there is reason to reject this claim. Consider a world where only four people exist—a husband and wife, and their two sons (this could be the actual world at an early point in humanity's history, or a possible world). In this case, it seems that each individual *could* love the other three fully and with equal intensity, and not have an impoverished life. And if it is possible that maximally intense love for all humans is not a deficiency, then the property can't be an intrinsic deficiency for a human.<sup>17</sup>

I affirm this while agreeing with Jordan that for humans in the actual world at the current time, attempting to love every person with equal intensity would lead to deficient loving relationships. This is so because, as finite beings with limited time, limited abilities, and limited emotional resources, we *are not able* to love everyone equally while also loving fully and deeply.<sup>18</sup> But even if it achieving maximally intense love for all humans is impossible for us because of our creaturely limitations and contingent circumstances, this does not entail that the property is an intrinsic deficiency when had by humans.

Of course, key to adjudicating the plausibility of (D2) is one's understanding of the nature of love and how one evaluates the intensity of love (issues I address in §5). When Jordan responds to an objection to (D2) similar to the one I give here, he turns to considerations of the nature of love and how one should measure love's intensity. As I outlined in §3, Jordan responds by arguing that in light of his understanding of the nature and intensity of love, it is not possible for anyone (including God) to have maximal love for all humans. But as I argued above, this is a distinct argument against (L), and it is independent of the divine perfection argument. In the next section I will attempt to argue that this nature of love argument fails. But regardless of the success of my response, if Jordan's defense of (D2) depends on his nature of love argument, and this argument constitutes a direct argument against (L) independent of (D1) and (D2), then at best Jordan's divine perfection argument is superfluous in Jordan's case against (L).

To recap my case against Jordan's divine perfection argument: I have argued that Jordan's divine perfection argument does not lead to a denial of (L) even if his key premises (D1) and (D2) are granted. I have also argued against (D1), showing that Jordan's response to a key counterexample to (TD) fails. Finally, I have argued that there is reason to reject (D2), and that Jordan's case for this premise must ultimately stand or fall with the conceptually separate nature of love argument (to be examined in the next

<sup>17</sup>A similar argument is made by Wessling in "The Scope of God's Supreme Love," 349.

<sup>18</sup>See Robert Adams's discussion of this point in *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 162–163; Diane Jeske makes a similar point in, "Friendship, Virtue, and Impartiality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57: (1997), 51–72, particularly 68–70.

section). In light of these considerations, Jordan's divine perfection argument against (L) fails.

§5: *Evaluating the Nature of Love Argument Against (L)*

If Jordan is to have a successful case against (L), it will need to come from his nature of love argument. Like the divine perfection argument, Jordan does not give a premised presentation of the nature of love argument, so I summarize the argument as follows:

*The Nature of Love Argument*

- (N1) For all persons S and P, if S loves P with maximal intensity, then S must take as his own or identify with all of P's interests.
- (N2) For some humans S and P, S and P have incompatible interests.
- (N3) No one can take as his own or identify with incompatible interests.

Therefore,

- (N4) No one (including God) can love every human with maximal intensity.

- (N5) If (L), then God must love every human with maximal intensity.

Therefore,

- (N6) (L) is false.

While I think this argument has fewer problems than the divine perfection argument, I remain unconvinced that it gives us reason to reject (L). In what follows I argue that two of the argument's key premises—(N1) and (N3)—can be challenged, depending on how two key concepts in the argument should be understood: (i) *interest of a person*, and (ii) *identifying with an interest of a person*.

Since the concept of a person's interests appears in (N1), (N2), and (N3), to evaluate the argument we need to understand what Jordan means by the term. In presenting his defense of (N2), Jordan states that he "understand[s] an interest of a person as a desire or goal had by that person—something the person cares about—or as something benefiting the person" (62, note 26). This statement contains an ambiguity. In the first disjunct of this disjunction, Jordan's explanation of an interest conflates a propositional attitude ("a desire or goal") and the object of the attitude (the *something* which the person cares about). Since the second disjunct refers to *something* rather than a propositional attitude about that something, and since in the rest of the paper Jordan seems to use *interest* to refer to the "something" which is desired, cared about, or beneficial for the person, I summarize Jordan's stated account of an interest as follows:

Interest<sub>1</sub>: Something<sup>19</sup> is an interest of person S if and only if it is something S desires or cares about, or it is something that benefits S.

I note two things about this understanding of interests. First, Jordan recognizes that a person can have something as an interest without caring about it, as long as that something benefits the person. This account also affirms that if someone desires or cares about something, then it is an interest of the person, whether or not it is beneficial to the person.

In defending the claim that persons have incompatible interests, Jordan gives the following example of what incompatible interests would look like:

Suppose you have an ample supply of tickets to a concert, but Smith will attend only if Jones does not. Although you prefer going with both, you decide to attend with Jones even though you know that this means Smith will not attend. You have done nothing wrong, as your hands were tied by the intransigence of your friends. To secure the interests of one may entail thwarting those of another. (62)

In this case, I take it that the conflicting interests would be something like *going to the concert without Jones* for Smith and *going to the concert* for Jones.

If we understand personal interests in terms of interest<sub>1</sub>, (N2) seems eminently plausible—no one should deny that there are actual cases like the possible example given above. But this understanding of personal interests creates a fatal problem for (N1), for Jordan himself gives reason to deny that maximal love requires identifying with all of the interests<sub>1</sub> of a person.

(N1) depends on Jordan's understanding of the nature of love (NCL) and intensity of love (IL). Recall that Jordan claims that divine love requires that (i) God has a disinterested concern for the beloved and that (ii) God takes as his own or identifies with the interests of the beloved. In discussing these two necessary conditions of divine love, Jordan makes an important clarification. He claims that because of God's disinterested concern for the one loved, "God would identify with no interest incompatible with the beloved's well being . . . love does not require identifying with interests harmful or destructive" (53). So assuming interest<sub>1</sub> as the correct account of a person's interests, Jordan himself should deny (N1)—maximal love would not require identifying with interests that are harmful or destructive. The problem presented here is straightforward: if the account of a person's interests Jordan explicitly gives in defending (N2) is accepted, Jordan himself gives reason to deny (N1).

For (N1) to be plausible, Jordan needs another account of a person's interest, one that lines up with what he says about concern for a person's

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<sup>19</sup>Jordan does not specify what kinds of things can stand in for "something," but from his discussion I take these "somethings" to primarily be states of affairs, though it seems plausible that there could be interests in persons (and perhaps other things) that are not reducible to interests in states of affairs.

well-being constraining the interests that love must identify with. I propose the following modification of Jordan's original account:

Interest<sub>2</sub>: Something is an interest of person S if and only if it is something S desires or cares about which is not harmful or destructive for S, or it is something that benefits S.

To support (N2) Jordan would need to show that there are incompatible interests<sub>2</sub>. Jordan's stated example of incompatible interests involving Smith and Jones doesn't exemplify a clear case of incompatible interests<sub>2</sub>; on the most natural reading of the situation, Smith's interest in attending the concert without Jones would be harmful for Smith. Another case that Jordan provides, though, seems to show that there can be incompatible interests<sub>2</sub> (I will refer to this case as *Jones and his sons*):

Jones has two children, Peter and Paul. . . . With only one available ticket to the concert which both Peter and Paul strongly desire to attend, Jones takes Peter rather than Paul to the concert. (64)

Here Peter attending the concert and Paul attending the concert seem to be incompatible interests<sub>2</sub>. I accept that there are incompatible interests<sub>2</sub>, and unless noted, when I refer to interests in what follows, I refer to interest<sub>2</sub>.

The example of *Jones and his sons* comes from an objection against Jordan's position which he addresses in his essay. I will argue that the example of Jones and his sons motivates two possible criticisms of the nature of love argument, depending on how *identifying with an interest* should be understood. I argue first that on a plausible account of identifying with an interest, one can identify with incompatible interests (i.e., (N3) is false). I then argue that if one accepts Jordan's alternate account of identifying with an interest, then one should reject Jordan's claim that maximal love requires identifying with all the interests of the beloved (i.e., (N1) is false).

Jordan felicitously states the general insight to be gleaned from the example of Jones and his sons when he writes,

It does not follow, one might object, that Jones [by taking Peter rather than Paul to the concert] thereby loves Paul less than Peter, since perhaps earlier Jones had taken Paul rather than Peter, or at some future occasion, Jones will take Paul. Or perhaps Jones will seek to compensate Paul in some way for failing to take him to this concert. Perhaps, even, Jones tossed a coin and Peter, lucky on this occasion, won the toss. (64–65)

I take it that any of these possible circumstances would make the claim that Jones loved Peter more than he loved Paul false. Further, many other cases like this one can be given; just change the particulars of the story.

Recall that Jordan's premise (N3) states that no one can identify with incompatible interests. The truth of this statement clearly depends on how Jordan's oft-used phrase *taking as one's own or identifying with an interest* is to be understood.

The following seems to me a plausible account of identifying with an interest:

Identifying<sub>1</sub>: For all persons S and P, S identifies with P's interest A if and only if S desires or cares about A in part because it is an interest of P.

Jordan himself gives some reason to think that this account is plausible. I noted above that for Jordan desiring or caring about something is sufficient to make it an interest of a person, which would give us some reason to think that desiring or caring is at least sufficient to identify with an interest as well. With this in mind, consider the following example. Jill's interest is having a new family car (call this C). In order for her husband Jack to identify with Jill's interest C, it is not enough for C to be Jack's interest as well. Jill can have C as an interest and Jack can have C as an interest, but if Jack does not desire C at least in part on account of it being Jill's interest, then he has not identified with her interest. In order to identify with Jill's interest, Jack must desire C at least in part *because* it is Jill's interest. This example shows the plausibility of identifying<sub>1</sub>, and it seems to me that identifying<sub>1</sub> also accounts for other situations where I would affirm that someone has identified with the interest of another.

Applying this account of identifying with a person's interest to the example of Jones and his sons, Jones can identify with *both* Peter's and Paul's interests. Jones can desire that Peter go to the concert and that Paul go to the concert because he knows that they both have this as an interest. He can do this even if he knows that there is only one ticket available. It further seems that Jones can identify with Paul's interest even after he has given the ticket to Peter, for Jones could continue to desire that Paul be with him at the concert because he knows that Paul desires to be there.

To sum up, I think there is something right about Jordan's position that God's maximally loving a person entails God's identifying with all of that person's interests (when understood as interest<sub>2</sub>). On what I take to be a good understanding of identifying with an interest (identifying<sub>1</sub>), this requires that for God to maximally love a person he must desire or care about all of that person's interests in part because they are interests of that person. But on this understanding of identifying with an interest, it seems that one *can* identify with incompatible interests, which makes Jordan's (N3) false.

Jordan considers the possibility that "failing to satisfy an interest . . . does not imply that one does not fully identify with it," but he rejects this view (65). The core of Jordan's response can be found in the following statement:

[N]o one could identify with (take as his own) interests which are known to be incompatible. Two interests are incompatible just in case attempts to bring about one of them require that the other be impeded. *If S identifies with interest A, he would seek to promote or advance or satisfy A.* So, consider two incompatible interests, B & not-B. No one could knowingly and rationally identify with B and concurrently with not-B, since he would then be in a position of both seeking to promote B and seeking to impede B (by seeking to promote not-B) at the same time. (65, emphasis mine)

Here Jordan assumes an alternate account of identifying with an interest:

Identifying<sub>2</sub>: For all persons S and P, if S identifies with P's interest A, then S must seek to promote or advance or satisfy A.

Jordan's case for (N3) depends on this necessary condition for identifying with an interest. And if identifying<sub>2</sub> is granted, then it may be that one cannot identify with incompatible interests. But why accept that one must promote or advance or satisfy someone else's interest in order to identify with it? As I noted above, in Jordan's description of an interest of a person he does not require that a person seek to promote or advance or satisfy her interest in order to have the interest—caring about it is sufficient. So it seems ad hoc to require, for example, Jack to seek to satisfy Jill's interest in order to identify with it when Jill doesn't have to seek to satisfy the interest to have it as an interest. Further, examples like Jones and his son Paul seem to indicate that one *can* identify with interests one doesn't all things considered seek to promote or advance or satisfy. Let me give another case: Ted identifies with his daughter Leah's interest in having a puppy; Ted desires that she have a puppy because he knows that she desires this. And Ted continues to identify with Leah's interest even though he doesn't get her a puppy because he has an overriding reason not to get her a puppy (Ted's son is allergic to dogs). Accordingly I am unconvinced that we should adopt Jordan's understanding of identifying with an interest (identifying<sub>2</sub>) which grounds his defense of (N3).

If I were to grant Jordan's identifying<sub>2</sub> account, I would reject Jordan's claim (N1)—that maximally intense love requires identifying with all of a person's interests. As I've already stated, (N1) depends on

(NCL): If person S loves person P, then (i) S has a disinterested concern for P and (ii) S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P.

and

(IL) For all persons S and P, the greater the intensity of S's love for P, the more S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P.

First, consider (IL). I take it that the case of Jones and his sons shows that Jones can love both Peter and Paul equally, while in this case identifying<sub>2</sub> with Peter's interests rather than Paul's by giving Peter the ticket. Here I appeal to fact over theory: if Jordan's understanding of (IL) entails that Jones loves Peter to a greater degree than he loves Paul, then so much the worse for Jordan's account.

I think there are many other cases which indicate that intensity of love does not depend on identifying<sub>2</sub> with interests. Do we want to say that in the above example Ted's love for Leah is not as intense as it would be if he got a puppy for her when doing so would cause Ted's son (Leah's brother) to suffer? Consider another example if you're not convinced yet. Katie makes her young son Jacob his favorite dessert. She brings the dessert

to him with a green fork. Jacob would prefer a blue fork, so he asks his mother if he can have a blue fork instead. (Let's assume that Jacob's desire for a blue fork is not harmful or destructive.) Unfortunately, there aren't any blue forks in the house. Since Katie loves her son, she cares about her son's interests and thereby desires that Jacob have a blue fork (i.e., she identifies<sub>1</sub> with Jacob's interest). Unfortunately the only blue forks in the state are a three hour drive away. Jordan's account of intensity of love combined with his account of identifying with an interest imply that if Katie went to the store and got Jacob a blue fork, her love would be more intense than if she asks him to eat with the green fork. But surely it is wrong to think that Katie loves Jacob less because she decides not to drive across the state to get him a blue fork. In summary, assuming that identifying with an interest implies attempting to promote or satisfy that interest (i.e., assuming identifying<sub>2</sub>), there are many cases we can consider which give reason to reject Jordan's account of the intensity of love, and therefore (N1) should be rejected.

More broadly, I think that Jordan's (NCL) (which undergirds (N1)) is not the best way to understand the necessary conditions for love. According to the account of love I find most plausible (the account of love provided by Aquinas among others), love has two necessary conditions; love requires a desire for the good of the beloved (which corresponds to one of Jordan's necessary conditions), and love also requires a desire for relationship with the beloved (which Jordan doesn't address).<sup>20</sup> Neither of these two conditions would require identifying<sub>2</sub> with all the interests of a person in order to maximally love that person. It does seem that desiring the good of the beloved requires identifying<sub>2</sub> with the beloved's interest in his ultimate good. Along with most of the Christian tradition, I see each person's interest in his ultimate good as being fulfilled by a personal relationship with God. And I see no reason to think that God could not identify<sub>2</sub> with (i.e., seek to promote or advance) every person's ultimate interest in having a loving relationship with God (even though some will not choose to desire or care about this interest for themselves and thus not have the salvific relationship which is their true good).

Let me sum up my case against Jordan's nature of love argument. If a person's interest is understood according to Jordan's explicit statement of what constitutes an interest (i.e., interest<sub>1</sub>), then Jordan's own affirmation that God would not identify with harmful or destructive interests gives reason to deny (N1). So to make the argument plausible, I modified Jordan's account of interest to interest<sub>2</sub>. I then argued that if identifying with an interest is understood as identifying<sub>1</sub>, then one can identify with incompatible interests, making (N3) false. Finally, I argued that if identifying with the interests of a person is understood as identifying<sub>2</sub>, then it

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<sup>20</sup>Eleonore Stump gives a helpful and insightful explication of Aquinas's account of the nature of love in chapter 5 of *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). These two conditions of love are also recognized by Robert Adams in his article "Pure Love," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 8:1 (1980), 83–99.

seems that (N1) is false. There are clear cases where a lover fails to seek to promote or satisfy a beloved's interest without that failure counting against the intensity of the love. This makes sense on my proffered account of love, on which the intensity of love depends on the intensity of the concern for the beloved's good and the intensity of desire for relationship with the beloved, but not on the number of interests of the beloved the lover seeks to satisfy.

*§6: Conclusion*

Jordan rightly recognizes that the truth or falsity of (L) is fundamentally important to contemporary discussions of the evidential argument from evil and the argument from divine hiddenness. It is also intrinsically important for those who desire to know God. Jordan's case against (L) is original and provocative, but I have tried to show that it is ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>I'd like to thank Trent Dougherty, Logan Gage, John Giannini, Kraig Martin, Thomas Talbot, and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.