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the reasons God has to prevent suffering are far less robust than is typically assumed. I have tried, to some extent, to defend the status quo regarding God's own ethics. But whatever the merits of my objections, Murphy's book is one that any philosopher interested in the problem of evil ought to read.

References

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Murphy, Mark C. (2017) *God's Own Ethics: Norms of Divine Agency and the Argument from Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Notes

1. Murphy (2017). All page numbers in parentheses in my text refer to this book.
2. Murphy is willing to consider the implications of the supposition that Michael Jordan is the greatest possible being (16).
3. Murphy considers a proposal along these lines (see 32–33, though I do not claim that the creator is required to love its intrinsically valuable creatures). In connection with that proposal, he considers the relationship between artists and their art, arguing that artists have no particular obligation to their work merely in virtue of having created it. But of course the creations in such cases cannot suffer.
4. In this scenario, the Anselmian being intends the visual display (G1) and foreknows but does not intend the evil E (including the painful screams) that will result (the evils that result are not among the success conditions of creating the beautiful visual display). Evil E results from the bringing about of G1. The Anselmian being also intends the beautiful symphony (G2) and makes use of (without intending) E in the bringing about of G2 (see 118).

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Enabling Ivan Karamazov: responding to Mark Murphy's *God's Own Ethics: Norms of Divine Agency and the Argument from Evil*

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Abstract: ***God's Own Ethics*** **introduces a number of philosophical subfields into conversation with philosophy of religion and metaethics in an attempt to discern the ethics of God. While its conception of the divine being is itself controversial, I here take issue with the claim that the divine being described in *God's Own Ethics* would be one worthy of worship and allegiance. Specifically, I argue that a God**

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lacking in moral perfection of the sort familiar to humans is either unrecognizable as God, or is open to the 'Ivan Karamazov' objection that such a God deserves neither worship nor allegiance.

Mark Murphy's *God's Own Ethics*[1] is a rich exploration of untrodden territory, astonishing in its use of resources from every relevant subfield of philosophy towards a single goal: clarifying the nature and prescriptions of, for, and by the divine will. This is a polymath's book; in addition to spending significant time working through complicated and technical discussions in metaethics, Murphy takes excursions into philosophy of agency, moral psychology, philosophical theology, practical reasoning, metaphysics, political theology, normative ethics, religious epistemology, philosophy of language, and phenomenology of religion. This is one of the book's most impressive and interesting features, but it's important to understand what one's committing to upon beginning such a tome: very few philosophers will be able to engage substantively with everything in the work. Equally, however, every philosopher will find something in here to take up and interrogate; my response is therefore necessarily partial. I will briefly sketch what I take to be the salient points of Murphy's account, before focusing my criticisms on the latter half of the work, where Murphy addresses the ethics of the God of Christian theism.

Murphy's book challenges many of our most basic assumptions about the nature of what he calls 'an Anselmian being': a being that exhibits every unqualified perfection to its intrinsic maximum. Importantly, the only moral norms that necessarily apply to an Anselmian being are those arising from the necessary divine perfections, which Murphy claims are all and only the unqualifiedly good-making properties with an intrinsic maximum. Perhaps the most controversial claim in the entire book is that a traditional Anselmian being – understood as an absolutely perfect being, rather than one whose perfections limit each other or are traded off against each other – need not exhibit moral perfection, at least not as humans typically understand it. If moral goodness is understood as 'appropriate responsiveness to value', then of course an Anselmian being has that particular property. What Murphy denies, however, is that human well-being is valuable enough so as necessarily to warrant promotion by the Anselmian being. An Anselmian being may have justifying reasons for exhibiting moral goodness understood in this more robust way, but nothing intrinsic to the logic of divine perfection requires it.

Paul Draper and Erik Wielenberg elsewhere in this journal take up the challenge of the first part of Murphy's book, where he makes the case that an Anselmian being need not have moral perfection as one of its attributes. According to Murphy, an Anselmian being has justifying, but not requiring, reasons to promote creaturely well-being, and an Anselmian being has decisive reasons not to intend evil to creatures. Though I have reservations about his arguments

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supporting these claims, I will focus my comments on the second part of Murphy's book, where he explains why such a being might still be worthy of worship and allegiance, if the being is the God of Christian theism.

In a footnote at the very end of the book's first part, Murphy considers a discussion of divine goodness by Marilyn McCord Adams in *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (1999). Murphy claims that:

> Adams in fact follows Scotus in holding that creaturely good does not necessitate divine action, and so it is possible for there to be an absolutely perfect being who does not treat our good as giving requiring reasons for action. Her concern is that such a being is not a being who is good to us, and to whom we could have the right sort of allegiance. (124 n. 14)[2]

In other words, Murphy is aware of the worry that a being who does not treat human good as offering requiring reasons for action is not, in fact, worthy of our allegiance. He notes that justifying our allegiance to such a being is the task of the second part of the book.

The position that Murphy attributes to Adams here – that a God who fails to treat the promotion of human good as a requiring reason for action is unworthy of allegiance – is not a new one, even within the Christian tradition. Canonical expressions of it, however, are primarily found outside the Christian tradition as challenges to it. One of the best-known formulations of the challenge is found in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the section entitled 'Rebellion', the character Ivan Karamazov articulates it as follows:

> I don't want harmony, for love of mankind I don't want it. I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, even if I am wrong. Besides, they have put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore I hasten to return my ticket. And it is my duty, if only as an honest man, to return it as far ahead of time as possible. Which is what I am doing. It's not that I don't accept God, Alyosha, I just most respectfully return him the ticket. (Dostoevsky (2002), 245)

One plausible reading of Ivan's indignation is that he cannot in good conscience accept any benefits, either temporal or transcendent, in exchange for allegiance to an Anselmian being who does not treat the prevention of horrendous evils as a requiring reason for action. We'll return to this point shortly, but note that where Ivan and Murphy agree is in their conviction that a being's worthiness of worship and allegiance is a salient feature of arguments from evil. Leaving aside the question of whether an Anselmian being actually exists, we might ask whether such a being would, in fact, count as God, were it not worthy of worship or allegiance.

Let's grant for now that Murphy is correct about the contingency of moral perfection as a divine attribute: an Anselmian being need not be morally perfect in the sense of performing all possibly good-producing actions. To be clear, this is not to claim that the being is morally deficient, just that it responds appropriately to value. In other words, an Anselmian being is under no obligation to take human

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well-being as a reason for action; it is morally permissible for an Anselmian being not to take human well-being as an end.

Building on this conception of the Anselmian being, Murphy's major claims in the second part of the book are the following:

(1) An Anselmian being is worthy of worship simply in virtue of being an Anselmian being, prior to specifying any other contingent properties (such as being loving, valuing human well-being, taking on human form, etc.). (132–133)

(2) An Anselmian being is not necessarily worthy of allegiance (either alliance or obedience). (138, 144)

(3) An Anselmian being is possibly worthy of allegiance. (145)

(4) The God of the Abrahamic religions is actually, contingently, worthy of allegiance, since this God has (contingently and antecedently) willed the promotion of human good for justifying (non-requiring) reasons. (189)

(5) The fact that horrendous evils persist in the world seems to conflict both with (a) the notion of God as an Anselmian being having taken on a contingent ethical framework, and with (b) the notion of the Abrahamic God as a being to whom we owe allegiance. (180)

    (a) But even an Anselmian being's having taken on a contingent ethics does not necessitate that the being would be generally motivated to prevent setbacks to human well-being. (181)

    (b) And even the Abrahamic God (as an instance of an Anselmian being who has taken on a specific set of contingent ethical commitments) is not indicted by the existence of horrendous evils, because 'God does not owe us . . . any duties of care'. (193)

(6) The benefits of using perfect being theology to ascribe perfections to an Anselmian being are not only the ability to defuse arguments from evil, but also to offer an account that explains how the Christian God loves its creations voluntarily, without requiring reasons. (195)

Let's begin by assessing the claims that I will not be criticizing.[3] Claim (3), that an Anselmian being is possibly worthy of worship, seems trivially – or at least intuitively – true. There is plenty of *a posteriori* evidence for Claim (5) as well: the persistence of horrendous evils seems to conflict both with the God of the Abrahamic religions having a contingent ethical framework, as well as with humans owing allegiance to such a being. Claim (6) is also accurate: if Murphy's picture of the Anselmian being is correct, then we have a robust explanation for a claim central to the religious experience of many theists: God loves humans, though God need not have. It provides an account of what God is necessarily obliged to do, and what God may do, but need not do. So far, so good.

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Finally, recall Claim (4): the God of the Abrahamic religions is actually, contingently, worthy of allegiance, since this God has (contingently and antecedently) willed the promotion of human good for justifying (though non-requiring) reasons. Draper and Wielenberg have offered reasons why we might be uncomfortable with the idea that the divine moral framework is contingent, and need not require God to promote human good. But let's put those concerns aside for the moment, and allow that Claim (4) is plausible.

My concerns focus on claims (1), (2), (5a), and (5b). Let's begin with Claim (1): that an Anselmian being is worthy of worship simply in virtue of being an Anselmian being, prior to specifying any other contingent properties (such as being loving, valuing human well-being, taking on human form, etc.). In describing the notion of worship that he has in mind, Murphy specifies that the Anselmian being must be worthy of worship for the right kinds of reasons. Presumably the ideal kind of reason would be something like 'because the Anselmian being contains all absolute perfections' – and surely this is at the very least a reason for awe. Indeed, all absolute perfections – particularly that of omnipotence – should minimally inspire awe! But if we ask whether such a being is worthy of worship simply in virtue of being an Anselmian being, one's reasons for worship (as opposed to mere awe) are going to be overwhelmingly prudential: to avoid annihilation by a perfectly all-powerful being who is not necessarily committed to one's well-being! This seems like an inadequate reason to worship, and depending on one's conception of worship, such a reason may preclude the very possibility of worship altogether.[4]

My worries about Claim (1) are closely connected to my worries about Claim (2): that an Anselmian being is not necessarily worthy of allegiance (either alliance or obedience). If the Anselmian being (as described in the first part of the book) is indeed not necessarily worthy of allegiance – and I think that's the correct implication to draw – my inclination is to question whether this being counts as God at all. According to at least one prominent conception of 'God',

> The title 'God,' on the proposed usage, signifies (that is, connotes) a being worthy of worship, even if such a being fails to exist and therefore even if the title fails to refer to an actual thing. Worthiness of worship is, of course, maximally morally demanding. It requires inherent (or self-contained) moral perfection, including perfect moral righteousness, and such perfection in an agent demands, in turn, a perfectly loving character. (Moser (2010), 23)

Though Moser uses the word 'worship' here, it describes something more like Murphy's 'allegiance'. In other words, for Moser, the title 'God' itself just means 'a being supremely worthy of worship and (something like) allegiance'. This is a somewhat ambiguous formulation, since it doesn't specify whether God is necessarily or contingently worthy, but presumably Moser means to stipulate that the title 'God' itself is defined by such worthiness. In this particular case, God is not an Anselmian being, insofar as being worthy of worship or allegiance is not definitive of an Anselmian being. One possible response to this worry is simply

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to deny that this conception of 'God' tracks the conception of an Anselmian being, which would certainly handle the worry. Doing so, however, would entail a radical departure from a fairly widespread and plausible view of what the term 'God' denotes.

The two most difficult claims to accept from the second part of Murphy's book follow in response to his acceptance of Claim (5): the persistence of horrendous evils tells against both the contingency of God's ethics, and against the idea that we owe allegiance to the Abrahamic God – call these (5a) and (5b). In response to (5a), Murphy argues that even an Anselmian being's having taken on a contingent ethics does not necessitate that the being would be generally motivated to prevent setbacks to human well-being. This response, however, threads a very small needle! If the Anselmian being has contingently (but committedly) taken on a divine ethics that somewhat resembles human moral norms, then it is counterintuitive at the very least to say that this commitment doesn't necessitate that the being would be generally motivated to prevent setbacks to human well-being. As Moser writes,

> By definition, a being who merits the maximally honorific title 'God' would be worthy of worship, and thus would be morally perfect and hence perfectly loving toward all humans, even toward all human enemies of God, in such a way that God would seek the best, all things considered, for all humans. (*ibid.*, 182)

Murphy's response to (5b), however, is the hardest bullet to bite. In response to the claim that horrendous evils tell against humans owing allegiance to the Abrahamic God – that is, the one who has contingently taken on a specific set of ethical commitments – Murphy argues that 'God does not owe us . . . any duties of care' (193). Indeed, this is true: this conclusion is entailed by the arguments of the first part of the book, and certainly, the idea that God owes humans absolutely nothing is quite orthodox. Further, there is a certain comfort in the explanatory power of this account for making sense of the popular claim 'God loves us, though God needn't have'. But the claim 'God does not owe us . . . any duties of care' ought not to be used as a response to the existence of horrendous evils in the world. It's difficult to say exactly where the normativity or inappropriateness lies here, but *prima facie*, it appears that either God, or the person offering the response, has some kind of epistemic confusion or moral deficiency. It may exhibit a kind of epistemic confusion, because one might think that's simply the wrong kind of reason to give in the face of horrendous evil – say, the torture and murder of a six-year-old. In this situation, if there is any sort of appropriate reasons-giving at all, the reasons are likely to be existential, not philosophical. It may also exhibit a kind of moral deficiency in either God or the reasons-giver. In the case of the reasons-giver, such reasons-giving betrays a radical lack of care for the one undergoing the horrendous evil. In the case of God, it is difficult to explain how an Anselmian being who has adopted a contingent divine ethics that makes human well-being central to its concerns could allow really horrendous evils to occur.

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To hold that, in light of the persistence of horrendous evils, the Abrahamic God 'owes us no duties of care' seems to play directly into the hands of the Ivan Karamazovs of the world. Note that in his divine challenge, Ivan does not deny the existence either of the Anselmian God, or of the Abrahamic God contingently committed to human flourishing. Ivan simply denies that such a god is worthy of his allegiance. An adequate response to the persistence of horrendous evils must preserve unequivocally the allegiance-worthy character of God, on pain of causing the Ivans of the world to return their tickets.

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Notes

1. Murphy (2017). All page numbers in parentheses in my text refer to this book.
2. There is some question whether this is an accurate representation of McCord Adams's view. She seems to reject a similar view to the one Murphy attributes to her – that of Nelson Pike – in *Horrendous Evils*:

   > [Pike] consistently draws on 'ordinary' moral intuitions and seconds Mill's insistence that unless God is perfectly good in the ordinary sense of moral goodness applied to human beings, He is not worthy of worship . . . Whereas nontheistic value theories assign all persons a common ontological status as humans and find it natural to see all persons as woven into a common web of rights and mutual obligations, many Christian thinkers regard God of the wrong ontological category for such entanglements. (Adams (1999), 11–12)

   She presumably includes herself in the latter group. Elsewhere, however, she writes that:

   > insofar as . . . God is free, problems of evil rearise – not as questions about whether God fulfills His moral obligations, but about whether Divine policy has chosen to furnish being to a very good or optimal world, and whether God has chosen to be *good* to individual created persons. (*ibid.*, 69–70)

   In other words, even positing the incommensurability of goods (finite versus infinite), the problems of evil are not dissolved, but simply take on a new form. In short, her position is significantly more complex than Murphy suggests.
3. This is not to say that the claims are completely uncontroversial, but just to say that I will not be the one to quibble with them.
4. Paul Moser addresses this very issue in *The Evidence for God*:

   > Let's say that a being is worthy of worship if and only if that being, having inherent moral perfection, merits worship as unqualified adoration, love, trust, and obedience. Of course, humans can worship a morally defective powerful being, perhaps out of human fear of harmful threatening power, but the being in question would not be worthy of worship. (Moser (2010), 23)

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