Religious Studies (2019) **55**, 389–403 © Cambridge University Press 2018
doi:10.1017/S0034412518000409

Deep desires

DAVID MCPHERSON

Department of Philosophy, Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska 68178, USA
e-mail: davidmcpherson@creighton.edu

Abstract: This article seeks to get clear on an important feature of a theistic way of life: namely, the appeal to 'deep desires' as part of an ethical and spiritual life-orientation. My main thesis is that such appeals should primarily be seen as pertaining to our acquired second nature and the space of meaning it makes possible, rather than first nature or innateness. To appeal to the 'depth' of a desire, on this account, is to say something about its normative importance: it is something of profound significance for our human fulfilment about which we ought to be concerned, and it correlates with the normative 'height' of the object of desire. Thus, our deepest desire correlates with what is seen as the highest or most worthy object of our desire (or love), which the theist claims is God. This view is contrasted with subjectivist accounts where desires are seen as 'deep' in that they structure our identity. My account affirms that deep desires structure our identity, but they do so because of their perceived objective normative importance. I also seek to show how we should affirm Alasdair MacIntyre's claim that 'the deepest desire of every [human] being, whether they acknowledge it or not, is to be at one with God'.

Introduction

In this article I want to get clear on an important feature of a theistic way of life: namely, the appeal to 'deep desires' as part of an ethical and spiritual life-orientation. Consider the following three passages from contemporary theistic philosophers:

> [1] [F]inite beings who possess the power of understanding, if they know that God exists, know that he is the most adequate object of their love, and that the *deepest desire* of every such being, whether they acknowledge it or not, is to be at one with God.[1]

> [2] A spiritual perspective will suppose that somewhere, *deep down*, we will feel drawn to recognize and live in relation to what it defines as spiritual reality. We may feel drawn to it, may pine for it, feel dissatisfied and incomplete without it. People speak of 'divine discontent', or a 'désir d'éternité'. This may be buried deep down, but it is a perpetual human potential. So even people who are very successful in the range of normal human flourishing (perhaps especially

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> such people) can feel unease, perhaps remorse, some sense that their achievements are hollow.[2]

> [3] If there is at least the possibility of a [theistic] interpretation of reality, this would open a way for our lives to have meaning in a strong sense that would leave far behind mere local satisfactions of our contingent wants . . . It would provide a model of fulfilment that would locate our human destiny within an enduring moral framework. So far from being a cosmic accident or by-product of blind forces, our lives would be seen as having a purpose – that of attuning ourselves to a creative order that is inherently good. Our *deepest responses* would be seen as pointing us towards such a goal, and our *deepest fulfilment* to be attained in realising it.[3]

I quote these passages in order to give a general picture of the phenomenon that I want to get clear on, and I will use them as guideposts for thinking about the nature and significance of the idea of deep desires in a theistic way of life.

Although I am concerned with clarifying the concept of deep desires in general, the focus here will be on what is thought to be the *deepest* desire from within a theistic perspective. And it is helpful to begin by clarifying what is standardly taken to be the proper *object* of such a desire. The passage from Charles Taylor above gives the most general description of the object of the deepest desire from within any spiritual perspective, theistic or otherwise: we 'feel drawn to recognize and live in relation to what it defines as spiritual reality'. From a theistic viewpoint, the pre-eminent spiritual reality is of course a personal God, and so from this perspective we feel drawn to 'recognize and live in relation' to God. There are two distinct yet connected activities here: first of all, having apprehended God's goodness, we desire to 'recognize' God, i.e. to affirm and appreciate God's goodness, which will involve worship, praise, and contemplation. Second, from this follows a desire to 'live in relation' to God, or, as Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, 'to be at one with God', which will involve a life of prayer and devotion. Our being at one with God also includes aligning our lives with the ultimate moral and spiritual purposes for which God created the world. Hence John Cottingham speaks of 'attuning ourselves to a creative order that is inherently good'. And hence the desire to do the will of God is central to a theistic ethical and spiritual life-orientation.[4] In what follows, I will therefore take the proper object of our deepest desire, on a theistic view, to be God, where this desire for God involves a desire to affirm and appreciate God's goodness and also a desire for communion with God. I will sometimes speak of our deepest desire as the desire 'to be at one with God' (following MacIntyre) or the desire for communion with God, but it should be understood that this relational good is predicated upon and inseparable from a prior affirmation and appreciation of God's goodness.[5] As Leszek Kolakowski puts it:

> [R]eligion is not a set of propositions, it is the realm of worship wherein understanding, knowledge, the feeling of participation in ultimate reality . . . and moral commitment appear as a single act, whose subsequent segregation into separate classes of metaphysical, moral and other assertions might be useful but is bound to distort the sense of the original act of worship.[6]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Our guiding question, then, is: how should we understand the idea that the desire for God is a *deep* desire, indeed that it should be regarded as our *deepest* desire?

Innateness

One way to understand the idea of deep desires is in terms of rootedness in human nature: on this view a desire is deep when it is *innate* to human beings (i.e. when it is 'hardwired' into our nature), as opposed to being an acquired disposition. For instance, desire for nourishment, rest, affection, and security can be described as being innate and thus 'deep' in this sense. But what about the desire to be at one with God, is it also innate? And is this how we should understand the idea of having a *deep* desire for God? There are a number of theists who seem to answer 'yes' to both questions. For instance, Eleonore Stump writes:

> For Augustine, and for Aquinas too, not only are human beings constructed in such a way that they hunger for the love of other persons, but in fact their deepest, inbuilt hunger is for God. On the Augustinian view shared by Aquinas, unless a person takes God as her deepest heart's desire, her heart will always have at its deepest core a yearning that is both inchoate and unsatisfied. . . . In effect, the medieval tradition Aquinas accepts supposes that . . . some desires . . . are hardwired into a human being. Certain biological desires, such as the desire for food, seem to be like this. For the medievals, the desire for God is like this, too. On their view, a desire for God is innate, whether or not a person is fully conscious of the desire or its nature.[7]

Here Stump seems to write about the depth of a desire in two senses: one sense having to do with being innate or 'hardwired' (it is our 'deepest core', our 'deepest, inbuilt hunger'), which is thus not subject to choice, and the other having to do with what we self-consciously see as being at or near the centre of our web of desires, which is subject to the will (hence she says 'a person takes God as her deepest heart's desire', which is a matter of commitment). We will come back later to discuss Stump's second sense of a deep desire, but here I want to focus on the first sense. We don't need to debate whether Stump's interpretation of Augustine, Aquinas, and the medieval tradition is correct. We can allow that a number of theists hold such a view (including Stump herself). But what should we make of this view of a 'hardwired' desire for God?

It seems strange to think of a new-born child desiring to be at one with God, whereas it is not strange to think of him or her desiring nourishment, rest, affection, and security. This is because the former presupposes the attainment of conceptual thought (particularly, the complex concept of God), whereas the latter do not. Thus, it seems that the desire for God does not come about without some form of 'second nature', i.e. acquired abilities, dispositions, and sensibilities. Language is obviously key here. As John McDowell puts it:

> In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. This is a picture of initiation into the space of reasons as an already going concern.[8]

Such initiation into a linguistic community emancipates 'a human individual from a merely animal mode of living into being a full-fledged subject, open to the world. . . . Human beings mature into being at home in the space of reasons or, what comes to the same thing, living their lives in the world.'[9] McDowell uses 'world' here in a sense that contrasts with a 'merely animal' mode of living in an 'environment'.[10] We, as mature human beings, have a 'world' that is disclosed to us through language and is laden with meaning for us as we actively live out our lives within it. Thus, the space of reasons can also be understood as the 'space of meaning', or as 'having a world' that is open to understanding.[11]

So the desire for God, on the view I want to advance, operates within the space of reasons (or space of meaning), where being at one with God is seen as something we have compelling reason to desire, and which is made possible by our second nature, especially our initiation into a linguistic community. Most theists of course want to affirm that there is in some sense a 'natural' desire for God (whether understood in first or second nature terms), where one can say to God (as Augustine did): 'You stir [us] to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'[12] Indeed, I think part of the attraction to saying that the desire for God is innate is that this ensures that God matters for everyone. One might worry that if the desire for God depends upon second nature, i.e. upon something acquired through a particular path of formation, then it would be completely contingent and we could not show that God matters for everyone.[13] However, I believe we can still say that God matters for everyone by appealing to the structure of the space of meaning, which our second nature abilities bring into view. Later I will consider how this might be, particularly with regard to making sense of MacIntyre's claim that 'the deepest desire of every [human] being, whether they acknowledge it or not, is to be at one with God'. But for now, we should note that there are two important ways that the desire for God can still be seen as relating to our first nature (i.e. our innate capacities or tendencies), even if we deny that this desire itself is innate.

First, the desire for God might represent a more developed manifestation or a higher analogue of a desire that is originally innate. Freud takes this position in his account of theistic longing as being 'infantile'.[14] In other words, it is a more developed manifestation of the innate desire for security or protection in the face of helplessness. Whereas the young child seeks protection through his or her parents (especially the father, according to Freud), the infantile theistic adult seeks protection in the face of continued human vulnerability by projecting a supreme parental figure: namely, God. In describing the religious person as 'infantile', Freud clearly means this as a critique and as a contrast to the properly adult stance of courageously facing up to the harshness of reality without any form

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of existential consolation (the idea here is that we should 'live without appeal', as Camus put it in *The Myth of Sisyphus*). But seeking *existential consolation* – or *cosmic security* (e.g., in the faith that 'all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well'[15]) – is an adult rather than infant activity and it is only improper if we think that all such existential consolation is illusory. That it is illusory in Freud's view is suggested by his talk of projection (or 'personification' or 'wish-fulfilment'). But this does not resolve the question of whether God is *merely* a projection, since after all there may be an objective correlate to the subject's projection of an external source of existential consolation. As Cottingham says in response to Freud: 'a religious believer can equally maintain that since our true destiny lies in union with our creator, we will naturally feel insecure and restless until we find Him'.[16]

These remarks also give indication of how the desire to be at one with God can be seen as a higher analogue of the innate desire for rest, where this is understood as 'spiritual rest' (i.e. 'resting in God'), and which can be sought, for example, through the practice of the Sabbath. We can say something similar about the innate desire for nourishment, which has a higher analogue in the 'hunger' for 'spiritual nourishment' that fills up our spiritual lack. Likewise, the innate desire for affection finds a higher analogue in the desire for communion with God. However, all of these higher analogues require second nature abilities (especially for conceptual thought) and are typically connected with a concern to orient one's life towards something of incomparably higher value, i.e. something holy or numinous (I will say more on this later).

The second important way that the desire for God can be seen as related to our first nature is that it arises out of the realization of our innate human capacities. What is especially significant is our innate capacity for language acquisition, since, as mentioned above, with initiation into a language we enter the space of meaning. Once we enter into this domain and become reflective, we can then come to form a desire for God, and I will argue that it is 'natural' to do so (in a sense that pertains to the structure of the space of meaning).

In sum: the desire for God is more properly a matter of second nature (even though it is not disconnected from first nature), as it does not come about without some acquired abilities, dispositions, and sensibilities, which depend upon an upbringing or formation in a particular culture or form of life. I will argue further that the idea of a *deep* or *deepest* desire should also be understood primarily as a matter pertaining to second nature, at least insofar as one appeals to a deep desire as part of an ethical and spiritual life-orientation.

The space of meaning

The crucial point is that the idea of a *deep* desire needs be understood within the space of meaning that our second nature brings into view. In exploring this, I want to begin by discussing one problematic account of the space of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meaning and how it can inform an understanding of deep desires: namely, a subjectivist view.

I have in mind something like Harry Frankfurt's account of the importance of what we care about, where this is a matter of mere contingency; i.e. it is a matter of how we happen to have developed, both in evolutionary and cultural terms, as the particular persons we are, as opposed to being based on some desire-independent normative standards for what we ought to care about. It is *in virtue of* our caring about certain things or persons – especially to the point of love – that we shape our sense of self and that things or persons matter to us.[17] Bernard Williams also endorses something like this view when he appeals to D. H. Lawrence's dictum: 'Find your deepest impulse, and follow that'.[18] There is a kind of subjectivist ideal of authenticity here of being who you are, i.e. who you happen to have become as the result of evolutionary and cultural processes. Williams went on to develop this in terms of the idea of 'ground projects' or 'categorical desires', of which he writes: 'an individual person has a set of desires, concerns or . . . projects, which help to constitute a *character*' and which are the basis of 'having a reason for living at all'.[19] Examples of such ground projects include the desire to be an excellent artist or scientist or philosopher, or to succeed in one's business career, or to be a good family member and friend, etc. So we have a conception here of a desire (or care) being 'deep' insofar as it structures our character or sense of identity and what matters to us.

There is certainly an important connection between the idea of a deep desire and our sense of identity that I want to affirm. However, I think the subjectivism of Frankfurt's and Williams's accounts ends up being problematic. If we come to think that the things, persons, or projects we care deeply about don't *really* matter, i.e. they don't stand independent of our desires as that with which we *ought* to be concerned, then this can have a deflationary effect on our caring and it can induce a kind of identity crisis or existential vertigo.[20] Indeed, this seems to occur in the common phenomenon of a midlife crisis, where one comes to realize that the projects around which one has structured one's life do not *really* matter.

Frankfurt's and Williams's subjectivism also clearly does not fit with how a traditional theist understands the desire to be at one with God, since he or she believes that this does really matter. Consider again Eleonore Stump's work. Stump has developed an account of what she calls 'the desires of the heart', which has a lot in common with Frankfurt's account of the importance of what we care about and Williams's account of 'ground projects' or 'categorical desires', but it also differs in significant respects. Stump writes:

> [A] person's heart's desire is a particular kind of commitment on her part to something – a person or a project – that has great value for her in virtue of her care for it. . . . A desire of a person's heart is a desire that is at or near the center of the web of desire for her. If she loses what she wants when her desire is at or near the center of the web, then other things that she had wanted begin to lose their ability to attract her because what she had most centrally

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> wanted is gone. The web of desire starts to fall apart when the center does not hold, we might say.[21]

There are obviously echoes of Frankfurt and Williams here.[22] However, Stump also wants to affirm that there can be an objective side to our heart's desires, where we can speak of what is their *suitable* object. The desires of the heart, she thinks, can be understood merely on a subjective scale of value in terms of their 'depth' or 'superficiality', i.e. how central they are to one's web of desire (and so, we might add, to one's identity). But their value can also be understood on an objective scale of value by which we measure human flourishing or fulfilment, 'where what is best is highest and what is worst is lowest'.[23] In particular, Stump believes that our *deepest* heart's desire should be correlated with that which is the highest good on the objective scale of values, which she thinks is 'shared union in love with particular people'. She writes: 'Anything *can* be the deepest desire of a person's heart, in the sense that a person can take it as the center of his web of desire. But only persons *ought* to be the deepest desire of a person's heart'.[24] Moreover, as we have seen already, Stump suggests (following Augustine and Aquinas, as she reads them): 'not only are human beings constructed in such a way that they hunger for the love of other persons, but in fact their deepest, inbuilt hunger is for God. . . . [U]nless a person takes God as her deepest heart's desire, her heart will always have at its deepest core a yearning that is both inchoate and unsatisfied'.[25] Thus, a person should 'take as her deepest heart's desire the very thing that is also her greatest flourishing – namely, God and shared union with God'.[26]

I have already argued that such an appeal to an innate or 'hardwired' desire for God is problematic because the desire for God presupposes the attainment of conceptual thought. Thus, to have such a desire requires that we first enter the space of meaning via an acquired second nature. From within this space of meaning what we need is an account of why God is *worthy* of our *deepest* love, which also means specifying why God is the *highest* good. This means engaging in 'strong evaluation', which contrasts with 'weak evaluation', where something is judged to be good – a 'weak good' – simply in virtue of being desired (or happening to care about it). In strong evaluation something is judged as good – a 'strong good' – in light of qualitative distinctions of value in terms of higher and lower, deeper and more shallow, admirable and contemptible, noble and base, sacred and profane, and so forth, which are seen as normative for our desires rather than being merely contingent upon them.[27] In other words, strong evaluative meaning, as an aspect of the space of meaning, involves normative demands that are seen as being 'there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them'.[28] To describe a desire as 'deep' or the 'deepest', as opposed to being shallow, is thus to say something about its *normative importance*: it is something of *profound* significance for our human fulfilment about which we *ought* to be concerned, and it is correlated with the normative 'height' of the object of desire. It is

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in light of this normative understanding of our deepest desire that it should be seen as being at the centre of our web of desire and integral to our sense of self, and as connected to our deepest fulfilment (as we have seen Cottingham maintains).

We in fact often evaluate human beings as deep or shallow depending on whether their lives are guided by desires that are viewed as being deep or shallow. We can bring this out by considering two modes of sexual desire: lust and erotic love.[29] The latter can be seen as a deep desire in comparison to the former because it has a higher object – namely, sexual communion with the beloved, as opposed to mere sexual gratification – and because it constitutes a greater mode of human fulfilment. The profound significance of this sexual communion – which can have a sense of being 'sacramental' – is also related to the perception of the profound significance of human sexuality itself. As Elizabeth Anscombe puts it:

> There is no such thing as a casual, non-significant sexual act. . . . Those who try to make room for sex as mere casual enjoyment pay the penalty: they become shallow. . . . They dishonour their own bodies; holding cheap what is naturally connected with the origination of human life.[30]

She goes on to say that the perception of dishonour here is a 'mystical perception', which I would call a strong evaluative judgement with regard to the sacred or the holy, i.e. the reverence-worthy. I would further add that the sense of the sacred or the reverence-worthy here can relate not only to the connection of sexuality with the origination of human life (as Anscombe suggests), but also to the way sexuality is intimately connected to our personhood and its special dignity. This comes out not only in the horror at sexual violence, where we have a sense of something sacred or profoundly precious having been violated, but also in what has traditionally been seen as the most profound form of sexual union: namely, 'holy matrimony'. Indeed, it can be argued that erotic love has an 'inherent nuptiality',[31] i.e. it tends towards exclusivity and permanence in a 'sacred bond'. When we really love someone erotically we do not want to live without the person (she or he is regarded as irreplaceable), we want to bind our lives together, and this also demands exclusivity as proper to the profound intimacy of the erotic loving relationship (and hence jealousy can be an appropriate response to threats to this intimate relationship). Thus, erotic love finds its proper fulfilment in the vow (or sacred bond) of marriage and this is regarded as a deep mode of human fulfilment.[32]

I think this account of erotic love as a deep desire can help us to understand the desire to be at one with God as a deep desire, and how it can be our *deepest* desire.[33] As I have suggested, on a theistic view the desire to be at one with God should be regarded as our *deepest* desire because God is the *highest* object of our love and the source of our deepest human fulfilment. As the ultimate creative source of every finite thing, God answers our fundamental existential questions as

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

philosophical, meaning-seeking creatures: Who am I? How ought I to live? Does my life have a purpose? Why is there anything at all? And so on. And describing God as the *highest* object of our love involves a strong evaluative judgement: God is most love-worthy because of God's perfect goodness as the fullest 'actuality', being perfect in every way (including in love for human beings).[34] Therefore, we experience the greatest human fulfilment (or 'fullness') through communion with God. The perfect goodness of God can also be described as supreme holiness, where God is seen as most reverence-worthy: such holiness has a numinous or transcendent quality and makes the strongest normative demands upon us for love, worship, and devotion. Hence MacIntyre says: 'finite beings who possess the power of understanding, if they know that God exists, know that he is the most adequate object of their love'.

Desiring God, whether we know it or not

MacIntyre continues by saying that 'the deepest desire of every such being, *whether they acknowledge it or not*, is to be at one with God' (my emphasis). The interesting suggestion is that we can have an *unacknowledged* desire for God, i.e. we have a desire for an object that is in some way *hidden* from view. Can we make sense of such an idea according to the account of deep desires given so far?

On the face of it, it seems strange to have a desire for something if we don't recognize ourselves as desiring the thing in question. Desire seems precisely to depend upon responsiveness to some recognized object. However, we might say that we desire something captured under a general concept – such as when someone desires a spouse – but not yet know what or who is the proper object of this desire. It is along these lines that Aquinas makes the case for thinking that an unacknowledged desire for God is present in our desire for happiness:

> To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching; for many there are who imagine that man's perfect good which is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasures, and others in something else.[35]

I don't think it is right to say that there is an innate desire for happiness (if this is what Aquinas is saying), since 'happiness' (understood as equivalent to 'human fulfilment') itself is a concept that requires that we have entered the space of meaning via an acquired second nature. However, all mature human beings do of course desire 'happiness' (or something equivalent captured under another term that denotes the ultimate end of human action), and so in this sense we can say that it is 'natural' (i.e. this desire is inevitable once we have entered the space of meaning). In any case, the point here is that we can desire many things

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(riches, pleasure, etc.) under the guise of desiring happiness, but what will really fulfil this desire for happiness is God.

We see this illustrated in the life of Augustine, as described autobiographically in his *Confessions* and recently discussed by Talbot Brewer in his book *The Retrieval of Ethics*. In his pre-conversion life, Augustine pursued various objects – e.g., sexual pleasure, public honour, friendship, and philosophical understanding – under the guise of desiring happiness, but he eventually came to realize that true happiness is found in God; in other words, he came to realize that 'our hearts are restless until they rest in God'. Brewer writes:

> Augustine . . . understands his own conversion not as the wholesale substitution of one set of desires for another, but as the attainment of a clearer and less adulterated vision of what he really longs for. . . . If we think of desires as apprehensions of actions, ends or persons as good, then we can make sense of the thought that the real object of Augustine's early desires was God by supposing that God answers best to the kind of goodness he imputed to the objects of those early desires. One might say, for instance, that his early desires involved a tendency to see various worldly pursuits as offering a deep or permanent satisfaction . . . that worldly experience proves them unable to offer. His conversion might then be understood as consisting in the dawning conviction that his early, seemingly secular longings were misdirected towards activities that did not in fact answer to the evaluative picture implicit in them, and that something else, God, did answer to that evaluative picture and hence was the real object of those longings. A similar idea is implicit in the . . . saying . . . : 'A man knocking on the door of a brothel is knocking for God.'[36]

It is important to note here that, when properly understood, the desire for happiness leads us to seek an object that is most worthy of being loved for its own sake but which, when so loved, is also constitutive of our fullest happiness.[37] Thus, we do not simply desire happiness, but rather we above all desire that which is *the source* of our fullest happiness, viz., God. Such is the position of Augustine and Aquinas. As the latter puts it: '[T]he thing itself which is desired as end, is that which constitutes happiness, and makes man happy; but the attainment of this thing is called happiness. Consequently we must say that happiness is something belonging to the soul; but that which constitutes happiness is something outside the soul'.[38] Brewer comments on Aquinas's view as follows:

> Aquinas notes that [the] last end of man can be characterized as God or as the attainment or possession of God. Yet, he makes clear, the first characterization is primary. Attainment or possession of God is good only because it constitutes a form of participation in a conceptually prior and independent good. Hence, the goodness of God is more final than the goodness of any possible relation to God, and since the proper object of desire is the most final end, the proper object is God.[39]

These remarks fill out what was said in the Introduction about how the relational good of being at one with God is predicated upon and inseparable from a prior affirmation and appreciation of God's goodness.

We should also see that Brewer's appeal to an 'evaluative picture' (where desires are viewed as 'apprehensions of actions, ends or persons as good') to understand

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

how God might be said to be the most adequate object of our desire or longing for happiness (i.e. 'deep or permanent satisfaction') is in alignment with my second nature approach to understanding the idea of God being the proper object of our *deepest* desire and source of our *deepest* fulfilment because of being the *highest* good, where 'deepest' and 'highest' are understood in strong evaluative terms as that which is normative for our desires. However, Brewer ends up offering a view of 'deep desires' that is separable from such an evaluative picture, insofar as the concept of 'depth' is not used as an evaluative concept (as it is my account). He writes: 'To say that a desire has depth is to say that its object exceeds the desirer's explicit articulation of it, and this affords the desirer with an occasion to perfect the desires by arriving at a fuller articulation of them'.[40] This is certainly one way to understand the idea of 'deep desires', and it can be seen to apply to the desire for God because the nature of God always in some way exceeds our capacity for explicit articulation. Nevertheless, I don't think this should be the primary way of understanding the idea of 'deep desires' insofar as one appeals to deep desires as part of an ethical and spiritual life-orientation. There are many things that may exceed our capacity for explicit articulation that have no importance for such a life-orientation.

Appeals to 'deep desires' as part of an ethical and spiritual life-orientation should be understood, as I have suggested, in strong evaluative terms. And thus to explore how there might be an unacknowledged desire for God in our desire (or longing) for happiness (or fulfilment), we need to explore a strong evaluative picture of how God can be seen as the most adequate object of this desire (or longing). At the end of the last section I tried to sketch an account of how God, if God exists, should be seen as the *highest* object of love, i.e. as most love-worthy and reverence-worthy, and the source of our deepest human fulfilment. This is the case, on the standard theistic view, because of God's perfect goodness or supreme holiness. Once human beings enter into the space of meaning and possess concepts like 'the sacred' and 'the holy' and seek after the attainment of their deepest fulfilment, we can see how they are 'naturally' drawn to orient their lives towards an ultimate object of love, devotion, reverence, and even worship, for which God, according to this standard theistic view, is the most proper object.

On this point, consider the following passages from Dostoevsky's novels. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dmitri Karamazov says: 'I'm tormented by God. Tormented only by that. What if he does not exist? . . . I keep thinking about it. Because whom will he love then – man, I mean? To whom will he be thankful, to whom will he sing the hymn?'[41] In *The Adolescent*, the 'holy peasant' Makar remarks:

> [T]o live without God is nothing but torment. And it turns out that what gives light is the very thing we curse, and we don't know it ourselves. . . . It's impossible for a man to exist without bowing down; such a man couldn't bear himself, and no man could. If he rejects God, he'll bow down to an idol – a wooden one, or a golden one, or a mental one. They're all idolaters, not godless, that's how they ought to be called.[42]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Likewise, at the end of *Demons*, Stepan proclaims:

> The whole law of human existence consists in nothing other than a man's always being able to bow before the immeasurably great. If people are deprived of the immeasurably great, they will not live and will die in despair. . . . For every man, whoever he is, it is necessary to bow before that which is the Great Thought.[43]

We can see this in various 'God-substitutes', such as the 'Religion of Humanity', or 'Progress', or 'Utopia', or the '*Ubermensch*', or whatever else is taken to be the ultimate object of love, devotion, reverence, and even worship. But for Dostoevsky, and on the account I have given, these are all forms of idolatry precisely because they seek to substitute for that which really is the ultimate object of love, devotion, reverence, and worship: namely, God.

Of course, it could also be that human life is a 'useless passion' (to borrow a phrase from Sartre) in that our deepest desire is for something that does not exist. It has not been my purpose in this article to argue against this possibility. The aim here instead has been to show how best to understand the idea of deep desires within a theistic life-orientation and to show how we should affirm the claim that 'the deepest desire of every [human] being, whether they acknowledge it or not, is to be at one with God'. Despite any doubts we might have about God's existence, this line of argument suggests that we should indeed affirm that *God still matters*.[44]

References

Anscombe, G. E. M. (2008) *Faith in a Hard Ground*, Mary Geach & Luke Gormally (eds) (Charlottesville VA: Imprint Academic).

Aquinas, St Thomas (1948 [1266–1273]) *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols, Fathers of the English Dominican Province (tr.) (New York: Benziger Bros.).

Augustine, St (1991 [397–400]) *Confessions*, Henry Chadwick (tr.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Brewer, Talbot (2009) *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Cottingham, John (2003) *On the Meaning of Life* (New York: Routledge).

Cottingham, John (2005) *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1990 [1880]) *The Brothers Karamazov*, Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (trs) (New York: Everyman's Library).

Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1994 [1871]) *Demons*, Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (trs) (New York: Everyman's Library).

Dostoevsky, Fyodor (2003 [1875]) *The Adolescent*, Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (trs) (New York: Everyman's Library).

Frankfurt, Harry G. (1988) *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Frankfurt, Harry G. (2004) *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press).

Frankfurt, Harry G. (2006) *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press).

Freud, Sigmund (1961a [1927]), *The Future of an Illusion*, James Stachey (tr.) (New York: Norton).

Freud, Sigmund (1961b [1930]) *Civilization and its Discontents*, James Stachey (tr.) (New York: Norton).

Haldane, John (2010) 'The restless heart: philosophy and the meaning of theism', in *Reasonable Faith* (New York: Routledge), 66–79.

Kolakowski, Leszek (2001) *Religion* (South Bend IN: St. Augustine's Press).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

MacIntyre, Alasdair (2009) *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield).
McCabe, Herbert , O. P. (2002) *God Still Matters* (New York: Continuum).
McDowell, John (1994) *Mind and World* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press).
McPherson, David (2017) 'Traditional morality and sacred values', *Analyse & Kritik*, **39**, 41–62.
Pieper, Josef (1997) *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press).
Scruton, Roger (1986) *Sexual Desire* (New York: Continuum).
Stump, Eleonore (2010) *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Taylor, Charles (1985) *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers*, I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
Taylor, Charles (1989) *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press).
Taylor, Charles (2007) *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University).
Williams, Bernard (1972) *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
Williams, Bernard (1981) *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Notes

1. MacIntyre (2009), 5–6 (my emphasis).
2. Taylor (2007), 620–621 (my emphasis).
3. Cottingham (2003), 62 (my emphasis); elsewhere he writes in a similar vein:

> The theist believes, sustained by faith, that the careful use of reason, and the sensitive and reflective response to our *deepest inclinations*, points us towards a life which is the life that a being of the greatest benevolence, goodness, mercy, and love has desired for us, and has destined us to achieve. . . . [T]he theistic belief will . . . have the capacity to irradiate the believer's life with hope. (Cottingham (2005), 52; my emphasis)

4. See, e.g., Matthew 6:9–13; cf. Luke 11:2–4.
5. I thank a reviewer of this article for pushing me to clarify this point. Cf. Josef Pieper:

> In every conceivable case love signifies much the same as approval . . .: loving someone or something means finding him or it *probus*, the Latin word for 'good'. It is a way of turning to him or it and saying: 'It's good that you exist; it's good that you are in this world!' . . . The approval I am speaking of is . . . an expression of the *will*. . . . It testifies to being in agreement, assenting, consenting, applauding, affirming, praising, glorifying and hailing. . . . Aquinas . . . says that something is missing to make well-wishing (and doing good) into real love. He calls the missing element the 'unio affectus', volition directed toward the other person, the wish to be with him, to be united with him, in fact to identify with him. When the true lover says, 'It's good that you exist', he wants to be one with the person he loves. (Pieper (1997), 163–164, 196–197)

6. Kolakowski (2001), 165; cited in Cottingham (2005), 1–2.
7. Stump (2010), 440.
8. McDowell (1994), 125.
9. *Ibid*.
10. *Ibid.*, 115–118.
11. See *ibid.*, 70–72.
12. Augustine (1991 [397–400]), I, i (1); see Haldane (2010) for a discussion of this Augustinian idea. Haldane ultimately seems to suggest that the natural desire for God is a matter of both first and second nature: it is 'a product of experience structured by natural desires [e.g., for knowledge] and conceptual attainments' (79).
13. I thank Kirstin McPherson for helping me to formulate this point.
14. See Freud (1961a [1927]), 18–30, 38–42; Freud (1961b [1930]), 19–32.
15. See T. S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding', from his *Four Quartets*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

16. Cottingham (2003), 11.
17. Frankfurt (1988, 83) writes:

> A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced. Thus he concerns himself with what concerns it, giving particular attention to such things and directing his behavior accordingly.

Elsewhere he writes:

> [I]t is only in virtue of what we actually care about that anything is important to us. The world is everywhere infused for us with importance; many things are important to us. That is because there are many things that we care about just for themselves, and many that stand in pertinent instrumental relationships to those things. If there were nothing that we cared about – if our response to the world were utterly and uniformly flat – there would be no reason for us to care about anything. (Frankfurt (2006), 20; see also *Idem* (2004))

18. Williams (1972), 79.
19. Williams (1981), 5. Frankfurt thinks Williams has this backward:

> [W]e are interested in having worthwhile projects because we do intend to go on living, and we would prefer not to be bored. . . . Our desire to live and our readiness to invoke this desire as generating reasons for performing actions that contribute to that end are not themselves based on reasons. They are based on love. They derive from and express the fact that, presumably as an outcome of natural selection, we love life. That is, we love living. (Frankfurt (2006), 37)

While there is some truth in this, it seems that the lack of worthwhile projects can in fact undermine our love of life. Consider, e.g., Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: he speaks of a natural 'thirst for life' but ultimately despairs over life.

20. See Taylor (1989) ch. 2.
21. Stump (2010), 7.
22. Stump is explicit about her indebtedness to Frankfurt, who seems to be indebted to Williams in his account, given that he cites Williams's work.
23. Stump (2010), 437.
24. *Ibid.*, 439.
25. *Ibid.*, 440.
26. *Ibid.*, 441.
27. For more on 'strong evaluation', see Taylor (1985), Introduction & chs 1–2; Taylor (1989) pt 1.
28. McDowell (1994), 82.
29. It should be noted that there is a conception of 'eros' that is broader than what I call erotic love here: eros can be broadly understood as the desire for that which offers or constitutes fulfilment.
30. Anscombe (2008), 186; cf. 172.
31. See Scruton (1986), 339.
32. In this paragraph I have drawn on McPherson (2017), 48–49.
33. The idea of there being similarities (or even connections) between erotic love and love of God is of course an old theme. One need only consider, for instance, how the erotic poetry of the Song of Solomon has often been read as a mystical allegory for the love of God.
34. This account depends upon Aquinas's claim that goodness and being are 'convertible':

> The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. . . . Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect, for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists. . . . Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same really. But goodness presents the aspect of desirableness . . . (Aquinas (1948 [1266–1273]), I, q. 5, a. 1)

On God's perfection and thus goodness, see *Summa Theologiae*, I, qq. 4 & 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press

35. *Ibid.*, I, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1; cf. I-II, qq. 1–5.
36. Brewer (2009), 50–51.
37. This is the idea behind the 'paradox of egoism': we can only attain our own happiness by focusing on something beyond our selves that is worthy of love or concern for its own sake.
38. Aquinas (1948 [1266–1273]), I-II, q. 2, a. 7.
39. Brewer (2009), 60. Brewer cites *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8; q. 2, a. 7; and q. 3, a. 1 (see also II-II, q. 26, a. 3, where Aquinas affirms that God is to be loved more than our selves as the source of our fullest happiness). I thank a reviewer for reminding me of this passage from Brewer and pushing me to clarify this point.
40. Brewer (2009), 51.
41. Dostoevsky (1990 [1880]), 592.
42. Dostoevsky (2003 [1875]), 373.
43. Dostoevsky (1994 [1871]), 664.
44. See McCabe (2002). I would like to thank Kirstin McPherson, Fiona Ellis, and members of audiences at Heythrop College, University of London and the University of Leeds for helpful comments on this article.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000409 Published online by Cambridge University Press