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# DIVINE SATISFICING AND THE ETHICS OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Chris Tucker

This paper accomplishes three goals. First, it reveals that God's ethics has a radical satisficing structure: God can choose a good enough suboptimal option even if there is a best option and no countervailing considerations. Second, it resolves the long-standing worry that there is no account of the good enough that is both principled and demanding enough to be good enough. Third, it vindicates the key ethical assumption in the problem of evil without relying on the contested assumption that God's ethics is our ethics (on steroids).

## 1. Introduction

No one expects God's ethics to have a satisficing structure, a structure which makes it rational, in the absence of countervailing considerations, to reject the better for the good enough. Satisficing, in this narrow sense, is rarely thought to apply to human ethics.<sup>1</sup> It is especially controversial whether it applies to divine ethics. For an absolutely perfect God might be expected to go above and beyond the call of duty, to always choose the best in the absence of countervailing considerations.<sup>2</sup> I reject these sensible expectations. I argue that God's ethics has a satisficing structure.

Indeed, I argue that God's ethics has a particular satisficing structure: in the absence of countervailing considerations, God must make each creature's life *fully good* but not necessarily maximally good. A creature's life is fully good when, roughly, it has all the goodness that it ought to have. The notion of full goodness is crucial. It underwrites the positive arguments that I offer on behalf of satisficing. It also resolves a longstanding worry about satisficing structures. For no other account of *the good enough* is both principled and demanding enough to be good enough.

This paper has direct relevance to the argument from evil. Standard formulations of the argument appeal to something like this conjunction:

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<sup>1</sup>See §3 for a discussion of how this conception of satisficing relates to the broader literature.

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Kraay, "Can God Satisfice?" 404–405.



- Ethical Premise:** God necessarily prevents suffering in the absence of sufficiently strong countervailing considerations, and
- Empirical Premise:** There exists some suffering for which God would not have a sufficiently strong countervailing consideration.

Together these premises entail that something exists—suffering in the absence of sufficiently strong countervailing considerations—which necessarily doesn't exist if God exists. So God doesn't exist. Recent literature on the argument from evil, including the literature on skeptical theism, tends to focus on whether the empirical premise is true or reasonable. To the extent that the ethical premise has been defended at all, it is defended by the following sort of analogical reasoning: excellent human beings prevent suffering in the absence of countervailing considerations, so (an absolutely perfect) God does too. Murphy forcefully challenges this analogical reasoning and concludes that we should reject Ethical Premise, thereby refuting the standard arguments from evil.<sup>3</sup>

I grant Murphy's challenge to the analogical reasoning for the sake of argument. I vindicate Ethical Premise without assuming that God's ethics is our ethics or our ethics on steroids. Maximal well-being is not required for full goodness, so God does not need a countervailing consideration to forgo elevating us to the greatest heights of well-being. Yet full goodness does require the absence of suffering, so God *does* need a countervailing consideration to allow us to descend into the depths of despair. This satisficing picture is not what we expected God's ethics to look like. It nonetheless vindicates the ethical premise in the argument from evil.

In the next section, §2, I distinguish between requiring and merely justifying reasons and explain why the former have a special role to play in the explanation of divine (in)action. I employ the requiring/merely justifying distinction in §3, where I clarify what it is for God's reasons to have a satisficing structure and distinguish that structure from its alternatives.

My arguments for divine satisficing initially assume a certain medieval neo-Platonist axiology. The concept *full goodness* is most familiar in that context (though not by that name). In addition, Murphy assumes this axiology. I give Murphy the axiology he wants and show that what follows is a satisficing structure capable of grounding the ethical premise in the argument from evil. In §4, I identify, clarify, and briefly defend the provisionally assumed neo-Platonism, as well as the notion of full goodness. In §§5–6, I argue that God's reasons have a satisficing structure. In a nutshell, satisficing best captures—in two ways—the normative import of the difference between full goodness and deprivation, given that these concepts are understood in the relevant neo-Platonic way.

After demonstrating that Murphy's neo-Platonism supports divine satisficing, I show that my arguments for divine satisficing can survive

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<sup>3</sup>See Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, especially chs. 3 and 6, and "Is an Absolutely Perfect Being *Morally* Perfect?"

without the assumption of neo-Platonism. In §7, I explain why the essential features of my arguments for divine satisficing depend only on neo-Platonism's commitment to the full goodness threshold; I show that this threshold fits comfortably in other metaethical frameworks; and I provide independent grounds for endorsing the full goodness threshold. In §8, I explain how full goodness resolves the longstanding worry that satisficing theories have no account of the good enough that is both principled and demanding enough to be good enough.

In §9, I apply full goodness satisficing to the problem of evil and defend its application against two concerns in the recent literature. The upshot is that it vindicates the key ethical assumption in the problem of evil.

## 2. Two Kinds of Reasons

Reasons (for action) are things that contribute in a systematic way to a given normative status, usually (ir)rationality. Rationality is "finally authoritative in settling questions of what to do."<sup>4</sup> With respect to God, a rational action is one that is worthy of being chosen by an absolutely perfect being. An irrational action is one that is *not* worthy of being chosen by such a being.<sup>5</sup> On this conception of rationality, there is no gap between an action's being (divinely) rational and an action's being good enough for God. If it is rational for God to satisfice, it is possible that God satisfices. Thus, one worry about divine satisficing—that it might be rational without being good enough for God—is stymied right from the get-go.

Divine reasons, then, are things that make systematic contributions to an action's being (not) worthy of divine choice. There are two different kinds of systematic contributions that reasons can make, which track two different kinds of force they can have. It is standardly assumed that all reasons have justifying force, roughly, the capacity to make an act rational.<sup>6</sup> It is less clear whether all reasons have requiring force, roughly, the capacity to make doing anything else irrational.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, 215–16.

<sup>5</sup>The labels "rationality" and "(ir)rational" do not matter. Just replace "rationality" with your favorite term for the single, comprehensive normative perspective that is finally authoritative concerning questions of what God is to do. And replace "(ir)rational" with your favorite term for what's (not) worthy of divine choice from the relevant perspective.

<sup>6</sup>Horgan and Timmons ("Untying a Knot from the Inside Out," 55) are the only exception to this standard assumption that I'm aware of. In order to account for what they call "meritorious supererogation," they correctly hold that they must posit a third dimension of normative force, merit-making. They incorrectly infer that merit-making force is possible in the absence of justifying force. How can a reason have the capacity to confer merit on an act without having the capacity to make the act rational? Hint: it can't.

<sup>7</sup>If something has requiring force without justifying force, I call it a *coherence constraint*. I assume that nothing provides a coherence constraint for God. When theorists claim that human beings are subject to coherence constraints, it is due to some imperfection. For example, an irrational desire to eat every rock you can find has some tendency to make it irrational to not eat the next rock without having any tendency to make it rational to eat the rock.

If a reason to  $\varphi$  has requiring force, it is a **requiring reason**, i.e., a reason that both makes  $\varphi$  pro tanto rational and makes doing anything else pro tanto irrational.<sup>8</sup> Requiring reasons to  $\varphi$  don't necessarily make  $\varphi$  required; rather, they necessarily make it required *in the absence of countervailing considerations*. If a reason to  $\varphi$  doesn't have requiring force, it is a **merely justifying reason**, i.e., a reason that pro tanto makes it rational to  $\varphi$  but does not make it pro tanto irrational to do something else instead.<sup>9</sup> Merely justifying reasons don't necessarily make it rational to  $\varphi$ ; rather, they necessarily make it rational to  $\varphi$  *in the absence of countervailing considerations*. So understood, all reasons are either requiring (have justifying and requiring force) or merely justifying (have justifying but not requiring force).

For simplicity, I follow Murphy in assuming that what God can (can't) do must be grounded in what God has reason to (not) do.<sup>10</sup> Since all reasons are either requiring or merely justifying, it follows that what God can (can't) do must be fully accounted for by these two kinds of reasons. Merely justifying reasons have some tendency to give God discretion in one respect without limiting it in any respect. If God's reason to give you an ice cream cone is merely justifying, then, in the absence of countervailing considerations, God can give you an ice cream cone *and* God can do something else instead.

Requiring reasons have some tendency to give God discretion in one respect and some tendency to eliminate it in every other respect. If God's reason to prevent your suffering is requiring, then in the absence of countervailing considerations, God can prevent your suffering *and* God cannot fail to do so. Consequently, requiring reasons have a special role to play in determining the scope of what God can do. In the absence of countervailing considerations, both merely justifying and requiring reasons to  $\varphi$  can explain why God can  $\varphi$ . Yet only requiring reasons can explain why God can't choose an action. If God can't let you suffer, it is because both (a) God has *requiring* reason to not let you suffer, and (b) God has no sufficiently strong countervailing considerations. To put the same point in more positive terms: if God must choose an action (if God can't choose any alternative), then God must have undefeated requiring reason to perform that action. Since Ethical Premise is a premise about what God can't do (God can't allow suffering in the absence of countervailing considerations), it assumes that God always has a *requiring* reason to prevent suffering.

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<sup>8</sup>Pro tanto rational = rational in the absence of countervailing considerations. Pro tanto irrational = irrational in the absence of countervailing considerations.

<sup>9</sup>For further clarification of requiring and justifying strength, see Gert, "The Distinction between Justifying and Requiring," and Tucker, "How to Think about Satisficing," 1373–1376.

<sup>10</sup>Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, ch 2. As it stands, this simplifying assumption is too simple to be true but is close enough for the present purposes. The main complications won't concern us here (e.g., God's inability to make  $2 + 2 = 5$  isn't grounded in what reasons God has, but something prior: what options God has). See Murphy's (*God's Own Ethics*, ch 2, sec 2.2) and Swinburne's (*The Coherence of Theism*, 148–152) discussion of perfect rationality and freedom for why the simplifying assumption is plausibly on the right track.

### 3. The Structure of Divine Reasons: Rivals and Methodology

#### 3.1. Three Rival Structures

This paper is concerned with the sort of reasons that an individual creature's well-being gives God to promote that well-being. Thus, we should set aside any reasons that God has from other sources, such as his promises or the fairness of a given distribution of well-being across people. We are focused solely on the sort of reasons an individual's well-being provides God to promote that well-being.

Everyone seems to agree—at least I assume—that creaturely well-being provides God with reasons to make a creature's life better.<sup>11</sup> The debate is about what structure those reasons have. One potential structure is:

No Requiring Reasons (NRR): the well-being of creatures provides only merely justifying reasons to give a creature higher degrees of well-being.

No Requiring Reasons holds that no matter how bad a creature's life is, God has no requiring reason to make the life better. If true, NRR would refute the ethical premise in the argument from evil, which holds that God can permit suffering only if God has a countervailing consideration. NRR says that, even in the absence of countervailing considerations, God can rationally ignore suffering *no matter how bad it is*.

The second structure holds that the well-being of creatures has some tendency to limit what God can do, but only up to a certain point.

Satisficing Reasons (SR): God has requiring reason to promote a creature's well-being to at least some suboptimal degree GE;<sup>12</sup> God's reason to promote a creature's well-being beyond GE are merely justifying.

GE is whatever degree counts as "the good enough." Below GE is not good enough and above GE is more than enough. Satisficing Reasons limits what God can do below GE, because God needs a countervailing consideration to allow a creature to have less well-being than GE. SR does not limit what God can do above GE, because God does *not* need a countervailing consideration to allow the creature to enjoy less than a maximal degree of well-being. The version of SR that I defend takes a stand on what GE is, namely GE = being fully good (both for the whole life and every part of it<sup>13</sup>). We can call the resulting version of SR, **SR\***. God has

<sup>11</sup>To deny this assumption is to deny that considerations such as *it would be better for the creature* provide any reason or rationale at all for God to prefer one situation over another. Such a denial seems implausible (though, it would be controversial to say that *all* God's reasons have that form). It's also worth mentioning that Ethical Premise in the argument from evil takes for granted that God always has a (requiring) reason, at the very least, to make a suffering creature better off.

<sup>12</sup>For our purposes, we can say that a degree of well-being is *suboptimal* for creatures of kind K iff creatures of that kind can generally have some higher degree of well-being.

<sup>13</sup>It may seem overkill to hold that the good enough is full goodness for the whole life *and every part of it*. Recall, though, that I'm trying to vindicate Ethical Premise. A life might be

requiring reason to ensure that (parts of) lives are at least fully good—which is enough to get the argument from evil up and running—but only merely justifying reasons to ensure that (parts of) lives are even better. We'll clarify full goodness in the next section.

The third structure is:

Just Requiring Reasons (JRR): for every higher degree of well-being that God could bring about, God has requiring reason to bring about that higher degree.

JRR is compatible with God's giving a creature a suboptimal degree of well-being, i.e., less well-being than God could have given that creature. If God can make a creature's life better than *W*, God still might give the creature *W* if God has a countervailing consideration, e.g., if someone's freedom would have to be violated to give the creature more than *W*. The "JRR Conjunction" is JRR plus the view that sometimes there are countervailing considerations strong enough to justify giving a creature some suboptimal degree of well-being.<sup>14</sup>

No Requiring Reasons, Satisficing Reasons, and Just Requiring Reasons are pairwise incompatible. NRR holds that God has no requiring reasons to promote creaturely well-being at all. SR claims that God has requiring reason to promote creaturely well-being up to a certain (suboptimal) point, the good enough, and only merely justifying reason beyond that point. JRR holds that God has requiring reason to make a creature's life better as long as God can make the creature's life better.

Let me briefly indicate how JRR, SR(\*), and NRR are related to the broader debate about satisficing. These theses are focused solely on God's reasons to promote a certain good, namely a creature's well-being. Analogs of these theses could be constructed for any good. For example, consider the value of the world and the reasons it provides God to promote that value. The value of the world might never provide a requiring reason for God to make the world better (NRR<sub>W</sub>), it might provide a requiring reason only up to a certain point (SR<sub>W</sub>), or it might provide a requiring reason as long as God can make the world better (JRR<sub>W</sub>). In principle, a satisficing structure might apply to God's reasons to promote creaturely well-being without applying to God's reason to promote the overall value of the world.

When philosophers argue that some satisficing theory is true, they usually aim to defend little more than this claim: for some good, some agent can rationally reject the better for the less good. This claim is compatible with

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good on the whole even though it contains some instance of suffering. If God has requiring reason to prevent *every* instance of suffering, as Ethical Premise supposes, then God must have requiring reason to make every part of the life fully good. This demanding account of the good enough is also what follows from the arguments I give later in the paper.

<sup>14</sup>The "Just Requiring Reasons" part of the JRR Conjunction applies only to the sort of reasons creaturely well-being provides God to promote that well-being. The JRR Conjunction is compatible with merely justifying reasons (e.g. a prerogative) serving as a countervailing consideration that makes it rational for God to choose a suboptimal degree of well-being.

all three rival structures. I am using “satisficing theories” more narrowly to apply to the structure involved in SR and  $SR_w$ .<sup>15</sup> Those who defend something under the label of “satisficing theory” almost always have something like the JRR Conjunction structure in mind.<sup>16</sup> They think, for example, that God has requiring reason to make the world better as long as God can make it better; however, they add that God has some countervailing consideration that makes it all-in rational to reject better worlds for less good worlds.<sup>17</sup>

Let’s return to our focus on God’s reasons to promote creaturely well-being. Murphy clearly endorses NRR, and many others apparently do so as well.<sup>18</sup> The JRR Conjunction is the standard way to account for how God can rationally reject the better for the less good. Until now, it’s not clear that anyone has been foolish enough to defend SR, much less  $SR^*$ . And this paper may reveal, ironically, that it is divine ethics, not human ethics, that is more apt to have a satisficing structure.

### 3.2. Methodological Considerations

You might have noticed that Murphy’s view seems *prima facie* absurd. Consider two similar worlds,  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ . The main difference is that  $W_1$  involves *neither* Jim’s enjoying a certain jelly bean at a certain time *nor* any holocausts, whereas  $W_2$  involves *both* Jim’s enjoying that jelly bean *and* a holocaust. You would think that God would need a pretty powerful countervailing consideration to prefer  $W_2$  over  $W_1$ ; however, Murphy’s NRR denies this. NRR claims that the badness of the holocausts provides only merely justifying reasons, and so God can rationally ignore them in the absence of countervailing considerations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>See Tucker (“How to Think about Satisficing,” 1375–81) for a detailed clarification of this structure and how it is different from the JRR Conjunction structure, or what I there call “motivated submaximization theory.”

<sup>16</sup>See Tucker, “Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization” for a defense of these claims regarding divine ethics, and Tucker, “How to Think about Satisficing” for a defense of these claims regarding human ethics.

<sup>17</sup>E.g., Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil*, 74–78.

<sup>18</sup>See Murphy, “Is an Absolutely Perfect Being *Morally* Perfect?” and *God’s Own Ethics*, ch. 4. A number of other philosophers would find NRR very attractive, if they were to agree that the simplifying assumption from §2 is on the right track. Historically, these philosophers include Aquinas (see Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, especially ch. 4 and the appendix; cf. *God’s Own Ethics*, ch 4, sec 4.4) and Duns Scotus (M. Adams, “Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God”). In the contemporary scene, this includes Marilyn Adams (“Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God,” 500; *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, e.g. 64); Davies (*The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, especially ch. 4 and the appendix); and Rubio (“God Meets Satan’s Apple,” 3002–3003). Davies explicitly rejects the idea that God acts on reasons, but he builds more into the notion of God’s acting on a reason than I do (*The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, 215–219).

<sup>19</sup>See Wielenberg (“Intrinsic Value and Love”) for another (alleged) counterexample along these lines. Murphy (*God’s Own Ethics*, 110–116) argues that NRR avoids various objections to skeptical theism. Yet one of Rowe’s alleged counterexamples to skeptical theism arguably works better against NRR than skeptical theism. According to NRR, God might not even care if human life were “nothing more than a series of agonizing moments from birth to death” (“Skeptical Theism,” 198, emphasis removed).



Such counterexamples, as devastating as they may first appear, fail to directly challenge Murphy's attack on the ethical premise in the argument from evil. This premise is the claim that God must prevent suffering in the absence of countervailing considerations, or alternatively, that God has *requiring* reason to promote our well-being at least to the point that we don't suffer. To the extent that this assumption has been defended at all, it has been defended on the further assumption that God shares our moral reasons: since we have requiring reason to promote the well-being of others, then God does too. The problem, as Murphy points out, is that the standard accounts of reason possession—including the standard Kantian accounts—fail to vindicate the assumption that God shares our moral reasons.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, if anything, they challenge it. Our intuitions in the jelly bean case may very well be driven by our expectation that God shares our moral reasons; therefore, they arguably do not directly respond to Murphy's challenge.

Murphy shows us that the key ethical assumption in the argument from evil needs defense.<sup>21</sup> An adequate defense of this assumption needs to *either* defend an adequate account of moral reasons possession that vindicates the key assumption, *or else* it needs to be plausible that the defense isn't just piggy-backing on undefended assumptions about the possession of moral reasons. The rest of this paper takes the latter approach by obeying this methodological constraint: we cannot assume that the structure of God's (moral or non-moral) reasons is analogous to the structure of our (moral or non-moral) reasons. The constraint is methodological, not substantive. We aren't assuming that the structure of divine reasons is *not* analogous. It constrains where we begin, not where we end.

In addition to helping us address Murphy's challenge, the methodological constraint also plays a useful heuristic role. It forces us to consider other kinds of considerations beyond the familiar appeals to analogy. One such consideration is the normative-axiological fit criterion: other things being equal, an overall ethical theory is preferable to the extent that its normative and axiological theories cohere or fit "tightly" together. I have nothing fancy in mind. Indeed, we apply this criterion so naturally and intuitively that we rarely need complicated arguments to tell when the fit is awkward or tight. The criterion's guiding idea is that one's normative and axiological theories are mutually constraining: (i) one's normative ethical theory constrains which axiological theories one can endorse, and (ii) one's axiological theory constrains which normative theories one can endorse. My arguments for divine satisficing depend most heavily on the latter direction, (ii), so I clarify it here.

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<sup>20</sup>Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, ch. 3.

<sup>21</sup>You may doubt that Ethical Premise needs defense since it is already so plausible that it is bound to be more plausible than any challenge to it, no matter how plausible the challenge may seem at first glance. Fine. It is still interesting to consider whether Murphy's challenge can be answered on its own terms.

First, we expect significant qualitative axiological difference to correlate with qualitative normative difference. Suppose that an ethicist waxes poetic about how special intrinsic dignity is. While *things* can have mere intrinsic value, only *persons* can have intrinsic dignity, where persons necessarily have the capacity to guide their behavior in light of their conception of rational laws. If this ethicist did not accord persons special normative treatment—e.g., that only persons have rights or that only persons can't be used as mere means—we would worry that she has “taken back” her claim that only persons have some special intrinsic dignity. That is, her overall (i.e., normative + axiological) theory would be objectionably awkward if the “intrinsic dignity” of persons failed to have normative significance. (Of course, we may object to such a normative theory on the grounds that animals have moral rights or whatever. That's because one's normative theory also constrains one's axiology. If the ethicist extends rights to animals, we expect her to modify her axiology, e.g., by extending dignity to animals or by making the standards for personhood more inclusive.)

Second, we expect the *absence* of qualitative axiological difference to correlate with the *absence* of qualitative normative difference. Suppose that a moral theorist holds that the only intrinsically valuable thing is pleasure, and that the only thing that affects its value is its quantity. Nonetheless, he claims that we have reason to promote the pleasure of people but not the pleasure of animals, and this is because of the nature of pleasure itself (and not because, say, that we've made promises to people that we haven't made to animals). This fit between the axiological and normative aspects of his view seems objectionably awkward, bordering on incoherent.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps we'll sacrifice some awkwardness in the way our axiology fits with our normative theory for the sake of other theoretical virtues; however, other things being equal, an overall ethical theory is preferable to the extent that its normative and axiological positions cohere or fit “tightly” together. In §4 and §7, I identify and defend the axiology I'm working with in this paper. In §5 and §6, I argue that SR\* is the normative theory that best fits this axiology.

#### 4. Medieval Neo-Platonism

##### 4.1. Medieval Neo-Platonism and Full Goodness

I provisionally assume medieval neo-Platonism, the axiological context in which full goodness is most familiar (though not by that name). Murphy's defense of NRR relies on this axiology. I'll give him the axiology—and the methodological constraint—he wants and show that what follows is not

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<sup>22</sup>The theorist might try to ease the apparent tension by adding some additional mechanism, such as conditions (enablers, disablers) or modifiers (intensifiers, attenuators). The point is that there *is* a tension and if it can't be relieved, the overall (normative plus axiological) theory is problematic.

NRR, but a satisficing structure capable of grounding the ethical premise in the argument from evil. I'll revisit this provisional assumption in §7.

Medieval neo-Platonism has three components.<sup>23</sup> First, God is the only intrinsically good thing *in the sense that* it is the only thing that is good independently of its relation to anything else. Second, to the extent that a created thing is good, it is good by participation in (or resemblance to) divine goodness. To claim that creaturely well-being is participated goodness is to claim that its goodness consists in a certain kind of relation to *the Good*. Such a claim is compatible with creaturely well-being counting as necessarily and non-instrumentally good. Third, badness is privation, or deprivation. It is not bad for a rock that it fails to participate in God's goodness through perceiving its surroundings or experiencing pleasure. In contrast, if a human life never enjoys such things, it is to that extent a bad human life. Badness is absence of *due* goodness or perfection, absence of goodness that a thing *ought* to have. I assume that a creature's nature, function, telos, kind membership, or something of the sort determines what goods it ought to have, though no particular account is built into neo-Platonism.<sup>24</sup> (The label "medieval neo-Platonism" may be misleading insofar as the third component has obvious affinities with neo-Aristotelian accounts of what's good/bad for a creature.)

Note that the privative view is distinct from the Augustinian claim that badness is a mere absence of good.<sup>25</sup> The language of *due* and *ought* is essential. The absence of some additional good, even some additional fitting good, is not necessarily bad for the creature. Nor does it suffice for the deprivation of the creature. Einstein could have been a little smarter, which would have "fit" his human nature, but he wasn't deprived with respect to intelligence. Deprivation for a creature is absence of a good that the creature is *due* or *ought* to have.

Full goodness is the opposite of deprivation. A creature's life (in some respect) is fully good iff there is some goodness it ought to have and it has all the goodness it ought to have (in that respect). A fully good life would be "self-sufficient" in Aristotle's sense, at least insofar as it would be a life that is "desirable and lacking in nothing."<sup>26</sup> Such a life has no badness for the creature, because it has no deprivation.

Full goodness (in some respect) will rarely, if ever, require maximal goodness (in that respect). Human beings ought to have some degree

<sup>23</sup>It has been endorsed by Aquinas and Suárez (Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil," 283–285); as well as Murphy (*God's Own Ethics*, especially ch. 4). Robert Adams's view (*Finite and Infinite Goods*, especially ch. 1 and 103–104) is a close enough fit for my purposes. As I explain below—see §4.1—his alleged counterexamples seem to misunderstand the third component.

<sup>24</sup>I also assume that God has, at most, limited voluntary control over what goods a creature ought to have. God can't make it false that human beings ought to have pleasure or friendships any more than God can make it false that  $2 + 2 = 4$  or that torturing humans for fun is morally wrong.

<sup>25</sup>Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil."

<sup>26</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk I.7.

of intelligence, but a human being isn't deprived if she fails to be three times smarter than Einstein. Perhaps a human being ought to have at least one unit of pleasure each moment. More pleasure is presumably better, but a human being is not deprived if she fails to have an infinite amount of pleasure each moment. Consequently, some fully good lives are better than others. A fully good life with 10 units of pleasure per moment is better, other things being equal, than a fully good life with 1 unit per moment.<sup>27</sup>

According to my version of Satisficing Reasons, SR\*, full goodness sets the threshold for the good enough. God has requiring reason to make each creature's life (in every respect) fully good, but only merely justifying reasons to make it even better. For example, God has requiring reason to give human beings whatever degree of intelligence is required for full goodness and only merely justifying reason to give a human being more than this degree of intelligence.<sup>28</sup>

My positive arguments for satisficing depend most heavily on the third component, because that's the component that gives us full goodness. Yet the third component is easily misunderstood. Suppose that pain is necessarily bad for humans. It is necessarily bad, on the privative view, because having pain is incompatible with full goodness. It does not follow that pain is somehow nothing or an absence or that pain qua pain is a privation.<sup>29</sup> Even if pain is just a certain kind of phenomenal character of experience, its badness for a creature might consist in depriving that creature of some other mental state that the creature ought to be in (e.g., a uniformly pleasant phenomenal character).<sup>30</sup> We must distinguish what pain is in

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<sup>27</sup>Some non-fully good lives, or lives with some deprivation, are also better than some fully good ones. Consider a fully good life. Now consider a second life exactly the same except that it contains both a painful pinprick and 1,000 additional units of pleasure. The latter seems better despite having some deprivation. This possibility raises a question for my satisficing view. I hold that God needs a countervailing consideration to prefer a non-fully good life over a fully good one. But what if the non-fully good life is better than the fully good one? In that case, the greater quality of the non-fully good life seems to justify God in choosing it. God doesn't need a countervailing consideration to forgo additional good beyond full goodness. God does need a countervailing consideration to allow deprivation into a life, but the high quality of the creature's life can itself provide the needed countervailing consideration, at least in cases in which the non-fully good life is better than the fully good alternatives. And it goes without saying that my satisficing view (and its rivals, NRR and JRR) allow that God might have countervailing considerations grounded in something besides well-being that affect his reasons to give a creature a certain amount of well-being (fairness of welfare distributions across people, past promises, etc.).

<sup>28</sup>For simplicity, I assume that, if a creature ought to have some degree of a good (e.g. intelligence), it is *always* better for the creature to have more of that good. All I really need for a satisficing picture is that it is *sometimes* better to have more of that good beyond what is due.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Adams's (*Finite and Infinite Goods*, 103) and at least some of Adam Swenson's ("Privation Theories of Pain") objections seem to miss this point.

<sup>30</sup>Of course, some pains are also good in a way (cf. Anglin and Goetz, "Evil is Privation," 5–6). If your finger is touching a burner, it is good that you feel pain and it would be bad if you didn't feel it. *Given that something bad is happening to you*, it might be good that you suffer pain. It doesn't follow that it is good for you to suffer pain (full stop, without qualification).

itself from the question of what makes pain bad (for the creature). The privative view, as I understand it here, addresses only the latter question.

After I show that Murphy's neo-Platonism supports SR\* rather than his NRR, I will drop some of its details (e.g., the claim that *all* badness is privative). In the next sub-section, I clarify the features of the third component that are most central to my arguments for SR\*.

#### 4.2. Medieval Neo-Platonism and the Structure of Axiological Reality

A natural assumption is that axiological reality is structured solely by which goods (bads) exist and whether things are better, worse, or equally good with respect to those goods (bads). Chang objects that this natural assumption fails to capture all true quantitative comparisons between comparable goods.<sup>31</sup> She introduces a fourth comparative. A might be comparable to B even though A isn't better than, worse than, or equally good as B. For A and B might be *on a par*.

Like Chang, the proponent of full goodness holds that the natural assumption fails to capture all the structure in axiological reality. In contrast to Chang, the proponent of full goodness is *not* adding another comparative and is *not* concerned with enriching the structure of quantitative comparisons. The full goodness threshold is qualitative. Every 50 unit increase of pleasure might be *equally good*, but not every failure to acquire 50 units of pleasure counts as deprivation. Indeed, 10 units of pleasure for you is *less valuable* than 100 units of pleasure for me. Yet if my life is already full of pleasure and yours isn't, then you might be deprived by missing out on those 10 units even though I won't be deprived by missing out on those 100 units. Human beings can be better, worse, equally good, and perhaps on a par in various respects; however, they also "have to have" certain goods in certain amounts. Or, in the more common parlance, there are certain goods human beings *ought* to have or are *due*.<sup>32</sup>

"Ought" and "due" have different connotations, but they both pick out something like an axiological—rather than a normative—requirement. (Actually, they often pick out a *pro tanto* axiological requirement, but we can ignore this refinement until the next section.) Such things are sometimes referred to as "impersonal oughts," or what something ought to be, in contrast to "personal oughts," or what one ought to *do*.<sup>33</sup> So understood, the phrase "goods a creature ought to have (is due)" is *not* synonymous with "goods appropriate to a creature's kind." Goods can be appropriate

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<sup>31</sup>Chang, "The Possibility of Parity."

<sup>32</sup>If you aren't convinced yet that the full goodness threshold is qualitative rather than quantitative, we can anticipate the discussion in §7. Simple hedonists claim that there is only one bad, pain. The proponent of full goodness objects that there is a distinct kind of bad, not reducible to pain, namely the failure to have all the pleasure that one ought to have. Which bads exist seems to be a qualitative, not a quantitative, issue.

<sup>33</sup>Sometimes philosophers use "ought" to refer to ideals rather than requirements. But in this paper I am concerned with the requirement sense of "ought," whether personal or impersonal.

for a creature without being axiologically required, without the creature being deprived without them. More intelligence would have fit Einstein, but he wasn't deprived without it.

Some philosophers may reject the existence of impersonal oughts, and so may reject the particular way in which full goodness enriches axiological reality. In §7, I provide an argument for the full goodness threshold that is independent of neo-Platonism. That argument just is an argument that there are impersonal oughts associated with the goods a human ought to have.

The third component, in my hands anyway, treats this additional axiological structure in a typical functionalist way, using three concepts that are defined in terms of each other. Something is *deprived* when it doesn't have all the goods it ought to have (is due). The goods it *ought to have* (*is due*) are those goods it is deprived without. Something is *fully good* iff it has all the goods it ought to have (and there are goods it ought to have).<sup>34</sup> So these three concepts are a package deal: nothing can be deprived unless it can be fully good and there are some goods it ought to have (is due).<sup>35</sup> To be deprived is to be deprived of *something*. It is to be deprived of full goodness, of all the goods that you ought to have.

These functionalist definitions would leave you in the dark if you didn't already have some independent grip on at least one of the terms. But I'm betting you have an independent grip on both *deprivation* and *the goods a thing is due or ought to have*. You recognize that an absence of sight is deprivation but an absence of omniscience is not. You recognize that sight is something that a human being *ought to have* or *is due* and that omniscience is not. We recognize, in other words, that humans are (pro tanto) axiologically

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<sup>34</sup>While I argue in this paper that full goodness is the good enough, they are conceptually distinct. *Full goodness* is what marks when a creature has all the goodness that it ought to have. The *good enough* is what marks when the requiring reasons to promote the good become merely justifying reasons to promote the good. The former is a meta-axiological concept, one that concerns the structure of the good. The latter is a normative concept, linking the good to reasons for action. My argument for SR\* below is roughly that once you hold that the meta-axiological concept (full goodness) applies to creatures, you are committed to holding that the normative concept (good enough) applies to the reasons of a divine agent.

<sup>35</sup>A caveat may be needed if we allow that some badness is non-privative (i.e., if we reject the full details of the third component) and also hold on to the full goodness threshold. In such a case, perhaps something can be deprived even if it has all the goods it ought to have, because it has some bads that it ought not have (is due not to have). Yet here again the *ought to have* is important. Not all bads would be deprivations. The grotesque appearance of one's internal organs is no deprivation of the aesthetic goodness one ought to have, but the grotesque appearance of one's face arguably would be. Just as we need to distinguish between those absences of goods which are deprivations and those that aren't, we must distinguish between those bads that are deprivations and those that aren't. Thus, we'll need to revise our functionalist definitions as follows. Something is *deprived* iff it doesn't have all the goods it ought to have *or* it has some bads it ought not have. The *goods it ought to have* are those goods it is deprived without. Those *bads it ought not have* are those bads it is deprived if it has. Something is *fully good* iff it has all the goods it ought to have and none of the bads it ought not have (and there are some goods it ought to have or some bads that it ought not have).

required to have sight but not omniscience.<sup>36</sup> (Full goodness has natural affinities with Aristotelian eudaimonia. They may be equivalent if both: a life that achieves eudaimonia is *qualitatively* better than a life that falls just short *and* some lives with eudaimonia can be better than others.)

For now, I ask that you assume the full details of medieval neo-Platonism. This will allow us to see that Murphy's axiology leads to SR\* rather than his NRR. I'll then argue that you should endorse the additional axiological structure presupposed by deprivation and full goodness, even if you reject medieval neo-Platonism.

### 5. Medieval Neo-Platonism and Divine Reasons

At a bird's eye view, my arguments for SR\* amount to this: if you endorse medieval neo-Platonism (or just the full goodness threshold), then the normative-axiological fit criterion supports SR\*. We can better understand this argumentative strategy by considering some foils.

#### 5.1. The Normative-Axiological Criterion and the Three Rivals

JRR is entailed by maximizing act utilitarianism (among other normative theories), but even when folks abandon such views they retain JRR. To the extent that there is any direct argument for JRR, it may be little more than an application of the normative-axiological fit criterion. It seems that there is requiring reason to make a life better than terrible and even better than just barely good. If beyond the barely good there's just *varying degrees of even better*, then there is no qualitative axiological difference between the varying degrees of betterness. Since there is an absence of qualitative axiological difference, there is an absence of qualitative normative difference (§3.2). In other words, there is no principled axiological threshold to mark where requiring reasons to promote well-being become merely justifying reasons to promote well-being. And thus JRR is true: it must be requiring reasons all the way up.

The normative-axiological fit criterion might even make NRR seem attractive. On the relevant neo-Platonism, all goodness in the world is ultimately God's goodness and badness is ultimately explained in terms of God's goodness. If you have an intuition that God has complete discretion over how his goodness is exemplified in a creature's life when the life is already great, it may seem that there is no axiological joint, no qualitative difference between the best life and the worst life. The creature just has more or less of God's goodness. And if there is no qualitative axiological difference, NRR must be true: it must be merely justifying reasons all the way down.

JRR and NRR treat the normative significance of well-being in a uniform manner: it is either requiring reasons all the way up (JRR) or merely justifying

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<sup>36</sup>It is, of course, a vexed question exactly what distinguishes those goods that are statistically correlated with human beings and those whose absence counts as deprivation. I don't have a good answer to this question, but there is a distinction here and we do take ourselves to be able to tell the difference in at least some cases. We intuitively take the absence of sight, to be a deprivation, and not a mere exception to a statistical regularity.

reasons all the way down (NRR). Whether this normative uniformity is correct depends on how uniform axiological reality is. If medieval neo-Platonism is true, axiological reality has more structure (so less uniformity) than is commonly recognized. There is a qualitative difference between the goods that are axiologically required and those that aren't, between the goodness a thing ought to have and the goodness that goes beyond that point (§4.2). (The above possible rationale for NRR misses the additional axiological structure posited by neo-Platonism.) Recall that it is objectionably awkward to claim that only persons have a special axiological status, dignity, and then deny that persons are subject to any special normative treatment (§3.2). Likewise, it is objectionably awkward to combine neo-Platonism's qualitative axiological difference with JRR or NRR's normative uniformity.

### 5.2. *A Tale of Two Oughts*

My two arguments for SR\* are, in effect, just two different attempts to help you see for yourself that the normative-axiological fit criterion supports SR\*, if we are assuming medieval neo-Platonism. These arguments exploit two differences between goodness and badness, as they are understood by neo-Platonism. The first argument exploits only the third component of neo-Platonism. The second argument, which I develop in the next section, exploits all three components.

The first difference between goodness and badness concerns a difference in impersonal ought claims. When a creature's life is bad (in some respect), its life ought to be better (in that respect). When a creature's life is already as good as it ought to be (in some respect), it's *false* that the creature's life ought to be better (in that respect).

Intuitively, there is a deep connection between impersonal *ought to be* facts and personal *ought to do* facts.<sup>37</sup> The nature of the connection will depend on the sort of ought facts at issue. Here we are concerned with *ought to be* facts which involve solely a creature's well-being (in some respect) and specifically with whether a creature's life is deprived (in that respect). This isn't an all-in, or all things considered, ought to be fact. It is a pro tanto one: *insofar as the well-being of the creature is concerned, the creature's life ought to be better*. At most, then, we should expect this sort of *ought to be* fact to ground a pro tanto *ought to do* fact.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. Feldman, *Doing the Best We Can*, 192. Feldman cannot find any way of linking ought to be and ought to do that both is genuine and of "any crucial significance to normative ethics" (*Doing the Best We Can*, 196). I'm going to show that neo-Platonism makes one way of linking them significant enough for divine normative ethics that it vindicates the ethical premise in the argument from evil.

<sup>38</sup>I take this pro tanto ought to be to be internal to well-being and independent of whether some suffering is deserved or demanded by justice. Just suffering is still deprivation. It may be good that a villain suffer the badness of extreme pain, but the extreme pain is still bad, it is still a deprivation. The possibility of just deprivation provides a potential way in which an *ought to be better insofar as the creature's well-being is concerned* might fail to be an *all things considered ought to be better*.



If an agent (all-in) ought to  $\varphi$ , then both it is rational for the agent to  $\varphi$  and it is *irrational* for the agent to not  $\varphi$ . If an agent *pro tanto* ought to  $\varphi$ , then both it is *pro tanto* rational for the agent to  $\varphi$  and it is *pro tanto irrational* for the agent to not  $\varphi$ . Recall from §2 that only requiring reasons are in the business of making things irrational. Thus, both all-in and *pro tanto* ought to dos are grounded in requiring reasons. Requiring reasons ground *pro tanto* ought to dos *whether or not* there are countervailing considerations. They ground all-in ought to dos *in the absence of* countervailing considerations. I propose, therefore, the following connection between the relevant sort of ought to be fact and requiring reasons: if a creature's life ought to be better (in some respect), then God has a requiring reason to make that creature's life better (in that respect).

Our dialectical context needs to be kept in mind. We are assuming that creaturely well-being provides God with reasons to promote well-being. The debate is about what structure those reasons have. NRR, JRR, and SR are rival accounts of this structure. If axiological reality were as uniform as it is ordinarily taken to be, then JRR or NRR would fare better on the normative-axiological criterion than SR\*. For SR\* would draw qualitative normative distinctions in the absence of qualitative axiological distinctions. Yet we are (provisionally) assuming neo-Platonism. We are assuming that axiological reality is divided between the goods that a creature ought to have and those it's false that the creature ought to have. Only SR\* has a normative structure that matches this axiological divide.

The normative uniformity of JRR and NRR leads them to treat different cases similarly, and this commits them to awkward conjunctions. These awkward conjunctions call out for explanation. JRR holds that, insofar as the well-being of the creature is concerned, God ought to make a creature's life better even if it's false that the creature's life ought to be better. But why should concern for a creature *pro tanto* require God to make the creature's life better, when the creature's life is already as good as it ought to be? NRR says that, insofar as the well-being of the creature is concerned, it's false that God ought to make a creature's life better even if it's true that the creature's life ought to be better. But why shouldn't a creature's life *pro tanto* require God to make the creature's life better when the life isn't as good as it ought to be? The problem for JRR and NRR is that we expect qualitative axiological difference to correlate with qualitative normative difference.

In contrast, SR\* says that God has requiring reason to make a creature's life better exactly when the creature's life ought to be better. That's satisfying; it doesn't call out for explanation in the way that JRR and NRR's awkward conjunctions do. We expect there to be a deep connection between the relevant sort of *ought to be* facts and God's requiring reasons. Only SR\* vindicates this expectation. Only SR\* has a normative structure that matches neo-Platonism's axiological structure.

### 6. Participated Goodness and What a Life is Due

The second difference between goodness and badness, as they are understood by neo-Platonism, concerns their relation to the goodness that's due. Our neo-Platonic metaphysics posits an asymmetry between creaturely goodness and badness. Taken together, the three parts of neo-Platonism claim that the goodness and badness of a creature's life are to be understood in relation to God. For a creature's life to be fully good is for it to manifest God's goodness in every way that's due to it, for the life to lack nothing. For a creature's life to be bad is for it to not manifest God's goodness in ways that are due to it.

This asymmetry yields two different kinds of choices. If God is choosing between a partly bad life and a fully good life, God is choosing between a life that is deprived (of manifesting God's goodness in ways that are due to it) and one that isn't deprived. If God is choosing between a fully good life and an even better one, God is choosing how to manifest God's own goodness in the creature's life *beyond* what's due to the creature *and* when the creature's life is already lacking in nothing. I suggest that SR\* best captures the normative significance of this difference.<sup>39</sup>

NRR and JRR again have awkward commitments that call out for explanation. NRR holds that the prospect of manifesting more goodness in the creature's life *never* provides a requiring reason to manifest more of God's goodness in the creature's life. Consequently, even if the creature is due to manifest more of God's goodness, God still has no requiring reason to make the creature's life better. But why is God's manifestation of God's goodness in a creature's life totally unconstrained when a creature isn't getting what they are due?

JRR holds that the prospect of manifesting more of God's goodness in a creature's life *always* provides a requiring reason to manifest more. Consequently, if a creature's life is already lacking in nothing and already manifests God's goodness in every way that is due to it, JRR holds that God still has requiring reason to manifest more of God's own goodness. But once a creature has everything it's due, once it lacks nothing, why is God further constrained in how God manifests *God's own* goodness in the creature's life?

Again, the problem with JRR and NRR is that we expect qualitative axiological difference to correlate with qualitative normative difference. SR\* provides the expected correlation. God has requiring reason to manifest more of God's goodness in a creature's life exactly when the creature is due to manifest more of God's goodness in the creature's life. That's satisfying and doesn't call out for explanation.

NRR and JRR do have one trick up their sleeve. They might try to capture the asymmetry between neo-Platonic goodness and badness in

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<sup>39</sup>Murphy (*God's Own Ethics*, 80–81) appeals to the participated nature of creaturely goodness in his defense of NRR; however, we'll see that NRR ignores the difference between these two kinds of choices.

a purely quantitative way. For example, the proponent of JRR might say that while the prospect of a better life always has requiring strength, it has precipitously less requiring strength when the life is already good, when it already lacks nothing. The problem is that SR\* gives us an even tighter fit between our normative and axiological theories. The difference between *a creature's life being due more* and *it's lacking nothing* is a qualitative difference (§4.2). The same goes for the difference between *its being true that a life ought to be better* and *its being false that it ought to be better*. A normative ethical theory fits better with neo-Platonism to the extent that it matches these qualitative differences at the axiological level with qualitative differences at the normative one. Only SR\* provides such a tight fit.<sup>40,41</sup>

### 7. Full Goodness without Neo-Platonism

The *Two Oughts Argument* (§5) and *Due Goodness Argument* (§6) are similar. They both rely on the third component of medieval neo-Platonism and thereby posit an axiological difference: there are certain amounts of goods (pleasure, power, intelligence) that a creature *ought* to have or that are *due* to the creature, and there are amounts of these goods that go beyond what the creature ought to have or what it is due. In other words, there is a qualitative difference between a life that is fully good and a life that is deprived. And they both reveal that only SR\* cuts the normative joints where the axiological ones are.

Yet the two arguments are not redundant. Between them, they show that there are two equally natural ways of speaking (ought vs due) that have exactly the same normative implications.<sup>42</sup> This strengthens the case that there is an underlying reality directing our intuitions rather than that

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<sup>40</sup>JRR and NRR might imitate SR\*'s normative implications with the help of countervailing considerations. For example, let NRR\* be the conjunction of NRR with the claim that *the creature has all the good it ought to have* counts as a countervailing reason against giving the creature more. If that's the way you want to roll, feel free. Such a view will share SR\*'s key implications for atheistic arguments: it vindicates the key assumption of the problem of evil and undermines any assumption that God would choose the best. But why bother with the extra complication of countervailing considerations when SR\* can do the same work without them?

<sup>41</sup>Do my arguments in §§5–6 work equally well as arguments that human ethics has a satisficing structure? Probably not *as well*. We might expect God to have a unique role in ensuring that things are the way they ought to be and unique discretion concerning how to manifest God's own goodness. But if they do work equally well with respect to human ethics, then no problem. The methodological constraint prohibits *beginning* with the assumption that human and divine ethics are analogous; it doesn't prohibit *ending up* there.

<sup>42</sup>The two arguments exploit the different connotations of "ought" and "due." The Two Oughts Argument exploits the natural thought that impersonal and personal oughts have some deep connection. The Due Goodness Argument (especially what I will shortly call the "increased oddness" of JRR) exploits intuitions one might have about what one person, God, owes to another. If you reject medieval neo-Platonism, I suggest that you focus on the Two Oughts Argument as it is the one that is most deeply connected to my own thinking and it doesn't rely on the first two parts of neo-Platonism. Even so, the Due Good Argument is more directly a response to Murphy's thinking, and so it plays a useful dialectical role not played by my preferred argument.

we are being bamboozled by our own words. Furthermore, only the Due Goodness Argument relies on the first two parts of medieval neo-Platonism, which allows it to increase the oddness of JRR. Given all three components, JRR constrains what God does *with God's own goodness* when everything else has what it is due and is lacking in nothing.

The third part of neo-Platonism is separable from the first two. Nothing is particularly theistic or Platonic about the claim that badness (for a creature) is deprivation. A naturalistic Aristotelian approach could accept that badness for a creature is deprivation of the goods a creature ought to have. So could a non-theistic non-naturalism about ethics, especially one that allows kind membership to play important normative roles.<sup>43</sup> Thus, there is some reason to expect that my arguments for SR\* can stand without relying on theistic, neo-Platonic approaches to axiology. Of course, even if other metaethical frameworks can make room for the full goodness threshold, it doesn't follow that we should make room for it. If we don't already endorse medieval neo-Platonism, why should we take the full goodness threshold seriously?

To say that full goodness exists for some creature is to say that there are some goods that the creature is due or that it ought to have. To see the plausibility of this claim, consider Singleton, a human whose life has one unit of pleasure and no units of pain. Intuitively, that's a very bad human life. Indeed, it seems to be a very bad life *with respect to pleasure and pain*. Without appealing to full goodness, it is hard to explain these intuitive judgments.

Simple hedonism claims that intrinsic goodness in a life is just pleasure and intrinsic badness is just pain, and that's all there is to it. This view can explain why Singleton's life is only *barely* good (it has only one net unit of intrinsic value). Yet it denies that the life contains any intrinsic badness; therefore, it can't explain how the life is (intrinsically) bad, nor how it is (intrinsically) bad with respect to pleasure and pain.<sup>44</sup> A simple objective list theorist may point out that the life lacks friendships or whatever. But the lack of friendships cannot explain how a life can be bad *with respect to pleasure and pain*. The full goodness threshold seems to capture our intuitive evaluation of that life: it is a bad life precisely because human lives ought to have more pleasure.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>E.g., FitzPatrick, "The Value of Life and the Dignity of Human Persons."

<sup>44</sup>More formally, the inference is as follows:

1. Singleton's life is bad in itself (bad with respect to Singleton's pleasure and pain) only if it has some intrinsic badness in it. [premise]
2. If simple hedonism is true, then Singleton's life is bad in itself (bad with respect to Singleton's pleasure and pain) only if it has some pain. [definition of simple hedonism]
3. Singleton's life doesn't have any pain in it. [stipulation of case]
4. Therefore, if simple hedonism is true, then Singleton's life isn't bad in itself (or bad with respect to pleasure and pain).
5. But Singleton's life is bad in itself (bad with respect to pleasure and pain).
6. Therefore, simple hedonism is false.

<sup>45</sup>The full goodness threshold might also be helpful for cashing out welfare prioritarianism and/or noncomparative harming; however, I'll have to explore these connections on another occasion.

Full goodness is a meta-axiological notion. It takes no stand on what the direct contributors to well-being are. Maybe it is just pleasure/pain, in which case hedonism can be salvaged by allowing that there are two ways for a life to be bad in itself: having pain and not having all the pleasure it ought to have. We could call such a view *full goodness hedonism* to contrast it with simple hedonism. Or maybe the direct contributors are given by some sort of objective or hybrid list (as I sometimes suppose for the sake of illustrations). The proponent of the full goodness threshold is committed solely to the claim that some of the goods that contribute to well-being are goods that the creature *ought* to have or are *due* to the creature.<sup>46</sup> Singleton's life shows us that the full goodness threshold is plausible in its own right. As a human being, it seems that there are certain amounts of pleasure that we are due or ought to have and that we are deprived when our pleasure falls short.

Recall that full goodness falls short of maximal goodness. We might be due at least one unit of pleasure each moment, but we aren't due a trillion units each moment. It is this feature of full goodness that grounds the above arguments for satisficing whether medieval neo-Platonism is true or not. The only downside of taking full goodness out of medieval neo-Platonism is that we lose the increased oddness of JRR that comes with endorsing the first two parts of neo-Platonism (i.e., that JRR would constrain what God does with *God's own goodness* even when everything else is lacking nothing and has everything it is due).

### 8. Full Goodness and the Good Enough

One worry about satisficing theories is that there is no adequate way to specify what degree of the good is *good enough*, the threshold that determines when one's requiring reasons to promote the good become merely justifying reasons to promote the good.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, we want the cut-off to be principled. It should track something qualitative. On the other, we want the threshold to be "demanding enough": it must be plausible that God has only merely justifying reasons to make one better off than the proposed threshold. It is difficult to satisfy both criteria at once.

Consider a view that lets *being good* serve as the good enough: God has requiring reason to make a life at least barely good and merely justifying reason to make it even better. The threshold seems principled. At first glance, there seems to be a qualitative difference between a life that is at least barely good and one that is not.<sup>48</sup> Yet the threshold also seems

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<sup>46</sup>Note that the full goodness threshold is logically weaker than medieval neo-Platonism's third component: only the latter entails that *all* bads (for a creature) are privative. Also, please remember the caveat from n. 35.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple," 3001.

<sup>48</sup>I say "at first glance," because the difference may not be qualitative if we take the full goodness threshold seriously and assume that all bads are deprivations. A life that has *almost* as much pleasure, intelligence, power, friendships, etc. as it is due will be deprived, so bad, in each respect. Yet overall the life is still very good. Given a full goodness threshold and the

insufficiently demanding. The Repugnant Conclusion seems repugnant for this very reason. In the absence of countervailing considerations, God must do more than ensure that people's lives are at least barely worth living. Suppose instead that we let *flourishing* serve as the good enough. This cut-off is arguably demanding enough, but it doesn't seem principled. In the abstract, the difference between one's having a good life and one's having a flourishing life seems to be a difference of mere degree.

Satisficing Reasons\* offers an account of the good enough that is both principled and sufficiently demanding. It holds that God has requiring reason to ensure that each creature's life is fully good (in every respect), but only merely justifying reason to ensure that the creature's life is even better (in that respect). The full goodness threshold is principled, because there is a qualitative difference between a life (or part's) being deprived and its having all the goodness it is due, all the goodness it ought to have (§4.2).

The full goodness threshold will also be plenty demanding. We aren't due omniscience, but maybe most of us are due more intelligence than we actually have. We aren't due infinite amounts of pleasure each moment, but maybe we are often due more than we are getting. Imagine a human whose whole life and every part lacks nothing: it has every bit of pleasure, intelligence, power, friendships, and accomplishments that it ought to have. The worst fully good life is a pretty awesome life.

Proponents of JRR, of course, won't find any threshold demanding enough, short of the best that God can do. Their objection is to (divine) satisficing theory as such. This is not the place for a complete defense of satisficing theory. I have shown that, as long as divine satisficing theory isn't ruled out, SR\*'s full goodness threshold is both principled and demanding enough. This is an accomplishment, as no other candidate for the *good enough* clearly satisfies both criteria.<sup>49</sup>

assumption that all bads are deprivations, we don't go from bad/deprived to *barely* good; we go from bad/deprived to *fully* good. Within this framework, the barely good (or worth living) threshold might be nothing more than some "sufficiently large" drop below full goodness. So it may not be a qualitative threshold after all.

<sup>49</sup>Consider an account of the good enough that we can call the *uniformly good account*: a life is good enough when it is good overall and good at every moment in which it exists. At first glance, this account seems to be an alternative to my full goodness account. Will this account be demanding enough? Recall Singleton and let's add that his one unit of pleasure happens in the only moment he exists. Given simple hedonism, his life is good overall and good in each moment, but his life doesn't look good enough. So if the alternative account is demanding enough, it either depends on an implicit commitment to full goodness or it appeals to some sort of list view which holds that a human life has to be "long enough." If it appeals to the latter, a uniformly good life is still compatible with an awful lot of apparent deprivation. While the life might be good overall and good in each moment, it could still be a life that lacks as much intelligence, pleasure, friendships, achievement, and so forth as it ought to have. To the extent that the life seems deprived, I think we'll feel some pressure to say that God should make the life better and, thus, I worry that this account isn't demanding enough. (Of course, a life with deprivation is bad and so a deprived life is not going to be uniformly good. But as was explained in §4.2, the possibility of deprivation requires the possibility of full goodness, and so any appeal to deprivation is implicitly committed to full goodness. To the extent that uniform goodness requires the absence of deprivation, it is not an alternative to my full goodness account.)

Before we return to the problem of evil, let me restate the big picture of §§5–8. The full goodness threshold is worth taking seriously whether we endorse medieval neo-Platonism or not. This threshold supports satisficing in two distinct ways. First, it grounds the essential elements of the Two Oughts and Due Goodness arguments (but it does not, by itself, ground the “increased oddness” of JRR). These arguments show that Satisficing Reasons\* is the normative theory that provides the tightest fit with the full goodness threshold, and so it fares the best on the normative-axiological fit criterion. Second, the notion of full goodness provides an account of the good enough that is both principled and demanding enough to be good enough, thereby resolving a long-standing problem with satisficing theory.

### 9. SR\* and the Ethics of the Problem of Evil

Satisficing Reasons\* and Just Requiring Reasons have a common core: they both vindicate the ethical premise in the argument from evil, namely that God necessarily prevents suffering in the absence of sufficiently strong countervailing considerations. When a creature suffers, it is not getting as much good as it is due (or as much as God can give it) and so God has requiring reason to make it better. Thus, God is rationally required to prevent suffering—indeed, God is rationally required to make the life fully good (or as well off as God can make it)—in the absence of countervailing considerations. Recall that, necessarily, God does what God has undefeated requiring reason to do (§2). So SR\* and JRR entail the relevant premise, namely that God *necessarily* prevents a creature’s suffering in the absence of countervailing considerations.

Pruss and Yancy argue that the third component of neo-Platonism—the claim that all badness is privative—would severely weaken the problem of evil.<sup>50</sup> Their argument assumes that privative evils do not significantly detract from one’s well-being. The assumption probably holds for the privative evils they focused on. Yet pain and low amounts of pleasure can significantly detract from one’s well-being, and the privative view can easily explain why (§4 and §7). Pain and low amounts of pleasure drive powerful problems of evil even if they are privative. The privative view, then, does not weaken the problem of evil. Rather, the privative view—and more generally, the full goodness threshold—vindicates the ethical premise in the problem of evil.

Murphy protests that the key ethical premise conflicts with God’s sovereignty:

The idea that the absolutely perfect being could be made to act by some creature as final cause is as contrary to that being’s sovereignty as the idea that the absolutely perfect being could be made to act by some creature as efficient cause.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Pruss and Yancy, “Privation in the Problem of Evil.”

<sup>51</sup>Murphy, *God’s Own Ethics*, 79.

Following rather traditional Anselmian metaphysics, Murphy assumes that an absolutely perfect being's (in)action can't ultimately be explained in terms of something external to it. For example, an absolutely perfect being can't be coerced or efficiently caused into action by something bigger and stronger than it. If the well-being of creatures plays a role in explaining why God must (not) do certain things, Murphy worries that God's (in)action will ultimately be explained in terms of something external to God.

Murphy's argument endorses a very strong conception of sovereignty, one that I'm not sure I endorse. Here I'll limit my response to showing that Murphy's neo-Platonic metaphysics addresses his own worry. Suppose that God has requiring reason to prevent suffering. Presumably, suffering contributes to such a reason only insofar as the suffering *is bad*. Given the relevant neo-Platonic metaphysics, creaturely badness is to be ultimately explained in relation to God (albeit in a more complicated way than goodness is to be explained in relation to God). The reason-giving power of suffering, whatever it happens to be, is ultimately grounded in God's value. For God to be moved by the badness of human suffering is for God to be moved by God's own goodness. In short, sovereignty considerations do not support NRR over its competitors, SR and JRR, and so do not challenge the ethical premise in the argument from evil.<sup>52</sup>

### Conclusion

Once a satisficing structure is clearly distinguished from what I called the JRR Conjunction, it seems that no one has previously argued that divine ethics has a satisficing structure. Nonetheless, I've argued that divine ethics has a particular satisficing structure, SR\*: God has requiring reason to make a creature's life and every part of it fully good, but only merely justifying reasons to make it even better. I relied on two applications of the normative-axiological fit criterion. First, only SR\* respects an intuitive connection between whether a creature's life ought to be better and whether God ought to make it better. Second, only SR\* respects the difference between a life that lacks manifesting goods in ways that are due to it and a life that lacks nothing.

The full goodness threshold emerged as an important contribution for both satisficing theory and meta-axiology. For satisficing theory, it grounded the arguments for divine satisficing and resolved the long-standing worry that there is no account of the good enough that is both

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<sup>52</sup>Furthermore, if this sovereignty objection were correct, it would rule out Murphy's plausible position that God has (decisive) requiring reason not to intend suffering. Murphy (*God's Own Ethics*, ch. 5, sec 5.6) considers this further worry. His response assumes that God's reason to not intend suffering is grounded *solely* in God's holiness, which is wholly internal to God's nature in a way that our suffering isn't. I contend, however, that any such reason would also be grounded in suffering's being bad. Think of how lame it would be to say, "God can't intend bad things, but that literally has nothing to do with the things's being bad." If divine sovereignty rules out God's having requiring reason to promote our well-being, it also rules out God's having (decisive) requiring reason to not intend our suffering.



principled and demanding enough to be good enough. For meta-axiology, it explains how a life with only pleasure and no pain can be bad *with respect to pleasure and pain*.

My defense of SR\* also meets Murphy's challenge to the ethical premise in the argument from evil, the claim that God has requiring reason to prevent suffering (or, that God must prevent suffering in the absence of countervailing considerations). I showed that SR\* vindicates the ethical premise in the argument from evil. Indeed, SR\* vindicates the ethical premise even if we grant Murphy's neo-Platonic metaphysics and avoid relying on the further, contested assumption that God shares our moral reasons.<sup>53</sup>

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