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PERFECT FREEDOM AND GOD'S HARD CHOICES

Luke Wilson

Rationalist models of divine agency typically ascribe perfect freedom to God, where this is understood as a freedom from external causal influences and non-rational influences, including desires or preferences not derived from reason alone. Paul Draper has recently developed a rationalist model of God's agency on which God faces "hard choices" between options differing in moral and non-moral value. He argues that this model is preferable to rival rationalist models because it is compatible with God's having significant freedom and being maximally worthy of praise and gratitude. I argue that on an alternative model of divine agency, which rejects perfect freedom and holds that God makes hard choices on the basis of brute preferences, God would be more worthy of praise and gratitude. However, a probabilistic problem for theism which Draper identifies for his model also applies to the brute preference model.

1. Introduction

What is required for an omniscient and perfectly free being to be maximally worthy of praise and gratitude when faced with a hard choice between morally best and non-morally best options? To be perfectly free in the sense intended here is to be free from any external or non-rational influences, including desires not derived solely from the recognition of one's objective reasons.¹ Paul Draper has proposed a rationalist model of God's agency on which God is perfectly free and may face "hard choices"

¹This is the conception of perfect freedom found in, e.g., Leibniz, *New Essays*; Swinburne, *The Existence of God*; Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*. Draper's understanding of perfect freedom is slightly different from the standard view as he treats reasons as causal factors: "a person is perfectly free when their choices are influenced only by reasons (understood as beliefs about value) instead of by (other) causal factors like felt desires or compulsions" (Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 27). However, this distinction will not affect my argument. Murphy claims that perfect freedom is an "uncontroversial" divine attribute ("Is an Absolutely Perfect Being *Morally* Perfect?," 94). Note that perfect freedom does not rule out possession of desires, since one might hold that beliefs about objective reasons motivate by producing desires, rather it rules out possession of brute desires, i.e. those not derived from one's beliefs alone.



between options differing in moral and non-moral value (e.g., aesthetic value).² Draper's project has two goals: first, to develop a model of God which best fits our intuitions about what a being must be like to qualify for the title "God" and, second, to assess how the acceptance of this model would impact the arguments of natural theology. Draper argues that his model is preferable to a similar rationalist model developed by Richard Swinburne because, unlike Swinburne's model, his is compatible with God's having morally significant freedom and thus with God's being maximally worthy of praise and gratitude. However, Draper notes that a cost for theism on his model is that theism would be much less probable on it than on Swinburne's model. I will argue that God would not be maximally worthy of praise and gratitude on Draper's model because there is a preferable alternative model of God's agency, the brute preference model, which abandons perfect freedom by ascribing underived desires or preferences to God. However, this alternative model also faces the probabilistic problem for theism that holds on Draper's model.

In the following two sections I will describe Draper's view before arguing in section 4 that Draper's model makes divine hard choices arbitrary in a problematic way. Section 5 describes the brute preference model and its application to divine hard choices. Sections 6 through 8 defend this model from various objections and section 9 discusses the probabilistic problem.

2. Hard Choices

Draper's model accepts value partitionism, the view that "certain goods are specifically moral (for example, charity and fairness) while others (for example, majesty and elegance) are not."³ Sometimes an agent may face a choice between options that are valuable in different ways such that they are incomparable. But, when options are comparable, it is natural to assume what Ruth Chang calls the "trichotomy thesis"—that they are comparable just in terms of the relations "better than," "worse than," and "equal in value to."⁴ However, Chang rejects the trichotomy thesis, holding that some options may be "on a par" with one another, by which she means that the options are comparable but neither is better, worse, or equal in value to the other. Draper follows Chang in rejecting the trichotomy thesis. I will call the claim that there can be actions that are on a par with respect to their value the "parity thesis" and a choice between options that are on a par a "hard choice."⁵ Draper's model combines value

²Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 27.

³Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 21. He says here that value partitionism is "no less plausible" than Swinburne's view, discussed in the following section, that moral goods are just all-things-considered goods.

⁴Chang, "The Possibility of Parity," 660–661.

⁵Chang and Draper use the term "hard choice" to cover additional cases, such as choices between options that are equally valuable or incommensurable, as well as choices that are

partitionism with the parity thesis and thus holds that agents may face hard choices between options of different types of value. Such choices are not hard for merely epistemic reasons. Even an omniscient being, which is fully aware of all the value relations between each of its options, would not be able to know that one option is overall better than any other in a hard choice scenario because none is better than any other.

Draper's example of Mary of Bethany illustrates Chang's primary argument against the trichotomy thesis, the "small-improvement argument."⁶ Mary faces a choice between two options: pouring perfume on Jesus's feet, an act (we will assume) of great aesthetic value, and selling the perfume and giving the money to the poor, an act of great moral value. "It is at least plausible to claim . . . that the two actions are on a par with respect to their goodness. They are comparable, but neither is better than the other and they are not equal in value."⁷ In the story, she chooses the former option. But suppose that Mary also had a slightly more expensive perfume:

Selling the more expensive perfume and giving the money to the poor would be overall better than selling the less expensive perfume and giving the money to the poor. Thus, if the two actions originally being compared were equally valuable, then it would follow that selling the slightly more expensive perfume and giving the money to the poor would be overall better than what Mary did. But surely that does not follow.⁸

This example is also intended to motivate the view that moral value does not always override non-moral value since Mary's action was not overall worse than the alternative, despite being morally worse. So, if value partitionism is true and options of different types of value (including moral and non-moral value) can be on a par, then even an omniscient being may face hard choices between morally best options and, say, aesthetically best options. Draper's model of divine agency seeks to accommodate possibilities of this kind.

3. Draper's Model

Draper accepts Swinburne's model of divine agency except where it must be amended to accommodate the possibility that God faces hard choices between options of differing moral value. Both models take God to be an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free person. They agree that this conception of God entails that God would be perfectly rational, since a perfectly free being would have no motivational influences apart from its

merely epistemically hard. My focus here, like Draper's, is just on parity cases, but I think my argument applies just as well to choices between options of incommensurable value. In fact, incommensurability is nearly identical to parity in some discussions of divine freedom (see, e.g., Senor, "A Defense of Divine Freedom"; Pruss, "Divine Creative Freedom").

⁶Draper takes the story from John 12 and Mark 14.

⁷Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 23.

⁸Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 23.

objective reasons and an omniscient being would have full knowledge of how well its reasons support the actions it can perform.⁹ Swinburne, however, takes the further step of claiming that a perfectly rational being must be morally perfect because moral reasons are just all-things-considered reasons:

[T]o judge that an action is morally good is to judge that it is, overall, taking all reasons into consideration, better to do than not to do; the reasons for doing it override . . . the reasons for not doing it. Conversely an action's being morally bad is it being one which overall is better not to do than to do, which there is overriding reason not to do.¹⁰

It is at this stage that Draper's model diverges from Swinburne's. Since his model adopts value partitionism and holds that moral goodness is simply one type of goodness among others, Draper rejects the claim that moral goodness is simply overall goodness. This opens up conceptual space for choices in which the aesthetic value of one option overrides the moral value of another and also for hard choices, where moral reasons for performing one action and aesthetic reasons for performing an alternative action are on a par.¹¹ On Draper's model, perfect rationality does not entail moral perfection, since a perfectly rational being may face hard choices between a morally best option and an aesthetically best option and, because these options are on a par, its reasons alone do not favor one over the other. So, a perfectly rational being is not always rationally required to choose the morally best. Draper agrees with Swinburne that God must be morally perfect, but denies that this is entailed by perfect rationality. So, whether a perfectly rational being counts as "God" would be a contingent matter.¹²

⁹Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 20.

¹⁰Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 186. (See also Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 23.) Draper points out that Swinburne's argument that omniscience and perfect freedom jointly entail moral perfection makes two metaethical assumptions in addition to the claim that moral reasons are just all-things-considered reasons: 1) moral realism—the combination of cognitivism and the falsehood of error theory and 2) "motivational intellectualism"—the view that "in the absence of non-rational causal influences, beliefs about what is overall the best thing to do are necessarily motivating" (Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 21). It is worth adding that Swinburne's argument requires not just moral realism but also objectivism, since subjectivism and some versions of constructivism are moral realist views which likely cannot do the needed work. Also, it is noteworthy that these metaethical assumptions are in tension with the Humean theory of motivation (see Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Sinhababu, *Humean Nature*). I discuss the relationship between Swinburne's argument and the Humean theory in greater detail in Wilson, *Divine Motivation and Bayesian Natural Theology*.

¹¹Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 21. There may be other non-moral values besides aesthetic value, but aesthetic and moral value are Draper's focus.

¹²See "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 23–24. Draper gives a full description of the attributes classical theism requires for a being to count as "God" ("What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 19). Of the divine brute preferences discussed later, an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly rational being would only possess moral brute preferences contingently, but it may yet be necessary that any being that counts as "God" has such preferences.

Draper argues that his model has an advantage over Swinburne's because it avoids the following atheistic argument:

1. No being that is perfectly free can be significantly free.
2. Any being that is maximally worthy of praise and gratitude must be significantly free.
3. Any being qualifying for the title 'God' (as classical theists use that title) must be both perfectly free and maximally worthy of praise and gratitude.
4. So, no being qualifies for the title 'God' (as classical theists use that title).¹³

Recall that a perfectly free being is free from non-rational causal influences and desires and, if it acts, acts only on what it believes it has most objective reason to do. By contrast, "a person is significantly free if they are free in the libertarian sense to choose between two or more alternative actions even though they believe that one of those actions is morally worse overall than another."¹⁴

On Swinburne's model, (1) is true because a perfectly free being acts only on its objective reasons and these reasons require doing the morally best since, if Swinburne is right, moral reasons are simply overriding reasons. So, for Swinburne, a perfectly free being cannot do other than what is morally best, when there is a best.¹⁵ Thus, a perfectly free (and omniscient) being cannot be significantly free on Swinburne's model, since it is not possible for it to choose a morally worse action over a morally better alternative. By contrast, on Draper's model a perfectly free being may face hard choices between a morally best option and a non-morally best option when the reasons supporting each are on a par. In such cases, nothing rationally requires a perfectly free being to choose the morally best option and so it may have morally significant leeway with respect to that choice. "[A] being that is perfectly free might still have morally significant libertarian free will, which implies that God could be essentially omniscient and essentially perfectly free and yet be only accidentally morally perfect."¹⁶ Thus, on Draper's model, (1) is false and so it is possible for a being to satisfy the definition of "God" in (3). In this way, Draper's model, unlike Swinburne's, is able to avoid the atheistic argument.

Can a proponent of Swinburne's model avoid the atheistic argument by rejecting (2), the claim that maximal praise- and thank-worthiness requires significant freedom? Although a being that always does what is morally

¹³"What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 27.

¹⁴"What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 27.

¹⁵Swinburne grants that there may not always be a unique best action God can perform; there may be equally best actions or for any given action there might be a better (see Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 114–115). I follow Draper in focusing on cases with a morally best and a non-morally best option, but the same basic problem I raise for Draper's model will hold on these options as well.

¹⁶Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 28.

best (or what benefits us) out of the necessity of its nature does not have morally significant freedom, it may nevertheless be the agent-cause and ultimate source of its action, rather than being forced to do what is morally best by something external to itself. Defenders of a model like Swinburne's may hold that God would be worthy of praise (or gratitude) for an action even if God could not have done worse as long as God's action was agent-caused.¹⁷ Draper agrees that such a God would be worthy of praise and gratitude, but crucial to his argument is that God must be *maximally* praiseworthy and *maximally* thankworthy, and he thinks that a God which is significantly free is *more* worthy of praise and gratitude than the God of the agent-causal alternative.

Draper presents a thought experiment intended to show that a being that always does what is morally best (or acts to benefit us) as the result of a morally significant free choice is more worthy of our praise (or, at least, our gratitude) than one which performs the same actions out of the necessity of its nature.¹⁸ The thought experiment involves two "powerful supernatural agents," A and B, where A intentionally acts to do what benefits us out of the necessity of its nature, but is the ultimate cause of this action. B also intentionally acts to benefit us, except B does not act out of the necessity of its nature. Rather, B "is free to choose and do otherwise and yet she deliberately (as opposed to arbitrarily or randomly) chooses to benefit [us]."¹⁹ So, B has significant freedom regarding whether or not to benefit us, while A does not. Draper grants that A may be worthy of our praise and gratitude, but holds that because B could have refrained from its action, it is more responsible for benefiting us than is A, and so B is *more* deserving of our praise and gratitude. Both exhibit a sort of control by being the ultimate source of the outcome of their actions, but only B has the sort of control "which involves the power to settle which of a number of possibilities is actual. Each of these [types of control] generates a distinctive kind of responsibility and thus maximal praiseworthiness (in the appropriate sense), or at least maximal thank-worthiness, requires both."²⁰ Furthermore, significant freedom "increases the second sort of responsibility and thus increases praiseworthiness and thank-worthiness."²¹ If this is correct and God must be maximally worthy of praise and gratitude, as

¹⁷Draper responds to Bergmann and Cover, "Divine Responsibility without Divine Freedom." See also Senor, "A Defense of Divine Freedom," 184–186. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 145–146, accepts a view like this, linking perfect freedom with praiseworthiness in the following way: "[I]f a man P does A freely, then no cause makes him do A. He is ultimately responsible for A being done; for nothing makes him make A be done. He is properly praised [for] doing A, if A is a good action; and properly blamed for doing A, if A is a bad action."

¹⁸Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 28–29.

¹⁹Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 28.

²⁰Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 29.

²¹Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 29.

(3) holds, then God would have to be an agent like B, possessing significant freedom, rather than like A, acting from the necessity of its nature.

4. *A Problem for Draper's Model*

Rejecting premise (1) in the atheistic argument requires Draper to hold that when two competing actions are on a par (and no alternative is superior) for a perfectly free being, it would be able to choose one rather than the other. But this raises a question—what could explain why such a being would choose one option rather than the other? This does not ask simply for an explanation on which God's choice of one option could be explained by reference to the reasons in its favor, but rather a contrastive explanation of why God would choose that option over the other despite the parity of reasons.

We can think of God's choice in parity cases as involving two (non-temporal) stages. At the first stage, God excludes all options that are overall worse than others, while at the second stage God chooses between those unexcluded options. Suppose God faces a choice between four distinct options, x_1 , x_2 , y_1 , and y_2 . Sticking with just two dimensions of value, moral and aesthetic value, suppose that the x 's are aesthetically better than the y 's and the y 's are morally better than the x 's, x_1 is overall aesthetically better than x_2 (and x_2 is no better morally than x_1), and that y_1 is overall morally better than y_2 (and y_2 is no better aesthetically than y_1). So, in this first-stage choice, God would reject x_2 and y_2 . This is not a hard choice, since x_2 and y_2 are overall worse than some competitor.²²

The second-stage choice is then between x_1 and y_1 . Whichever option God chooses, a partial explanation can be given in terms of the first-stage facts. (If God chooses x_1 , it is because of its features that make it aesthetically attractive and the fact that it is not overall worse than any competitor. If God chooses y_1 , it is because of its features that make it morally attractive and the fact that it is not overall worse than any competitor.) However, this leaves unexplained the second-stage choice—the choice of x_1 rather than y_1 or of y_1 rather than x_1 .²³ Clearly, God's second-stage choice of one rather than the other cannot be based on any objective reason, since we are assuming the strength of all such reasons has been exhausted in

²²Things will be more complicated if there are at least two infinite hierarchies of options such that options within a hierarchy are all comparable, but there are ranges in one hierarchy in which the options are on a par with the options in ranges in the other hierarchy. In this type of scenario, it could be that every option is overall worse than some other.

²³Cf. Pruss, "Divine Creative Freedom." If we are allowed the assumption that God has in fact chosen A over B in a parity or incommensurability scenario, we may, in some sense, explain this by God's being impressed by the reasons supporting A. But if, as I am assuming, God is perfectly rational and perfectly free, then God will not be impressed by those reasons except in proportion to their normative strength. In such cases, God would be aware that a choice of either A or B is rationally required, so there must be an explanation for the choice of one rather than the other from God's perspective even if the explanation is simply that God chose arbitrarily.

the judgment that the options are on a par. But the choice cannot be based on a non-rational desire or preference for one option rather than the other, since these would be ruled out by God's perfect freedom on Draper's model.²⁴ Thus, God's choice cannot be based on either rational or non-rational factors, so it seems that God either cannot act or acts arbitrarily in parity cases.²⁵

Would God's choosing arbitrarily be compatible with God's having significant freedom and perfect rationality? If it is not, then (1) would be true if I am right that a perfectly free being could only make hard choices by choosing arbitrarily, and so the atheistic argument would threaten Draper's model as well as Swinburne's. If, on the other hand, arbitrary choice is compatible with significant freedom and perfect rationality, then (1) would be false, and so the atheistic argument would be unsound on Draper's model. Nevertheless, there would be a problem for Draper's model originating from premises (2) and (3). (2) states that significant freedom is a necessary condition for maximal praise- and gratitude-worthiness, but it does not follow that it (combined with the other traditional divine attributes) is sufficient. Suppose that God chooses arbitrarily in morally significant contexts where morally and aesthetically best options are on a par and that God happens to always choose the morally best action.²⁶ This would have to be the case if a perfectly free being is to be morally perfect on Draper's model (as it must be to count as "God"), but it is doubtful that such a being would be both maximally praiseworthy and maximally gratitude-worthy since there is an alternative model on which, I will argue, God is more worthy of praise and gratitude.

5. The Brute Preference Model

Consider a model of divine agency on which God's choices are based solely on God's objective reasons unless there are multiple rationally unexcluded options that are tied, incommensurable, or on a par with respect

²⁴Chang, "Grounding Practical Normativity," argues that one can create a new reason for oneself when facing a hard choice simply through an act of will, where this is an expression of one's "self-identity." But it is unclear how such an act could be understood except as an action based on non-rational features, such as one's character, cares, desires, preferences, etc., if it is not arbitrary. If God arbitrarily chooses the morally best, we may ascribe a moral preference to God in a *post hoc* fashion and we may even hold that this arbitrary choice gives God a preference for the moral in subsequent hard choices, but neither of these moves helps explain the hard choice in question.

²⁵The same would hold for equally valuable options and for unexcluded incommensurable options. Perhaps a second-stage, contrastive explanation is unnecessary for divine choices between equally valuable options, such as whether to create a beach with n or $n+1$ pebbles, but when the choice is between options of different types of value, such as one between moral and aesthetic value, it is more plausible to think that such an explanation is called for.

²⁶Perhaps God would only have to make one such choice—whether to be morally perfect or aesthetically perfect—but this must still be an arbitrary choice.

to their value, in which case God chooses between those options on the basis of certain divine brute preferences. More generally, we can state this brute preference model as holding that God is capable of being motivated, at least in some cases, by brute preferences or desires (i.e. preferences or desires not derived from objective reasons, or beliefs about objective reasons, alone), and so God is not perfectly free (in the sense that Swinburne and Draper intend). We can distinguish two types of brute preference model of divine agency (BPM) that are relevant to our discussion:²⁷

Strict Rationalist BPM: Brute preferences play only a *tie-incommensurability-parity-breaking* role. If God's objective reasons are such that there is a unique best action among God's options, then God will perform that action and God's brute preferences will play no role in God's choice. However, if God's objective reasons leave more than one option unexcluded, then God can choose between those options on the basis of a brute preference.

Lenient Rationalist BPM: God is intrinsically motivated by God's objective reasons, but God's decisions are not always constrained by what there is most objective reason to do. If there is a unique best action among God's options, God's motivations derived from the objective reasons alone would most strongly support performing that action, but God's motivations from brute preferences may lead to God's choosing other than the unique best action.

A defender of lenient rationalist BPM would need to adopt a permissive standard of rationality to avoid ascribing irrationality to God. Such a standard would hold that it is sometimes rationally permissible for God to satisfice; i.e. to choose an option that is good enough even when there is a better (and perhaps even a best) alternative available.²⁸ However, I will assume strict rationalist BPM in what follows since it is closest to Draper's model.²⁹

I think an intuitive case can be made that the God of the BPM is more worthy of praise and gratitude for choosing the morally best than the God of Draper's model as long as its choice results from the right sort of desire (or combination of desires)—e.g., from a *de dicto* desire for the morally

²⁷Both assume an anti-Humean theory of motivation, which Draper's model adopts. A Humean BPM would hold that God requires brute preferences or desires to be motivated and a perfectly good being is one that has the best possible brute desires/preferences. I consider only anti-Humean views here, but see Wilson, *Divine Motivation and Bayesian Natural Theology*.

²⁸See, e.g., Tucker, "Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization (in Philosophy of Religion)"; "Divine Satisficing and the Ethics of the Problem of Evil"; Kraay, "Can God Satisfice?" It is worth noting that the issue of the rational permissibility of divine satisficing is distinct from that of the possibility of divine satisficing. If God is perfectly free, then it may be that divine satisficing is not possible, even if it is rationally permissible.

²⁹Senor appears to adopt a strict rationalist BPM ("A Defense of Divine Freedom," 181–182, 191–194). Leftow gives an argument for lenient rationalist BPM on the grounds that it is required to avoid modal collapse ("Two Pictures of Divine Choice"). Rea also appears to accept lenient rationalist BPM (*The Hiddenness of God*, 74–84).

good or from love of its creatures, etc.³⁰ To modify Draper's thought experiment, suppose agents B and C face the same type of hard choice between a morally best option and an aesthetically best alternative and both choose to do what is morally best. However, B chooses arbitrarily while C chooses out of its desire to act morally, out of love or compassion, or from some such desire. Intuitively, C is more worthy of praise than B. After all, the choices of B and C are identical at the first stage, where all options but the morally best and the aesthetically best have been ruled out, so they are equally praiseworthy up to that point. The only difference is the second-stage choice, how they choose between the unexcluded options, but, plausibly, B's arbitrary choice adds nothing to its praiseworthiness while C's choosing from its moral character or from love or compassion adds to its praiseworthiness. So, the God of the BPM, a being like C, would be more praiseworthy for doing the morally best than the God of Draper's model, a being like B.

One of Brian Leftow's arguments for the BPM claims that a God whose second-stage choice is based on the choice-worthy features of its options is more rational than one who chooses arbitrarily at the second stage.

[I]f God picks what pleases Him most, He is more responsive to each alternative's properties than He is if He picks arbitrarily. Being more responsive to things' properties seems more rational than in effect ignoring them at the stage of His final pick.³¹

Thus, a proponent of the BPM could argue that perfect rationality requires possession of some brute preferences. However, even if this is not the case and a perfectly free God could be perfectly rational, I think Leftow is right that the God of the BPM is more sensitive to the good-making features of the chosen option than God would be on Draper's model. So, the difference in motives between the God of the BPM and the God of Draper's model makes the former more praiseworthy.

Note that my argument does not claim that choosing the morally best action is more praiseworthy than choosing the aesthetically best option. The contrast we are interested in is not that between a morally perfect being and an aesthetically perfect being. Perhaps one who arbitrarily chooses the aesthetically best would be as praiseworthy as B and one who chooses on the basis of aesthetic preferences would be as praiseworthy as C, but on the models of God we are considering, one must be morally perfect to count as "God."³² Rather the contrast is between a morally perfect being

³⁰A brute preference model can leave open which sort of desire is most praise/thank-worthy.

³¹Leftow, "Two Pictures of Divine Choice," 156.

³²Murphy, "Replies to Wielenberg, Irwin, and Draper," and Miller, "The Intrinsic Probability of Theism," suggest that the aesthetically perfect being may count as "God." Assuming Draper's value partitionism, this move would require a more lenient standard for moral perfection than Draper gives if a perfectly rational being would face hard choices between morally and aesthetically best options.

whose second-stage hard choices between morally and aesthetically best options are made arbitrarily and a morally perfect being whose choices in the same scenarios are made on the basis of brute preferences. (I mean here that they are “morally perfect” in the sense that each always chooses what is morally best, not that each is maximally praiseworthy.) So, what is at issue is whether one of these is more worthy of praise than the other.

Some might deny my claim about praiseworthiness, but recall that Draper’s model requires God to be both maximally praiseworthy and maximally thankworthy.³³ I think that an argument like that given above about praiseworthiness is more clearly successful when applied to thank-worthiness. Suppose B and C face a hard choice between one option that benefits you, X, and one that does not benefit you, Y, and both choose the former. However, B chose arbitrarily while C chose out of its love or compassion for you. Intuitively, C is more worthy of your gratitude because of its motive than is B. Even if B and C are equally thankworthy for their indistinguishable first-stage choices, the difference at the second-stage makes C more thankworthy. Furthermore, we can correctly say that C intended X while it is not clear that it is correct to say that B intended X rather than that B intended X or Y. It would be little better than an accident that B chose to benefit you rather than not, and a benefit given intentionally is more thank-worthy than one given accidentally.

So, if I am correct that an omniscient and perfectly free being that is able to make hard choices must choose arbitrarily, then even if such a being always happens to choose the morally best option, and so could count as perfectly morally good (in the sense that it always chooses the morally best option), it would not be maximally praiseworthy and maximally gratitude-worthy because the God of the BPM, which is perfectly rational but not perfectly free, would be more worthy of praise and gratitude. So, a new atheistic argument would apply to Draper’s model since (3) requires God to be perfectly free and maximally worthy of praise and gratitude, but a maximally praise- and gratitude-worthy being would not be perfectly free. The BPM would also fail to satisfy the conditions in (3), since (3) holds that God must be, by definition, perfectly free, so a defense of the BPM is needed. The next section responds to an objection to the BPM’s relevance to the issue of God’s hard choices and the following two sections address direct objections to the BPM.

6. *Hard Choices on the BPM?*

One might object to the claim that God faces genuinely hard choices on the BPM in the scenario we are imagining, in which God’s objective reasons

³³Bergmann and Cover (“Divine Responsibility without Divine Freedom,” 382n1) and Senor (“A Defense of Divine Freedom,” 185–186) argue that praiseworthiness is easier for God to satisfy than thankworthiness and that God need not have significant freedom to be praiseworthy. However, it does not follow that *maximal* praiseworthiness does not require significant freedom.

for choosing the morally best option, MB, are on a par with God's objective reasons for choosing the aesthetically best option, AB. I have argued that such a choice must be arbitrary on Draper's model, but on the BPM the choice can be made on the basis of a brute preference for one option over the other. However, would God's possession of a brute preference for the morally best provide a new reason in favor of God's doing MB? If so, wouldn't it follow that MB is now overall better than AB for God, and so the choice between the two is not a hard choice after all? If this is right, then appealing to the BPM is not a way of explaining of God's hard choices.

I think this objection fails for a few reasons. First, it assumes a certain normative view of what kinds of facts ground reasons; it assumes that having a desire gives one a *pro tanto* objective reason to act to satisfy it. Roughly speaking, we can distinguish objective and subjective reasons by treating objective reasons as those one has in virtue of the objective value of one's options. The relative weight of these reasons corresponds to the comparative value of the options; the more valuable the option, the greater the reason to act accordingly. Subjective reasons are grounded by the agent's desires. An agent would have a subjective reason to perform an action just in case performing that action would satisfy (or, perhaps, is believed to satisfy), or at least raise the probability of satisfying, some desire of the agent. If we accept the normative claim that it is objectively valuable that one satisfy one's desires, then an agent's brute desire can give rise to an objective reason, but the agent only has this objective reason derivatively. These derived objective reasons can be contrasted with underived objective reasons, which are those that the agent has independently of any desires, goals, etc. they might have. Assuming a rationalist account of motivation, it would follow from God's perfect rationality that God would be motivated by underived objective reasons, but this motivation follows from the reasons rather than the reverse. The BPM is compatible with the truth or the falsehood of the normative claim in question. If it is false, then God's brute preferences would not make MB better supported by the objective reasons than AB.

Let's suppose that the normative claim is true. Even so, it is not clear that the introduction of an objective reason derived from God's brute preference for MB would in fact make MB overall better than AB. It would do so if the underived objective reasons favoring MB and AB left them tied, rather than on a par. If MB and AB are equally well supported by the underived objective reasons, then adding an additional objective reason to do MB would make MB overall better than AB (provided the new reason does not change the relative weight of the other reasons). But the same does not hold for parity cases. If MB and AB are on a par given only the underived objective reasons, then the brute preference may provide an additional objective reason to do MB, but this need not make MB overall better than AB (although it may) since it is part of the nature of parity that small improvements to one option do not automatically make that option

overall better (as Chang's "small improvements argument" shows). If God's brute preferences give reasons of a great enough strength, then a divine brute preference for MB would make MB overall better than AB, but it's not clear that such reasons *must* have this kind of strength. Since the BPM allows for motivation out of proportion to the objective reasons (although not in conflict with them, on strict rationalist BPM), in such a scenario a desire can give a parity-breaking motive where none is available on Draper's model. So, this motive can provide a contrastive explanation of the choice that is non-arbitrary, even if such an explanation is not available in terms of the balance of all of the objective reasons, including underived and derived reasons.

Finally, even if God's brute preferences do make one option overall better than the other, this does not undermine my argument. The question at issue is this: given a scenario in which God's underived objective reasons for morally and aesthetically best options are on a par, how can God choose in a way compatible with maximal praise/thank-worthiness—through a random choice or on the basis of a brute preference? Whether this brute preference provides a new objective reason or simply grounds a non-rational motive, my claim is that the choice described by the BPM is more praise/thank-worthy than the choice described by Draper's model.

7. *Against Perfect Freedom*

A proponent of the BPM may argue that the perfect freedom requirement in (3) has not been adequately motivated. After all, the BPM holds that God is perfectly rational and maximally worthy of praise and gratitude, as well as possesses the traditional divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness, and this does not seem like an unacceptable conception of God. (Of course, a proponent of the BPM may hold that God must be "perfectly free," but explicate this concept in a way that is compatible with God's having brute preferences.) Is there something in the conception of perfect freedom as rationalists understand it that makes a BPM theologically unacceptable? I think that, on the contrary, the intuitions commonly taken to support divine perfect freedom can be accommodated by the BPM. Murphy's argument for perfect freedom is typical:

Just as we think a human agent is unfree not only if his or her agency is constrained by an external force but also if his or her agency is limited by internal drives or compulsions, it seems to me that if the Anselmian being's agency is limited by other than that being's assessment of the reasons to act one way rather than another, then the Anselmian being is not exhibiting the perfection of freedom.³⁴

³⁴Murphy, *God's Own Ethics*, 27. Murphy makes a distinction between the concept of an Anselmian being and the concept of God, where an Anselmian being counts as "God" only if it has certain contingent features such as being worthy of worship and allegiance.

So, perfect freedom, it is claimed, is necessary to immunize God from external causal influences and internal drives or compulsions.³⁵ This aspect of perfect freedom, however, is not at odds with the BPM. God's brute desires should not be characterized as "external causal influences" since they are God's own mental states rather than, say, other agents or laws of nature. It would be problematic for God's freedom if other agents or past states of the world over which God has no control causally influence God, but no such outside influence would affect God on the BPM. Nor would anything outside of God or any prior temporal state cause God to have those brute desires.

Would God's brute desires rightly be characterized as "drives or compulsions?" Some desires undoubtedly feel like drives or compulsions, as in cases of unwilling addicts. Humans, of course, have complex sets of desires and emotions, some of which conflict with others which we wish to affirm as more central to our characters. For instance, a person who values courage and views himself as a courageous person may be assailed by cowardly desires and see them as not part of their "real self," and so as alienated desires.³⁶ It makes sense to characterize as drives or compulsions those brute desires that are problematic to one's agency, such as those in conflict with one's reasons or with one's more central desires (e.g. second-order desires), but it is not necessary that any set of desires that includes brute desires would have these objectionable features. Such problematic desires need not assail God on the BPM since God's brute desires need not be in conflict with each other nor with God's judgments about the objective reasons.³⁷ Particularly on a strong rationalist BPM, God's brute preferences cannot conflict with God's perfect rationality since God's brute desires only "kick in" when the motivation provided by God's objective reasons has been exhausted. While God's brute preferences would be non-rational, in the sense that they would not follow from God's beliefs about God's objective reasons alone, they would not be irrational; they would not conflict with the objective reasons.³⁸ So God's brute desires and preferences should not be characterized as external causal influences or as internal drives or compulsions.³⁹

³⁵Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 298, gives similar reasons for accepting divine perfect freedom: "if [God] is in any way pushed into exercising his powers sovereignty is not fully his." (See also Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 104.)

³⁶See, e.g., Ekstrom, "Alienation, Autonomy, and the Self."

³⁷Perhaps God could have competing brute desires, but competing desires need not compete with the objective reasons.

³⁸Cf. Leftow's defense of divine non-rational preferences ("Two Pictures of Divine Choice," 157).

³⁹Perhaps one may argue for divine perfect freedom on the ground that divine impassibility is a non-negotiable divine attribute and that it entails perfect freedom, but I don't think such a move would be successful. If we understand the claim that God is impassible to mean that God cannot suffer, then divine impassibility would not be strong enough to entail perfect freedom, since the BPM can hold that God's brute desires cannot be frustrated in a way that would lead to divine suffering. Closer to perfect freedom would be Creel's

Thus, I think there is good reason to doubt that perfect freedom must be included in a theologically acceptable model of God's nature. One may protest that there is something problematic about the fact that God's brute preferences are unchosen (or that God's "deep self" is unchosen). However, if this is a problem, there is an analogous problem for any model of divine agency. Even on rationalist models, God's perfect freedom is not something that is chosen by God. Self-creation is impossible for God as well as for creatures.⁴⁰ So, if premise (3) were amended to require perfect rationality in place of perfect freedom (or if, unlike Draper and Swinburne, we understand "perfect freedom" in a way compatible with God's having brute preferences), then the brute preference model could avoid the atheistic argument.

8. *Libertarian Freedom on the BPM*

It is possible that God faces hard choices between morally best and non-morally best options both on Draper's model and the BPM. So, on these models, unlike Swinburne's, God does not do what is morally best simply out of the necessity of God's nature. I have argued that on Draper's model God's morally significant hard choices can only be made arbitrarily while on the brute preference alternative God can make non-arbitrary hard choices on the basis of brute preferences. These brute preferences are not essential to God; God could have had, say, aesthetic preferences rather than moral preferences, so God's possession of moral perfection would be contingent.⁴¹ This is one sense in which God's choices can be morally significant on the BPM.

However, to be significantly free on Draper's definition requires being "free in the libertarian sense to choose between two of more alternative actions" even though the agent believes that "one of those actions is morally worse overall than the other."⁴² Does the BPM allow for God to be free in the libertarian sense? This will depend on how we understand what libertarianism requires. Consider the following argument against BPM:

- (I) God does not possess libertarian freedom on the BPM.
- (II) God possesses libertarian freedom on Draper's model.

interpretation of impassibility as "the property of being insusceptible to causation" but, as I have argued, this is not in conflict with the BPM (see Creel, "Immutability and Impassibility," 323). A stronger account of impassibility, such as that impassibility is an insusceptibility to having emotions or the property of being incapable of empathy, gets closer to a view at odds with the BPM (see Scrutton, *Thinking Through Feeling*, and Mullins, "Omnisubjectivity and the Problem of Creepy Emotions," for discussion). But one who questions whether perfect freedom should be ascribed to God would not be convinced that either of such strong versions of divine impassibility is theologically non-negotiable.

⁴⁰If self-creation is necessary for freedom or moral responsibility, as argued by Galen Strawson ("The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility"), then a very quick argument for atheism would follow.

⁴¹This point is in keeping with Draper's model (see section 3 above).

⁴²Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 27.

- (III) Possessing libertarian freedom is required for having significant freedom.
- (IV) Significant freedom is required for maximal praise/thank-worthiness.
- (V) So, God can be maximally praise/thank-worthy on Draper's model, but not on the BPM.

We can understand the requirements for libertarian freedom in a stronger or a weaker sense. I will argue that on the weaker reading (I) is false, while on the stronger reading either (III) or (IV) is not justified if God's hard choices must be arbitrary on Draper's model.

If libertarian freedom is simply freedom from causal determination by anything outside of the agent, so that being the ultimate cause of one's action is sufficient for libertarian freedom, then this can be accommodated by the BPM, as the argument of the last section shows. Compatibilists may defend a conditional version of alternative possibilities on which an agent could have done otherwise just in case both the agent would have acted differently if it had possessed different desires and the agent could have had different desires. Yet libertarians are understandably unconvinced by such an account when it is applied to human action since if determinism is true, the agent would have had different desires only if conditions external to the agent had been different. However, in the case of divine action, God's having aesthetic preferences, for instance, would not have been dependent on anything external to God. Thus, a conditional account of alternative possibilities may be more palatable to libertarians when applied to divine action than to human action.⁴³ So, on this weak account of libertarianism, nothing outside of God is ultimately responsible for God's acts and God has alternative possibilities (including those between morally better and worse options) in the conditional sense. If this is enough for libertarian freedom, then BPM is compatible with libertarian freedom, and so (I) is false.⁴⁴

⁴³Senor, "A Defense of Divine Freedom," 182–184, defends a similar position. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 147, argues that an ability to do otherwise is required for being worthy of praise or blame and seems to equate this ability with a lack of an external determining cause: "a man is only to be blamed for his actions if in the circumstances he could have done otherwise, if he was the ultimate source of things happening as they did." Applying this account to God, as Swinburne does, gives us an even weaker conditional sense of alternative possibilities, since God's essential moral perfection means that God could not possibly want to do other than what is morally best.

⁴⁴Stump, "Libertarian Freedom and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities," has defended such a version of libertarianism. For similar approaches to divine freedom see e.g. Fales, "Divine Freedom and the Choice of a World"; Mawson, "Freedom, Human and Divine"; Pruss, "The Essential Divine-perfection Objection to the Free-will Defense"; Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 182–184; Talbott, "God, Freedom, and Human Agency"; Timpe, "God's Freedom, God's Character"; Timpe, "The Best Thing in Life is Free"; Wierenga, "The Freedom of God." Bergmann and Cover, "Divine Responsibility without Divine Freedom," defend a similar view about divine responsibility (see Rowe, *Can God be Free?*; Morrision, "Can God be Free?"; Howard-Snyder, "Divine Freedom," for objections). Also, it is noteworthy that, as I have described the BPM, it is compatible with event-causal, non-causal, and agent-causal versions of libertarianism.

Nevertheless, if libertarian freedom requires a stronger (unconditional) version of alternative possibilities, then there is a sense of libertarian freedom which Draper's model can accommodate but it seems the BPM cannot. Perhaps God has libertarian freedom only if God faces choices between two or more options and a full description of God's intrinsic properties and the circumstances God is in logically prior to the choice does not necessitate which option God will choose. From this it would follow that there are at least two possible worlds such that God takes the first option in one world and the second option in the other and these worlds are intrinsically indistinguishable prior to God's choice. On Draper's model, God has libertarian freedom in this sense because when God faces hard choices nothing necessitates whether God chooses the morally best or the non-morally best option. But one might think that God cannot have this kind of libertarian freedom on the BPM. When facing a hard choice, God's objective reasons do not give God a motive to choose one option rather than the other, but God's possession of a brute preference for one provides a motive not derived from the objective reasons alone. So, when facing a hard choice between a morally best and an aesthetically best option, and given that God has a brute preference for the morally best and no brute preference at least as strong for the aesthetically best, there is no possible world (posterior to God's possession of that brute preference) in which God chooses the aesthetically best option, although there are possible worlds in which that same being has different brute preferences and so chooses differently.⁴⁵

I do not think this difference regarding the strong sense of libertarianism tips the scales in favor of Draper's model because of the arbitrariness involved in such choices. If God's perfect freedom necessitates that any such strong libertarian choices God makes, including hard choices, are arbitrary, then such freedom does not seem to enhance God's control over the way the world is. Furthermore, consider Draper's own comments about divine arbitrary choice. On Swinburne's model, it is possible for God to have libertarian freedom in the strong sense just in contexts that are not morally significant, such as when faced with options that are equally morally best, yet the choice between these would have to be arbitrary. However, Draper argues that the God of his model, facing morally significant hard choices, would have greater autonomy:

Such a God would have a great deal more autonomy than, for example, a God who is constrained by reasons to perform only a single act of will, namely, actualizing the possible world that She knows to be better than any other possible world that She can actualize. Such a God would also have

⁴⁵Perhaps a version of the BPM could hold that God's brute desires merely incline without necessitating even in parity cases. A brute preference for the moral would raise the probability of God's choosing that option in a hard choice, without necessitating it, and arguably this gives us a contrastive explanation. If this move is successful, the BPM would be compatible with strong libertarianism, but in what follows I will assume that it fails and argue that the BPM is nonetheless preferable to Draper's model.

greater autonomy than a God who performs multiple distinct acts of will, *but only because She sometimes makes arbitrary choices between options that are equally good overall.*⁴⁶

Draper also argues that one who chooses “deliberately (*as opposed to randomly or arbitrarily*)” to benefit you in a hard choice scenario when they could have done otherwise is more praiseworthy than one who picks the same option out of the necessity of its nature.⁴⁷ If I am right that Draper’s God can only make hard choices arbitrarily, then just as the arbitrariness of choices between equally morally best options diminishes God’s autonomy on Swinburne’s model, so the arbitrariness of God’s hard choices on Draper’s model would diminish God’s autonomy.

Thus, a model that ascribes libertarian freedom in the strong sense to God, but on which such choices are made arbitrarily, does not seem preferable to an account of divine freedom on which God has libertarian freedom in all but the strong sense, but on which God does not make arbitrary choices. So, if we take (III) to require possessing libertarian freedom in the strong sense in order to have significant freedom (as we must to make (I) true), then there is good reason to think (IV) is false; significant freedom is not necessary for maximal praise/thank-worthiness. I think it is better to reject the strong libertarian reading of (III) and allow that God can have significant freedom because God is the ultimate cause of God’s action and God’s nature does not necessitate that God always chooses the morally best.

Swinburne’s model, Draper’s model, and the BPM all hold that God is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly rational. All three hold that God is free from external causal forces and from irrational preferences, but Swinburne and Draper add that God is “perfectly free” because God also has no brute, non-rational preferences. I have responded that possession of brute preferences that are non-rational, rather than irrational, does not diminish God’s autonomy. God is morally perfect on all three views, but only for Swinburne is this entailed by God’s essential properties. So, God can have morally significant freedom only on Draper’s model and the BPM. Draper’s model alone seems able to afford God morally significant freedom in the strong libertarian sense (although see n. 45), but I have argued that this does not favor Draper’s model because God can make only arbitrary choices with such freedom. God can make morally significant free choices in the weak libertarian sense on the BPM, but this model allows God to make such choices from motivations that are non-arbitrary and thus more praiseworthy or thankworthy than the motivations of Draper’s God. Thus, we have good reason to prefer the BPM to Draper’s model.

⁴⁶Draper, “What If God Makes Hard Choices?,” 26, emphasis added.

⁴⁷Draper, “What If God Makes Hard Choices?,” 28, emphasis added.

9. *Hard Choices and Natural Theology*

Nevertheless, a probabilistic problem for theism that follows from Draper's model also applies to the BPM. Recall that Draper's project has two parts: first, to develop a version of theism that best fits what we think is required for a being to count as God and second, to assess how well this account of theism fares in the project of natural theology. Draper argues that his model, while giving a conception of God superior to competing accounts, leads to a problem for those seeking to defend theism through natural theological arguments.

We have seen that, on Swinburne's model, omniscience and perfect freedom are jointly sufficient for perfect rationality and perfect rationality is sufficient for moral perfection. It follows that there is no probability space open for quasi-theistic competitors to theism that posit an omniscient and perfectly free being that is, say, morally indifferent or evil. However, since Draper rejects the move from perfect rationality to moral perfection, on his model:

[T]here are a whole host of supernaturalist alternatives to theism that are just as simple as theism is. These alternatives involve deities that have all the properties God has except they are not morally perfect: when they face hard choices they do not always do what is morally best.⁴⁸

This is a problem for theism because the presence of these epistemically possible alternative hypotheses makes theism less intrinsically probable on Draper's model than on Swinburne's.⁴⁹ Furthermore, facts that are well explained by theism might be equally well explained (or better explained) by a quasi-theistic rival to theism. For instance, consider "aesthetic deism," which posits a being like the God of theism except that when facing hard choices it would choose the options that produce more beauty or drama over those that would have the morally best outcomes.⁵⁰ (On a BPM the deity of aesthetic deism would have brute aesthetic preferences and on Draper's model, if my argument above is correct, it would either always arbitrarily choose what is aesthetically best rather than what is morally best or it would make one arbitrary choice to be aesthetically perfect rather than morally perfect.) Aesthetic deism would seem to have no less explanatory power than theism and, Draper argues, "it explains the pattern of good and evil in the world much better than theism does."⁵¹

⁴⁸Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 30.

⁴⁹On the notions of intrinsic probability at work here, see, e.g., Swinburne, *Simplicity as Evidence of Truth*; Draper, "Simplicity and Natural Theology." All of the views we are considering hold that objective reasons are intrinsically motivating. So, while theism fares best on Swinburne's model, it is better off on Draper's model and on strict or lenient rationalist BPM than on a Humean BPM (see my n. 27 above).

⁵⁰Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 30.

⁵¹Draper, "What If God Makes Hard Choices?," 30. Draper, "Evil and the God of Abraham, Anselm, and Murphy" and "Atheism and Agnosticism" give more detailed accounts of aesthetic deism.

However, if it is true that God must face hard choices, this would lead to an argument like Draper's against theism even on the BPM. If God does not face morally significant hard choices (because moral reasons are overriding, as Swinburne thinks), then, on a BPM, although ascribing brute preferences to God would open the door to God's having many possible motives, these preferences would always be constrained by God's judgments about what is morally best. So, if God has aesthetic preferences, aesthetic reasons would only get to play a role in God's decision making when choosing between options where one is no better supported by the moral reasons than the other. On the other hand, if a being like God but with aesthetic preferences does face morally significant hard choices, then these aesthetic preferences would lead it to choose against the morally best option when moral and aesthetic reasons are on a par. So, as on Draper's model, the BPM would allow for supernaturalist alternatives to theism, such as aesthetic deism, the presence of which would lower the intrinsic probability of theism and which may have better explanatory power than theism. This means that there is a probabilistic problem for theism if God would face morally significant hard choices whether we accept Draper's model of God's agency or the BPM.⁵²

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