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THE DIVINE NATURE

PERSONAL AND A-PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

Edited by Simon Kittle and Georg Gasser

The Divine Nature

> **"I'm deeply convinced that this book will make an important contribution to recent debates concerning models of God and theories on the God-world-relationship. Highly recommended."**
>
> – *Matthias Remenyi, University of Würzburg, Germany*

This book is the first systematic treatment of the strengths and limitations of personal and a-personal conceptions of the divine. It features contributions from Jewish, Islamic, Chinese, Indian and naturalistic backgrounds in addition to those working within a decidedly Christian framework.

This book discusses whether the concept of God in classical theism is coherent at all and whether the traditional understanding of some of the divine attributes need to be modified. The contributors explore what the proposed spiritual and practical merits and demerits of personal and a-personal conceptions of God might be. Additionally, their diverse perspectives reflect a broader trend within the analytic philosophy of religion to incorporate various non-Western religious traditions. Tackling these issues carefully is needed to do justice to the strengths and limitations of personal and a-personal accounts to the divine.

The Divine Nature: Personal and A-Personal Perspectives will be of interest to scholars and advanced students working in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology.

Simon Kittle is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. His primary interests are the topics of human agency and free will, and questions connected with that topic.

Georg Gasser is Professor for Philosophy at Augsburg University, Germany, and the main editor of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. Georg received his Ph.D. from Innsbruck University and his habilitation from the Munich School of Philosophy. Georg's scholarly work addresses topics in personal identity, the ontology of the human person, philosophical theology and the metaphysics of resurrection.

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The Divine Nature

Personal and A-Personal Perspectives

Edited by Simon Kittle
and Georg Gasser

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1 Introduction

Thinking about Personal and A-Personal Aspects of the Divine

Simon Kittle and Georg Gasser

1.1 Getting Our Bearings

What is God like? What, or who, is the Divine? What is the nature of ultimate reality or the Absolute? Is God a person? Is the Divine personal? There are no simple answers to these questions. One might think that, to some approximation of the truth, monotheistic faiths such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam straightforwardly affirm that God is personal while non-theistic faiths typically hold that the Absolute (if such be recognised) is a-personal or impersonal (perhaps with the caveat that polytheistic faiths provide a more complex answer depending on the deity in question). Unfortunately, this picture – and no doubt any such summary statement – is far too simplistic. Huw Owen observed that 'the word "God" and its equivalents in other languages have been used in a bewildering variety of senses' (Owen 1971: vii). And it is not just that the word 'God' is used in a 'bewildering variety of senses' across different religions. There is also much diversity within each religion. As Brian Davies makes explicit, even if we were to 'confine our attention to one [religious grouping]', such as Christians, 'we should not assume that they all understand [the term "God"] in the same sense' (Davies 2003: 1). And we should therefore not assume that any two adherents to the same religion mean the same thing by a statement such as 'God is personal'. Moreover, the problem is not just that religious adherents happen to disagree about *the meanings* of these words. Rather, there is a deeper problem in the vicinity concerning the wider approach to religious language. Any minimally reflective attempt to take seriously the idea of an ultimate reality to which it would be legitimate to apply terms such as 'God' or 'the Divine' will, before long, have to wrestle with the *sheer otherness* of God. And this is likely to lead right up to, if not over, 'the edge of words', to use the evocative phrase of Rowan Williams (2014). Put otherwise, there are prior questions about whether (and how) any words in a human language *could* manage to say anything positive about God at all. And differences of opinion on these prior questions feed into disagreements about how a statement such as

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'God is personal' functions, which then puts constraints on how it is to be understood.

The difficulty noted above – namely, that serious reflection about God leads directly to 'the edge of words' – is perhaps one reason why, among the recent literature in philosophy of religion, one of 'the most striking disagreements is between those who regard the Divine reality as personal and those who do not' (Wainwright 2013: 3). The essays in this volume all deal with some aspect of the personal/a-personal question. They are classified into three groups: those that deal primarily with theoretical issues for a-personal conceptions of the Divine, those that deal with theoretical issues pertaining primarily to personal conceptions of the Divine, and those that address the implications for spiritual or religious practice of one or the other conception of the Divine. Due to the diversity of approaches adopted and topics covered in the essays herein, they will not be summarised in this introduction but will be left to speak for themselves. In order to help facilitate deeper engagement with the essays, the second half of this introductory essay provides a very brief sketch of some of the more prominent conceptions of the Divine or ultimate reality, focusing on the question of whether and to what degree they conceive of God as a person and/or (a-)personal, and what such assertions mean. To employ Owen's wonderful turn of phrase, the hope is that 'faith in theological metaphysics will be justified by its works' (Owen 1971: xi).

The importance of our topic is not something for which one needs to argue. The question of what God is like is second in importance (if at all) only to the question of whether there is a God. But as W. Jay Wood (2014: 1) points out, these two questions cannot be easily separated, since what it means (and whether it is true) to say 'God exists' or 'We believe in God' is affected in part by how God is understood. Thus, the questions of whether (and in what sense) God or the Divine is a person or is personal are, in virtue of being aspects of the larger question concerning what God is like, of the utmost intrinsic interest simply because they are questions about God. Charles Hartshorne puts the point like this: 'The theistic question … is not one more question, even the most important one. It is, on the fundamental level, and when all its implications are taken into account, the sole question' (Hartshorne 1962: 131).

It is also true that, precisely because of what it means to be God, the question is of the utmost derivative interest. The nature of ultimate reality and of the relationship between that Reality and the universe has ramifications for every aspect of created existence. Religious thinkers have long argued that the meaning of human life is determined by whether there is a God and what God is like (see Goetz 2013 for an overview). And the question of whether (and in what sense) God is personal is of particular importance to human beings because we are personal beings. Our existence as personal beings is central to all aspects of our lives, and our collective life together. And it is therefore of primary importance whether we as human beings might be able to relate to the Divine personally. Moreover, and to take the point a step further, if one thinks that being a person is central to what it is to be human, one might also think that human beings have certain 'religious needs' which are bound up with our existence as personal beings and which may only be met or satisfied by a Divine being of a personal nature (Owen 1971: 55, 63). This latter point is evidenced when proponents of a-personal concepts of the Divine argue that they can make sense of religious practices such as prayer (which *prima facie* appear to require a personal Divine subject) as opposed to simply abandoning such practices.

What, then, might it mean to conceive of God as personal? As a minimum, we might start with the idea that to conceive of the Divine as in some sense personal is to conceive of God as having (at least something analogous to) (i) some form of consciousness or experience, (ii) a mind, (iii) a will, and (iv) an intellect, and as capable of (at least something analogous to) (a) acting intentionally, (b) knowing, (c) relating to others, (d) loving others, and (e) conversing with others.

We do not mean to offer the first list as a *definition* of what it is to be personal, nor is the second offered as an exhaustive list of those activities of which personal beings are capable. Rather, the idea is that such properties and such activities are some of the main things people have in mind when they affirm that God is personal. In a recent book on the cognitive science of religion, Justin Barrett identifies items from each of the above-mentioned lists as making up part of *natural religion*, which is understood as 'the cultural expression of numerous natural tendencies' possessed by human beings everywhere that 'encourage belief in gods and related concepts and practices' (Barrett 2011: 131). What we want to suggest, however, is that the meaning of the 'personal' *should*, at least in the first instance, be connected to such properties and activities. As a rough start, to the degree to which a given concept of God affirms that God possesses these properties or engages in these activities, to that degree is God conceived of as personal. Of course, each of the above properties or activities may be understood in a diversity of ways. And it may be argued that God can be understood as personal even if God lacks one or more of the above properties or does not engage in some of the above activities. And that may well be correct. But those observations do not undermine the thought that statements such as 'God is personal', 'God wills *X*' (for some *X*), and 'God loves the world' must bear at least some connection to how the terms 'personal', 'wills', and 'loves' are used when not applied to God, and this holds even if such statements employ analogical language. The degree to which such statements become disconnected from their ordinary meaning will be the degree to which the meaning of assertions such as 'God loves the world' or 'God forgives my sins' become opaque.

1.2 The Personal and/or A-Personal Nature of the Divine: A Brief Survey

1.2.1 Classical Theism

According to Charles Taliaferro et al., the term 'theism' was coined in the 17th century by Ralph Cudworth who used it to refer to 'the philosophy of God, according to which God is the Creator and sustainer of the cosmos, all good, omnipresent, eternal or everlasting, omnipotent, omniscient, existing necessarily (or existing *a se*), and provident' (Taliaferro *et al.* 2013: 1). We will follow Cudworth in that usage. And we will understand by 'classical theism' that version of theism which is common to thinkers such as Ibn Sina (c. 980–1037; Latinised as Avicenna) in the Islamic tradition, Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204; often known in English as Maimonides) in the Jewish tradition, and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) in the Christian tradition. John Cooper characterises classical theism as follows:

> [C]lassical theism asserts that God is transcendent, self-sufficient, eternal, and immutable in relation to the world; thus he does not change through time and is not affected by his relation to his creatures.
>
> (Cooper 2006: 14)

As understood here, then, 'far more central to' classical theism than the so-called omni-properties (omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence) are the doctrines of 'Divine simplicity, eternity, immutability and impassibility' (Williams 2011: 96). These are what mark out classical theism from other versions of theism. In brief, the doctrine of Divine simplicity states that there is no sense in which God has parts or God is composite. This includes the assertion that God does not have any properties that are distinct from God. Thus, for classical theists, if it is correct to affirm that 'God is good', God's goodness is not distinct from God but just is God – similarly for God's knowledge, God's will, and so on. The doctrine of Divine eternity means that God has no temporal parts or properties: God exists 'outside' of time or atemporally. As Thomas Williams sees it, this means the Divine life 'is not characterized by succession at all' (Williams 2011: 96). Divine immutability means that God is unchangeable. And closely related to Divine immutability is the doctrine of Divine impassibility, which at a first pass states that 'God cannot be acted upon by anything outside himself' (Williams 2011: 96).

As Davies sees it, for classical theists, 'God is primarily the Creator. God is … causally responsible for the existence of everything other than himself' (Davies 2003: 2). Classical theists take God as Creator to mean that everything other than God is radically dependent on God for its entire existence at every moment at which it exists. Although it may not be immediately apparent, prioritising God's role as Creator has wide-ranging implications for the question of whether (and in what sense) God is personal and/or a-personal. To begin with, some classical theists maintain that if God is (and must be) the Creator and sustainer of all that exists which is not God, then it is impossible for God to intervene in the universe. As Herbert McCabe, a prominent proponent of classical theism, explains, God cannot interfere in the universe because to interfere 'you have to be an alternative to, or alongside, what you are interfering in' (McCabe 1987: 6). Similarly, Davies states, 'You cannot intervene in what you are doing yourself. And, say classical theists, God cannot literally intervene in his own created order' (Davies 2003: 4).

The doctrines of Divine eternity and Divine immutability are also relevant to the issue of whether God is a person or in some sense personal. Since God is 'outside' of time or atemporal, God is immutable: God cannot change. Classical theists understand this in a very strong sense. It is not just that God's *nature* or *essence* does not change, but that God is subject to no change whatsoever. For at least some classical theists, this means that God is not even subject to what philosophers call *mere Cambridge change*, which is the change some entity undergoes when something external to it alters the relational descriptions which can be truly said of it; for example, when Sally goes from being the tallest person in her family to being the second tallest because brother has grown taller than her while Sally's own height remained constant, Sally undergoes a *mere Cambridge change* because Sally has not changed in and of herself.

Paul Helm, a proponent of classical theism, states that God cannot undergo even Cambridge change: '[T]he creator is immutable to the extent that he does not have even "merely Cambridge" temporal and spatial relations with any other substances much less real changes' (Helm 2010: 20). This idea has a venerable history. Aquinas, for example, says that creatures cannot say anything about the very essence of God's substance, and neither can creatures attribute to God some accidental property, since there are no accidental properties in God (Aquinas 1905: Bk 2, Ch 12). How then should we understand a statement such as 'God is Lord'? This statement seems to be about God: it seems to posit the existence of a Lordship relation which holds between God and the human being. As we've seen, Aquinas denies this relation can have any basis in God. And apparently sensitive to the worry that if this relation had a basis extrinsic to God that would still be enough to make God subject to change and thus put God in time, Aquinas also denies that this relation has any basis *extrinsic* to God: 'It is impossible therefore for the relations, whereby God has relation to the creature, to be anything outside God' (Aquinas 1905: Bk 2, Ch 13). What then are these relations? They are nothing more than 'modes' of human thought (Aquinas 1905: Bk 2, Ch 13).

This idea – that God bears no real relations to creation – is a mainstay of classical theism. It derives ultimately from the conception of perfection that classical theists employ, which is based on the intuition that God must be immutable since (they hold) any change in God would either be for the better, implying God was not perfect initially, or for the worse, implying that God is no longer perfect. And because becoming related to any created entity would be a change, classical theists maintain that no 'created [entity] can cause God to change or be modified in any way': God bears no real relation to creation (Davies 2003: 5).

Once we are clear about the metaphysical picture of classical theism, we might doubt whether it is possible to affirm that God is a person or that God is in any sense personal. And indeed, the motivation behind many critiques of classical theism is the idea that, precisely because classical theism holds that God is simple, eternal, and immutable, it follows that God is static, unresponsive, and (at the very least) a-personal if not impersonal. Here is how Richard Swinburne puts the worry:

> If [...] God were immutable in the strong sense, he would be a very lifeless being. The God of the Hebrew Bible, in which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all have their roots, is pictured as bring in continual interaction with humans—humans sin, then God is angry, then humans repent, then God forgives them; humans ask God for this, then God gives them this, then they misuse it, then God takes it away; and so on. A totally immutable God is a lifeless God, not a God with whom one can have a personal relationship—as theists have normally claimed that one can have with God.
>
> (Swinburne 2016: 233)

And here is William Mann, a defender of classical theism, describing an objection often levelled specifically at the doctrine of Divine immutability:

> Perhaps the most fundamental objection to [the doctrine of divine immutability] is that an immutable being could not be a personal being, a being who intervenes in history, who cares for his creatures, who is aware of our sins and works for our redemption, who hears and answers our prayers, who consoles us in our grief, who inspires us in our joy. An immutable God would be a completely impassive God, uncomfortably akin to the textbook caricature of Aristotle's narcissistic unmoved mover.
>
> (Mann 1987: 254)

Many classical theists recognise that the metaphysics of classical theism makes it difficult to affirm that God is a person and/or God is personal. What do they say in response? While (once again) a succinct summary statement would be simplistic, since there are variations among classical theists in how the core tenets are understood, we can articulate some general contours. Some classical theists straightforwardly deny that God is a person and do not see this as a concession. Instead, they argue that since personhood requires embodiment (Thatcher 1985), membership of a kind (Davies 2003: 9), membership in a linguistic community (Hewitt 2019), finitude (Feser 2009; Hewitt 2019), or some other property that it would be unfitting to attribute to God, it would be most undesirable to have a theology according to which God was a person. Far from being something we try to affirm, God's being a person, when rightly understood, is something to be avoided. Others within the tradition of classical theism are less sanguine about the prospects of rejecting the idea that God is a person. For example, Mann defends the claim that God should be understood as an 'immutable person' (Mann 1987: 256). Brian Leftow construes God as atemporal and as a person (Leftow 1991: Ch 13). And Eleonore Stump, a classical theist in the Thomist tradition, appears to be sympathetic to the idea that God is a person, at least if the term 'person' is taken to mean 'something with both mind and will' (Stump 2016: 32). Moreover, wherever classical theists come down on the question of God's being *a person*, they do typically want to retain the language of God as *personal*. Adrian Thatcher (1985: 61) maintains that belief in a personal God 'is essential to the Christian faith' and this is not an uncommon position.

How, then, is the idea of God as personal upheld given the underlying metaphysics? Thatcher suggests that theists who hold that God is (e.g.) atemporal can make sense of the personal nature of the Divine by construing personal language about God as *symbolic* (Thatcher 1985: 61). And this is indicative of what may perhaps be the dominant approach to addressing these issues by classical theists, namely, insisting that all language about God is *analogical*. On the assumption that language about God is analogical, the envisaged problems can be avoided (so classical theists contend), by maintaining that the alleged incompatibility between some commitment of classical theism and a statement describing some personal aspect of God only arises given a presupposition of univocal predication.

A different approach involves tackling the perceived incompatibilities head-on by attempting to provide an explanation for why the incompatibility is only perceived, and not in fact a genuine incompatibility. This may involve explicating the Divine attributes such as simplicity, immutability, and so on, in more depth, or explicating the notion of what it is to be a person, or both. Very roughly, as much explanation is provided as is needed to show that classical theism is not incompatible with God's being personal, God's acting, and so on. One recent example of this approach is Stump (2016), who seeks to develop modified accounts of the classical Divine attributes which make it clear that these attributes pose no obstacle to construing God as personal.

1.2.2 Theistic Personalism

This section outlines *theistic personalism*. We draw the label 'theistic personalism' from Brian Davies (2003: 9–14), although our use is not identical to his. As we understand the position, theistic personalists hold that (i) that God should be conceived of as a person or (at the very least) as robustly personal and (ii) that classical theism cannot make sense of God's personal aspects. There is some disagreement among theistic personalists as to just which tenets of classical theism must be jettisoned to secure personal language about the Divine, but usually it is one or more of (the closely related doctrines): Divine atemporality, Divine immutability, Divine impassibility, and Divine simplicity. Understood like this, theistic personalism encompasses a wide variety of positions which differ a great deal in how they construe Divine properties such as omnipotence and omniscience. What they agree on is that Divine personhood is – or should be – central to our understanding of God. The following is typical theistic personalist's starting assumptions:

> According to the classical Christian and theistic view of God, *he is a person*. He is thus a being who has knowledge; he also has affections (he loves some things, hates others); he has ends and aims, and acts on the basis of his knowledge to achieve his ends.
>
> (Plantinga 2008: 370–371, our emphasis)

Put another way, theistic personalists take it as axiomatic that God is personal in some strong sense and/or that God is a person. In the words of Richard Swinburne: 'That God is a person, yet one without a body, seems the most elementary claim of theism' (Swinburne 2016: 104).

Theist personalists are concerned to secure personal language about God because, after all, such language is ubiquitous in most theistic religious traditions. Theists talk about God creating the world, delivering people from captivity, conversing with prophets, overturning injustice, being merciful, forgiving people from their sins, executing a just judgement, and so on. All of these activities seem to require a personal being who has beliefs and can act intentionally to bring about its purposes. And, as Thomas Morris frames the question:

> In what sense can properties of personal agency, purposes, intentions, beliefs, and attitudes be ascribed to a being who is also said to be incorporeal, eternal, and infinite? If God is [as] different from us in metaphysical status [as classical theism maintains], it is prima facie problematic how such ordinary properties as that of being knowledgeable or that of being powerful can be thought to apply to him. For if that aspect of deity we characterize as power and that aspect we refer to as knowledge are so very different from the power

> and knowledge enjoyed by human beings, it can appear that even to use such predicates in this unusual context is to twist language beyond what it can bear.
>
> (Morris 1987: 11)

Agreeing with this line of thought, theistic personalists typically construe at least some personal language about the Divine in univocal terms. Sometimes theistic personalists are explicit in 'proposing likely characteristics of the Divine person based on our experience of ourselves as persons' (Sayre 2010: 154) and in drawing strong conclusions from those characteristics. For example, personalists may reason that to be a person is to be capable of engaging in activity, and since *activity* is necessarily a temporal process, persons must be temporal. Therefore, God can be a person only if God is temporal. A similar argument concerning the very existence of God has been advanced by some process theists:

> Every actuality, including the divine actuality, must, at least in some sense, be somewhere at some point in time. To speak of an actuality without spatial and temporal thickness is to speak of a pure abstraction. If God is real, therefore, he too must, in some sense, be temporal and spatial.
>
> (Mellert 1977: 127)

In general, and as already hinted at, theistic personalists do not have a problem explaining how God *is a person* (or is personal). In taking the personal nature of God as primary, making sense of personal aspects of the Divine is unproblematic. What theistic personalists are often charged with is, if you like, the reverse problem: explaining how *God* is a person; put differently, it is sometimes suggested that theistic personalists struggle to explain how the being they describe is legitimately called 'God'. At this point, a distinct difference in emphasis between classical theists and theistic personalists can be discerned. Classical theists, as already observed, stress those aspects of personhood which seem to require finitude, such as embodiment, and which therefore (to their minds) rule out God's being a person. Theistic personalists, by contrast, stress those aspects of personhood – such as rational agency and free choice – which seem to allow persons some measure of transcendence (see, e.g., Patricia Sayre 2010: 151–152 useful survey of the position).

1.2.3 Motivating the Search for A-Personal Concepts of the Divine

In recent decades, one can observe an intensified discussion of a-personal conceptions of the Divine that are decidedly different from models conceiving of God as a person or as having some personal characteristics.

What are the major motivations for an increased interest in these concepts of Divine reality? We briefly discuss two: (i) the worry of a problematic anthropomorphic understanding of God and (ii) the problem of evil. We consider each problem in turn.

The worry of an anthropomorphic understanding of God is religiously motivated: if we grasp the Divine properties such as omnipotence, omniscience, or moral perfection by extrapolating from our understanding of what it is for ordinary (human) persons to be powerful, knowledgeable, or morally good, then we end up with a kind of superperson but not with God. A God whose attributes are conceived of by projecting our own capacities as rational and moral agents without any limitations is a God made in our image and as such an idol. McCabe, for instance, writes that a God understood as exhibiting typical – albeit positive – human attitudes such as 'suffering in sympathy with creation […] can be seen as a kind of idolatry' (McCabe 1987: 1). There is an essential difference between a finite being, which thanks to our imaginative faculty is extended further and further towards infinity, and an essentially infinite being by its own nature.

The concern that the problem of evil is in a precarious tension with the assumption that the theistic God exists is, instead, ethically motivated. Take, for instance, Marilyn McCord Adams' notion of *horrendous evils*. She understands horrendous evils as prima facie life ruinous, that is, it is doubtful whether someone experiencing such evils is able to see his/her life as a 'great good to him/her on the whole' (Adams 1999: 26). Even if we assume that it is within the right of God to permit such evils or that God is ultimately able to defeat and transform them into something good, there still lurk the questions of whether and how God means to be good to us after such horrific things have already happened. John Bishop and Ken Perszyk press this point by arguing that if the theist God exists, this is likely to make God ultimately causally responsible for all horrendous evils since God is the Creator and sustainer of all reality (Bishop & Perszyk 2016: 109–110). If so, then even if God will finally bring participants in those evils into the joy of an eternal and intimate Divine relationship, God still has to engage with the consequences of these evils. One such consequence might be that it is hard to conceive of a God who allows such horrors by creating us in a world like this, as ultimately trustworthy and as a loving parent or close friend. God's overall relationship to human persons would necessarily be defective if God creates a world with horrendous evils and then redeems us from them in a second step.

At this point, one might claim that these challenges properly apply only to theistic personalism and not to classical theism. However, one has to bear in mind that even those proponents of classical theism who deny that God is a person nevertheless attempt to retain the idea that God is in some sense personal. As such, it is a problem for both camps.

Moreover, it is precisely the theistic commitment to there being some personal aspects of the Divine that nourishes a third motivation for alternative concepts of God, namely, the suspicion that the attribution of personal aspects in any metaphysically robust sense is incompatible with central Divine attributes of classical theism such as immutability, simplicity, or aseity. This is why Perszyk comments that many classical theists 'end up with a very stretched or thin sense of "personhood", and I think they would do better to reject the idea that God is literally a person' (Perszyk 2018: 101). Those who agree with this assessment may continue to use a personalistic use of language in relation to God but should be explicit in stating that this use of language has no realist-literal implications. A strict interpretation of classical theism might therefore well come close to non-personal concepts of God. We will now discuss two such concepts that figure prominently in the current debate and this collection of papers – the euteleological and axiarchic conceptions of the Divine.

1.2.4 The Euteleological Conception of the Divine

One may take as point of departure for an euteleological understanding of the Divine the idea that the universe exists because it is directed towards an ultimate purpose – God. In classical theism, God is conceived of as the ultimate 'telos' or final cause of creation as, for instance, Thomas Aquinas argues in his famous fifth way. From an euteleological perspective, reality is inherently directed towards the realisation of its final cause, which is identified with supreme goodness but this final cause is neither a Creator distinct from creation nor anything that has been established by a Creator. Supreme goodness as ultimate end of creation is something inherent in reality; it is brought about by reality itself and not by anything different from it. Therein lies the ultimate reason why reality exists: so that the supreme good can be realised. How can we imagine the supreme good? What does it consist of? The answers to these questions are likely to vary according to religious tradition. Against the background of a Christian interpretation, it could be said that the supreme good consists in the realisation of that attitude which the New Testament calls *agapé*: we are to love and meet one another as loving parents meet their children, and as this form of unselfish and inclusive love has become manifest particularly in Jesus Christ (Bishop & Perszyk 2017: 613).

At this point, further elaboration of the notion of *bringing about* or *producing* is in order. In what way should we understand the idea that reality itself brings about *agapé*-love as supreme good and thereby realises its inherent final purpose? To answer this question, the first step is to widen the modern narrowing of the concept of causality to efficient causation: as long as we think of causation in terms of a cause bringing about an effect, we will have a hard time developing a coherent euteleological understanding of reality. Once causal pluralism is accepted, however, things change. One – though in modern times not very popular causal understanding – is Platonic axiarchism (Leslie 1970). It claims that the universe's existence is due to its being good that it should exist. Thus, the universe's existence is explained by the very fact that concrete instances of the supreme good are realised. It is good that the universe exists because only due to its existence are instances of the supreme good realised as well. It is because of this purpose that the universe exists at all.

Consequently, the Divine is at the same time the final and efficient cause of the universe. In contrast to traditional theist understandings of reality, however, this orientation towards the good is not due to a Divine Creator who is different from reality but is instead grounded in the structures of reality itself. This point is crucial for an adequate understanding of the euteleological concept of the Divine, since a special metaphysical realm of the Divine in radical difference to the realm of all creation is explicitly rejected in favour of a monistic worldview. The universe exists *ex nihilo* not because of a supernatural agent but because of the axiological structure inherent in the universe, which has the realisation of the supreme good as its ultimate telos and which is as such also the first cause for the existence of the universe. Within this picture, the Divine is not to be equated with the universe itself (in the manner of pantheism) but is both transcendent to and immanent in the universe: the Divine transcends the universe insofar as the Divine is the yet-to-be-realised ultimate telos of reality which represents the supreme good to which everything is oriented. However, the Divine is also immanent because it is realised as *agapé*-love from time to time in the here and now, and finally, if the ultimate telos of the universe is truly realised, then the Divine is this final stage of the universe's development. Bishop and Perszyk underscore this point:

> It is thus essential to the ontological priority of the divine on the euteleological conception that particular instantiations or incarnations of it do not exhaust the divine—though that there are such incarnations is necessary, since the actuality of the Universe cannot be explained as existing to realize its *telos* if its *telos* were not actually realized. But the divine transcends its particular manifestations through its status as all-encompassing reality existing for the sake of, and only because of, the realization of love, the supreme good.
> (Bishop & Perszyk 2016: 121)

Euteleology may sound dialectically obscure, if not openly incoherent, to ears familiar with traditional theistic conceptions. However, it is worth recalling that there is also interesting evidence that similar discussions have been conducted in the wake of Hegel's philosophy of religion in idealistic-theological circles (Schärtl 2019). We cannot go into these debates here but the reference highlights that while an euteleological conception may seem unfamiliar to those raised in modern analytic oriented frameworks it should not therefore be excluded as a serious option at the table of discussion about adequate conceptions of the Divine.

Any adequate conception of the Divine must not only respect fundamental rational requirements such as consistency and coherence but also 'religious "fitness to purpose"'(Bishop & Perszyk 2017: 615). We will limit ourselves to the brief discussion of two such reconstructions – omnipotence and moral perfection.

The first is omnipotence. Since the euteleological concept of God has no personal characteristics, talk of Divine knowledge, rationality, and free will does not apply. What in personal concepts of God is thought of as the Divine will therefore consist in an inherent teleological orientation towards the supreme good. For proponents of a euteleological conception of the Divine, this inherent teleological orientation can be described as free insofar as the actual course of the universe towards its telos is not predetermined but there exist many different, contingent courses towards this telos at every moment. One structural parallel of this proposed concept might be the thesis of physical intentionality discussed in the contemporary metaphysics of dispositions. This is the idea that certain natural dispositions share the essential marks of intentionality attributed to thoughts – in particular being directed towards a certain state of affairs (e.g., Bauer 2016; Heil 2003; Molnar 2003).

Consider now moral perfection. Within an euteleological interpretation of the universe, evils can neither directly nor indirectly be attributed to a personal Creator and director of the universe because there is none. However, insofar as everything that exists can be described as being directed towards the supreme good and as such falling within the realm of the Divine, all instances of evil in the world also fall within this realm. The existence of evil in the world shows the failure of achieving the supreme good as ultimate telos in a specific way: someone committing great evil exists in the first instance because of the realisation of the ultimate good. The fact that this person does not strive for the good but perpetrates great injustice and suffering demonstrates the sharp contrast with the euteleological orientation of the universe as its primary and ultimate purpose. It shows in terms of a privation theory of evil that evils in the world are the most striking expression of how the inherent telos of the universe can be perverted from a lack of being good.

The notion of purpose is undoubtedly embedded first of all in personal contexts of action. However, anyone who takes seriously the idea of a natural-intrinsic orientation of the universe towards a telos – and such an idea is by no means absurd, as the debates on intentionality in dispositional realism show – is also in a position to understand and motivate adherence to unconditional love for another person as the ultimate purpose of human existence despite injustice, suffering, or danger. In such acts of agapeic love, the axiological final and efficient cause of the universe manifests itself most clearly.

1.2.5 A-Personal Axiarchism

Why anything exists at all is among the most fundamental philosophical questions. It is not merely a philosophical question, but a deeply existential one, and one that touches the very core of being human. Derek Parfit puts it this way:

> Even if these questions could not have answers, they would still make sense, and they would still be worth considering. Such thoughts take us into the aesthetic category of the sublime, which applies to the highest mountains, raging oceans, the night sky, the interiors of some cathedrals, and other things that are superhuman, awesome, limitless. No question is more sublime than why there is a Universe: why there is anything rather than nothing.
>
> (Parfit 2011: 624)

The theistic response to this question is well-known: God is the ultimate cause of all that exists and God has created it because it is good. A Platonic inspired alternative to this view is axiarchism as defended by contemporary philosophers such as John Leslie, Nicholas Rescher, and Derek Parfit. The basic thesis of axiarchism is that this universe exists because its existence is good, or good enough, under axiological consideration, and what is good enough that it should exist, will also exist. A possible good state of affairs goes hand in hand with the axiological demand of its realisation, since its existence constitutes a good. Thus, axiarchism poses a direct link between goodness and being. It is not the natural realm but the axiological realm which explains why anything exists at all: the world exists because it normatively ought to.

Central for a proper understanding of axiarchism is the question of what sense of 'because' is employed in axiarchic thinking when the claim is made the world exists because it should exist due to its goodness. The 'because' marks direct efficiency (Leslie 2016: 54) which, however, ought less to be thought of in terms of causal efficiency but rather analogously to a logical relationship (Leslie 1970: 293–294). For example, an object that has a certain shape also has a certain size. The shape of the object does not bring about this size, but shape and size are logically dependent on each other. Axiarchism, by analogy, sees a link between the axiological dimension of reality and the existence of reality.

Does such an answer make any sense? Does not this theory sound completely crazy? How can a normative demand *give rise to* the existence of the universe? Leslie is aware that this reaction is to be expected in many cases but points out that any answer to the fundamental question of why something exists at all and not rather nothing will always have to refer in its fundamentality to inexplicable brute facts. He writes,

> Uncomfortably, any creation story must contain features to be taken on trust. One can make the entire cosmos such a feature, theorizing that there is no cause for its presence. Alternatively, ethical requirements may provide a cause; but their alleged effectiveness must be in part inexplicable.
>
> (Leslie 1970: 292)

A little later he goes on:

> … I am not proclaiming that axiarchist reasoning lacks force; only that rationality does not compel acceptance of its force. Properly developed, it *is* reasoning, not a pun on 'necessity', but reasoning whose principles come with the apology: these persuade me, and might persuade you.
>
> (Leslie 1970: 292)

In view of such a situation – which is not surprising with regard to fundamental philosophical interpretations of reality – the obvious task of the respective representatives of line of interpretation is to demonstrate its plausibility, as well as its possibility. For this purpose, representatives of axiarchism use various analogies (for an overview, see Mulgan 2017). A first analogy refers to theistic approaches, which explain the existence of God, among other things, by the fact that God is perfect. Such an explanation alludes to the axiarchic idea that perfection includes existence. Analogously, it can be said that the best of all possible worlds or all possible worlds that have a certain axiological 'value' also include their existence. A second analogy refers to the axiological dimension of scientific-theoretical considerations. We prefer simple and elegant theories, speak of the beauty of a theory, and tend to regard these features as indications of the truth of a theory. Such a theory can only be true in a realist sense if the reality to which it applies is also simple, elegant, and beautiful. In addition, a universe structured in such a regular and ordered way that it allows the existence of intelligent beings able to understand and appreciate these features of reality is evidence for the axiarchic view that such universes should rather exist than disordered and chaotic ones (Rescher 2010: Ch. 10).

A third analogy relates to logic. Certain properties logically imply other properties, such as when the property of *being a square* implies that the four sides of a square are equal in length. By analogy, it can be argued that what is intrinsically good should exist, while what is intrinsically bad should not. This normative 'rule' applies in all possible worlds and narrows down the range of real worlds to those that are also good enough to exist under axiological consideration. Parfit has introduced the notion of a *selector* for highlighting this fact: a feature of a possible world is a selector if it is able to explain why it is actual (Parfit 2011: 637–639). Selectors are a kind of filter which let only those possible worlds become actual which reach a certain axiological threshold justifying existence.

These explanations of axiarchism should suffice to show that while this position may sound quite unfamiliar for contemporaries, it is certainly a possible answer to the question of why the universe exists. Of course, it is one thing to be a logical possibility and another thing that this logical possibility is also likely to be true. Thus, the next relevant question is whether axiarchism is not a too extravagant explanation. We would like to make two brief points relevant to assessment of this question.

First, it has to be kept in mind that axiarchism has a long philosophical history dating back to Plato and Plotinus and having deeply influenced Christian Neoplatonic thinkers such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and John Scotus Eriugena. Thus, the core idea of axiarchicism, namely, that goodness implies existence, may sound strange to modern ears simply because we are used to drawing a sharp distinction between the normative and the natural and we tend to see normative issues as inherently subjective relative. However, there is no need to take this as the last word as, for instance, recent meta-ethical debates on the metaphysics of non-natural objective values indicate. Once a robust metaphysics of non-natural values and normative facts is established as alternative to moral naturalistic and anti-realistic accounts (e.g., Cuneo & Shafer-Landau 2014), the assumption that these values not only exist alongside natural states of affairs but also have an inherently actualising aspect for the natural realm becomes easier to accept.

Second, Richard Swinburne is one of the few proponents of theism directly addressing axiarchism. He criticises the position by suggesting that it does not fall under the general explanatory approaches we use for understanding reality, that is, either causal or personal explanations (Swinburne 2004: 47, fn. 16). We use causal explanations for natural processes, while we explain the behaviour of rational beings in a personal, reason giving manner. Thanks to these explanatory accounts, we are able to deal successfully with reality. To the question of why this universe exists, we can give a causal or a personal/reasons explanation, depending on whether one is leaning towards naturalism or theism. The problem with axiarchism, as Swinburne sees it, is that it employs neither a causal nor a personal explanatory account and therefore its explanatory force is less than that of the mentioned alternatives.

However, one may point out that we are seeking an answer to a question which is distinctive and extraordinary, because it is not directed towards certain features of reality but towards the whole of reality. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the answer itself might be distinctive or extraordinary in some way. A theist's answer is extraordinary as well if, for instance, it is claimed that God as ultimate cause is simple, immutable, and eternal. In addition, as previously indicated, axiarchism has a respectable history in Western philosophy and therefore a strong feeling of unfamiliarity in modern times may be due to the fact that we are simply not as familiar with Platonic-inspired thought as much as philosophers of previous generations were. In the light of these considerations, it can thus be assumed that axiarchism deserves a rightful place at the table in serious discussions of ultimate explanations of reality's existence.

1.2.6 Adequate Alternatives to Theism?

We would like to conclude our thoughts by addressing the question of whether an euteleological or an axiarchic account of reality is able to provide the resources that are usually attributed to theism. In particular, we focus here on that mainstay of theistic thought which is that God is the saviour and redeemer of humankind. For the theist, God plays a special role in the life of a believer, a role which is both salvific and redemptive: God is the one who wipes away every tear (Rev 21:4) and is the judge of all people (Ps 7:8).

Within euteleological and axiarchic accounts of ultimate reality, the axiological dimension of the universe takes the place of God. It grounds the hope that the universe is good because its goodness is the reason for its existence. Therefore, so the thought goes, one can realistically have the hope that the universe is structured in such a way that good will triumph over evil. Moreover, proponents of these accounts suggest that, because of this hope, an unconditional adherence to values such as mercy, tolerance, or *agapé*-love is coherent and justified, despite all the evils in the world. A good human life committed to these values thus does not become meaningless in the face of suffering, finitude, and death. The essential role of a non-personal concept of God is its normative function in justifying adherence to such ethical ideals, since it makes the realisation of these ideals seem likely. Talk about hope for redemption and justice is thus explicated to the effect that adherence to ethical ideals has a realistic chance of being actualised. The good news is that we do not find ourselves in a world that permanently undermines the realisation of these ideals through structures of reality that are intrinsically adverse to them. Even if, in the end, individual compensation for the evil suffered in one's life cannot always be banked on, given a euteleological or axiarchic conception of God, we are justified in holding on to these ideals and striving for them, since reality is ordered towards their realisation as ultimate purpose. Optimism is appropriate given that at some point, this purpose will be (fully/partially) achieved. Such an interpretation of reality does seem like it can give hope. Of course, it does not offer a comprehensive answer to the problem of evil, but which account of ultimate reality does? And these a-personal views have some clear advantages: since no personal categories are applicable here, the question of the moral justification of evils does not arise as sharply as with theism. Thus, we conclude that a-personal conceptions of the Divine can present an attractive religious interpretation of reality, one which will likely be especially appealing to those who find themselves unable to believe in a conception of God as presented in the theistic tradition.

It will be clear from the above that the differences between classical theists, theistic personalists, and proponents of euteleological and a-personal axiarchic conceptions of the Divine are, to use Davies's words, 'both complex and far-reaching', with the result that 'if you want to take sides, you are going to have to do a lot of work' (Davies 2003: 15). Some empirical studies from the social sciences suggest that this work is not just an academic glass bead game: we are in a time where the religious self-understandings of many, at least in the West, are changing rapidly; traditional religious ideas are now frequently found to be wanting; and religious pluralism is on the increase. Getting a basic orientation about religious frameworks helps to organise one's own thoughts and to recognise the strengths and limitations of the respective positions. The question of the nature of God leads to the very centre of these efforts. We hope this brief introduction has aided that process.

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Section I

A-Personal Aspects of the Divine: Theoretical Virtues and Limits

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2 Personal Theism vs. A-Personal Axiarchism

Yujin Nagasawa

2.1 Introduction

Traditional Judeo-Christian theism (henceforth theism) affirms the existence of God as a personal being that is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and necessarily existent. According to this view, the world exists because God chose to actualise it. Axiarchism is a novel, a-personal alternative to theism. According to this view, the world exists because it is better that it be actualised than that it not be actualised; that is, the existence of the world is ethically required. Axiarchism says that this a-personal, creatively effective ethical requirement, rather than God, is the ultimate explanation of the existence of the world.[1] Axiarchism appears attractive initially because, by replacing a personal God with the a-personal ethical requirement, it seems to explain the existence of the world without facing such challenges for theism as the problem of evil and the modal problem of evil. I explain in this chapter, however, that axiarchism cannot avoid these problems because there are versions of the problems that apply to it. I argue, moreover, that theism enjoys advantages over axiarchism in responding to these problems.

This chapter has the following structure. In Section 2.2, I introduce theism and explain how the problem of evil and the modal problem of evil arise for it. In Section 2.3, I introduce axiarchism and explain how its own versions of the problem of evil and the modal problem of evil arise for it. In Section 2.4, I introduce one of the four existing responses to the problems and argue that while this response is compatible with both theism and axiarchism its counter-intuitiveness makes the response problematic. In Sections 2.5–2.7, I introduce the three additional responses and argue that they are compatible with theism but not with axiarchism. In Section 2.8, I consider axiarchists' attempts to develop two unique responses to the problems and argue that neither of them succeeds. I argue moreover that, if axiarchists try to assimilate the theistic approach to address the problems, axiarchism collapses into theism. That is, there is then no point in pursing axiarchism as an alternative to theism. In Section 2.9, I conclude.

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2.2 Theism and Evil

Theists typically hold the following three theses:

> The personal-God thesis: God is a personal being.
> The omni-God thesis: God is an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being.
> The necessary-God thesis: God is a necessary being.

By appealing to these theses, theists generally explain the existence of the actual world roughly as follows: as a personal being that is omnibenevolent, God decided to actualise this world that contains sentient free human beings with whom He can interact and hold communion. He then used His omniscience and omnipotence to actualise the world. This is an ultimate explanation of all there is because, as a necessary being, God does not require an explanation of His own existence.

Critics have challenged theism, however, by introducing the problem of evil and a variant, the modal problem of evil. The problem of evil is a familiar challenge to theism which focuses on the omni-God thesis. If the thesis is correct in saying that God is an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being, then the actual world should be free from any instance of evil. Given His omniscience, God should know that there is evil in the actual world. Given His omnipotence, God should be able to eliminate evil in the actual world. Given His omnibenevolence, God should be willing to eliminate evil in the actual world. Yet the actual world contains many instances of evil. This appears to suggest that the omni-God thesis is incorrect in saying that God is an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being. The problem of evil arises from an apparent conflict between our observation of the actual world and the omni-God thesis. Our observation shows that there is evil in the actual world but the omni-God thesis appears to imply that there should be no evil in the actual world.

The modal problem of evil, which was explicitly defended for the first time by Theodore Guleserian (1983), focuses on the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis. If the omni-God thesis is correct in saying that God is an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being and if the necessary-God thesis is correct in saying that God exists necessarily, that is, that God exists in all possible worlds, then there should be no possible world in which there is 'appalling evil', an extreme form of evil that is worse than any instance of evil in the actual world, such as millions of innocent people being tortured eternally for no good reason. There are, however, possible worlds that contain appalling evil; such worlds are metaphysical possibilities. This appears to suggest that, contrary to what the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis jointly entail, there is no necessarily existing God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. The modal problem of evil arises from an apparent conflict between our modal intuition and the conjunction of the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis.[2] Here our modal intuition says that there are all sorts of possible worlds, including worlds that contain appalling evil, but the conjunction of the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis appears to imply that there should be no possible world that contains appalling evil.

2.3 Axiarchism and Evil

Axiarchism is a radical, a-personal alternative to theism. According to this view, the actual world exists not because it was created by a personal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God who exists necessarily, but because it is better that it be actualised than that it not be actualised. In other words, the actualisation of the world is an ethical requirement. Axiarchism is not a mainstream view but it has been defended or favourably considered by such distinguished philosophers as John Leslie (1989, 2001, 2015, 2019), Derek Parfit (1992, 1998), Nicholas Rescher (1984, 2010), and Tim Mulgan (2015, 2017). According to Leslie, Plato was an axiarchist as well. Plato suggests in Book Six of the *Republic* that although the Good lies ‘far beyond existence in dignity and power’, it gives existence to all known things (Leslie 2019: 63).

Mulgan contends that axiarchism can be motivated in three primary ways (Mulgan 2017: 2–3). First, it can be motivated by appealing to the Platonic reasoning typically adopted by theists: God exists because it is better that God be actualised than that He not be actualised. Similarly, axiarchists can claim that the world exists because it is better that the world be actualised than that it not be actualised. In both cases, concrete existence is derived from abstract existence by reference to value (Leslie 2015). Second, axiarchism can be motivated by appealing to science. Science seems inherently axiarchic because such valuable features as simplicity, beauty, and elegance are commonly considered reliable guides to true scientific theories. Here scientists seem to assume that the world itself is simple, beautiful, and elegant. This assumption can be taken further to develop an axiarchic inference that the world exists because it is simple, beautiful, and elegant (Rescher 2010). Third, axiarchism can be motivated by appealing to reasoning that we typically adopt in metaphysics. Only a *possible* world can be actual. An impossible world cannot be actual because it is logically, rather than causally, required that an actual world be a possible world. Axiarchism says analogously that only an overall *good* world can be actual. An overall bad world cannot be actual because it is *ethically*, rather than causally, required that an actual world be an overall good world.

On the face of it, the problem of evil and the modal problem of evil for theism are irrelevant to axiarchism because these problems are concerned only with the existence of God understood as an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent and necessarily existent being. However, even though axiarchism does not face the identical problems, it faces its own versions of these problems. Consider the problem of evil for axiarchism. Axiarchism says that this world is actual because the actual world is good and the a-personal, creatively effective ethical requirement actualises what is good. This seems to suggest that axiarchism guarantees that there are only good things in the actual world. Clearly, though, the actual world contains many instances of evil. This appears to suggest that axiarchism is incorrect in saying that there is a creatively effective ethical requirement. This version of the problem of evil arises from an apparent conflict between our observation of the actual world and an implication of axiarchism. Our observation reveals evil in the actual world but axiarchism appears to imply that there should be no evil in this world.

Consider now the modal problem of evil for axiarchism. Axiarchism is considered a fundamental principle that is necessarily true. If it is only contingently true, it is unclear how it can constitute the ultimate explanation of contingent facts such as the existence of the actual world. Yet, if axiarchism is necessarily true, then there should be no possible world that contains appalling evil. There are, however, possible worlds that contain appalling evil; such worlds are metaphysical possibilities. This appears to suggest that axiarchism is incorrect in saying that there is a necessarily true creatively effective ethical requirement. This is a version of the modal problem of evil for axiarchism that arises from an apparent conflict between our modal intuition and an implication of axiarchism. Here our modal intuition says that there are all sorts of possible worlds, including worlds that contain appalling evil, but axiarchism appears to imply that there should be no possible world that contains appalling evil.

2.4 Response 1: The Actual World Is the Best Possible World

We have seen that although axiarchism does not face either the problem of evil or the modal problem of evil that *theism* faces, it does face versions of the same problems. How can axiarchism and theism respond to these problems? In this and the following three sections, I introduce and assess four responses to the problems. I argue that theism has an advantage over axiarchism because the latter cannot pursue any of the responses I will discuss.

Response 1 makes three claims: (i) Leibnizian optimalism, according to which the actual world is the best possible world; (ii) total modal collapse, according to which the best possible world is the only possible world (Kraay 2011: 364); and (iii) modal actualism, according to which only the actual world exists.

Consider Leibnizian optimalism first. Leibniz writes:

> It is therefore not a question of a creature, but of the universe; and the adversary will be obliged to maintain that one possible universe may be better than the other, to infinity; but there he would be mistaken, and it is that which he cannot prove. If this opinion were true, it would follow that God had not produced any universe at all: for he is incapable of acting without reason, and that would be even acting against reason .... It is thus one must think of the creation of the best of all possible universes, all the more since God not only decrees to create a universe, but decrees also to create the best of all.
>
> (Leibniz 1710/2009: 249)

Leibniz refers to a 'universe' but we can construe it as equivalent to a 'world' according to contemporary metaphysics. Again, it seems intuitively obvious that there could have been a world that is better than the actual world. Leibniz, however, rejects such a claim. Given that God is the greatest possible being, Leibniz contends, He must have chosen to actualise the best among all possible worlds. Hence, Leibniz concludes, the actual world must be the best possible world. Leibniz is a theist but Leibnizian optimalism is compatible with axiarchism. Axiarchists, such as Rescher (2010), argue that the creatively effective ethical requirement allows only the best possible world to be actualised and that, hence, the actual world is the best possible world. Rescher contends that the existence of evil in the actual world does not undermine Leibnizian optimalism because opti*malism* is distinct from opti*mism*. Optimism is the view that things will go well and optimalism is the view that things will go as well as *possible* (Rescher 2010: 41). Optimism demands that the actual world be perfect even if it is impossible for a perfect world to be actualised. On the other hand, optimalism demands only that the actual world be as good as possible. According to Leibnizian opti*malism*, the actual world is the best possible world even though it might not be a perfect world.

The actual world contains some things that are evil and does not contain everything that is good. This suggests that God and the axiarchic requirement are meant to assess the overall axiological value of *worlds* rather than the axiological values of individual *items* or individual *states of affairs* within worlds. Consider what I call the 'Leibnizian hierarchy', a hierarchy of all possible worlds that are ranked in accordance with their overall axiological values. We can picture that, referring to this hierarchy, God or the axiarchic ethical requirement selects the best possible world that sits at the top of the hierarchy and actualises it. Given that the actual world is, by definition, the world that has been actualised, Leibnizian optimalism infers that the actual world must be the very best possible world at the top of the hierarchy. By appealing to this