The 2026 British Analytic Theology Symposium
21st – 22nd May, 2026
York

Thursday 21st May

12.30 – Registration desk opens (York Medical Society)

13:15 - 15:15 Short paper session 1 (streams)

Stream A **– Theatre Room**

Chair - Oliver Crisp

1. Tim Mawson: 'From the Unsurpassability of the Economic Trinity to the Necessity of the Immanent Trinity'
2. Joseph Jedwab: 'Relative Identity, Trinity, and Simplicity'
3. Ben Page & Max Baker-Hytch: 'The Wright Account of the Atonement'

Stream B **– Tempest Anderson Room**

Chair - Aysenur Unugur Tabur

4. Ferhat Taskin: 'Could God Be Perfectly Free and Rational in Actualizing a World If There Are Infinitely Many Surpassable Worlds?'
5. Junbo Cao: 'Two Kinds of Motivational Ultimacy: Reconsidering the Charge of Egoism against Glorificationism'
6. Seyma Yazici: 'Theodicy without Harm: Disputing the Morality Premise of Anti-Theodicy'

Stream C **– King's Manor K/G07**

Chair - Simon Hewitt

7. Tasia Scrutton: ''Thy Kingdom come': divine and human action in Catholic ecotheology relating to the Kingdom of God'
8. Ryan Byerly: 'An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Transformative Experiences of Connectedness'
9. Alec Siantonas: 'Sin and The Dialect of the Tribe'

15:15 - Tea and Coffee (York Medical Society - Oak Panelled Room)

15.45 – Registration desk closes

15.50 **–** Welcome from the BATS Committee **- Theatre Room**

16.00 – Plenary session #1 – Theatre Room

William Wood: 'The Doctrine of Sin as an Explanatory Hypothesis'

Chair - Tim Mawson

17.30 – Conference Dinner (York Minster Refectory – Pre Booked Only)

19.30 – Plenary session #2 – Theatre Room

Brian Leftow: 'Divine Simplicity and the Trinity'

Chair - William Wood

21.00 – Pub

Friday 22nd May

9.00-11.00 – Short paper session 2 (streams)

Stream D – **Theatre Room**

Chair - Max Baker-Hytch

10. Daniel Woolnough: 'Calibrating Theistic Evidence: Theodical Transparency, Hiddenness Goods, & Skeptical Theism'
11. Gregory Stacey and Tyler McNabb: 'Divine Epistemology and Proper Function'
12. Damiano Migliorini: 'Omnipresence and Pantheism'

Stream E - **Tempest Anderson Room**

Chair - Ben Page

13. Valerian Gamgebeli Doroshenko: 'Divine Perfection and Infinite Debt: A Necessary Connection Argument for Eternal Conscious Torment'
14. Nathan Coundon: 'Anselmian Atonement and The Immaculate Conception'
15. Tammy Wiese: 'Judgment, Verdict, and Validation: The 'Trial-by-Ordeal' Logic'

Stream F – **King's Manor K/G07**

Chair - Martin Pickup

16. Elizabeth Burns: 'Divine Omniscience and Human Goodness'
17. Ho-yeung Lee and Tien-Chun Lo: 'An Expansionist Approach to Omniscience'
18. Aysenur Unugur Tabur: 'The Case for Open Theism: The Collapse of Frankfurt Cases and Its Implications for Divine Omniscience'

11:00 – Tea and Coffee (York Medical Society - Oak Panelled Room)

11.40-13.00 – Short paper session 3 (streams)

Stream G – **Theatre Room**

Chair - Ben Page

19. Andrew Loke: 'In defence of Theistic Conceptualism and a new conception of God'
20. Jace Snodgrass: 'On the Simplicity of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity: An Exercise in Constituent and Non-Constituent Ontologies'

Stream H - **Tempest Anderson Room**

Chair - Daniel Woolnough

21. M.J. García-Encinas: ‘It is Impossible to Think its Negation’
22. Daniel Molto: ‘The Consequences of Theology’

Stream I – **King’s Manor K/G07**

Chair - Tasia Scrutton

23. Tommaso Soriani: ‘When God Chooses a Metaphysics: Theological Stakes in Theories of Personal Persistence’
24. Emily Hammer: ‘Aborting the Embryonic Christ Argument: Rethinking Personhood and Theological Implications for Embryo Research’

13.00 – Lunch on own (Recommended: Shambles Food Court)

14.10-15.30 – Short paper session 4

Stream J – **Theatre Room**

Chair - Tim Mawson

25. Jonathan Hill: ‘Christ’s temptations and the divine nature’
26. Daniel Rubio: ‘Non-Trichotomous Afterlife Axiology’

15:30 – Break

15.50-17.10 – Short paper session 5

Stream K – **Theatre Room**

Chair - Oliver Crisp

27. Luke Wilson: ‘Divine Motivation and Brute Preferences’
28. Isabel Cortens: ‘Self-knowledge, Understanding, and Union with God’

17:15 - Symposium Finishes

17.30 – Optional Evensong at York Minster

18:30 – Optional Dinner

20:00 – Pub

Abstracts:

1. Tim Mawson: 'From the Unsurpassability of the Economic Trinity to the Necessity of the Immanent Trinity'

I wish to get help thinking about a crucial premise in an argument for the Trinity. The central thought in the argument is a simple one, *viz*. that if it would be best for God to redeem us in a way that requires three divine persons, God must in Himself be a trinity. Here it is a bit more formally:-

1) If there is a God, then He is necessarily omnipotent.

2) For God to be omnipotent, it must be possible for Him to create a universe such as ours, with significantly free creatures, such as ourselves, in it.

3) A universe in which there are significantly free creatures such as ourselves is one in which a fall is possible.

4) If there is a God, a fall is possible.

5) If there is a God, then He is necessarily perfectly good.

6) For God to be perfectly good, then if a fall is possible it must in turn be possible for Him to redeem fallen creatures in whichever way would be the best possible way for Him to redeem them if there is a best possible way.

7) If there is a God, He must be able to redeem fallen creatures in the best possible way, if there is a best possible way.

8) There is a best possible way for God to redeem fallen creatures and it requires the activity of exactly three distinct divine persons.

9) So, if there is a God, He must be a trinity.

All the premises in this argument are going to be acceptable to all theists with the exception of premise 8. Premise 8 is a value judgment of a particularly strong – transworld – sort. I need help from those who know their way around the treasure house of Theology better than I do, to point me to reasons already extant in the literature germane to the claim that not just is God's redeeming fallen creatures via a method involving three divine persons a good way for Him to redeem them, or even that it is actually the best way, but that it is the best *possible* way. And of course, having my attention drawn to new reasons for and against this premise or holes in the argument in which it features would also be welcome.

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2. Joseph Jedwab: ‘Relative Identity, Trinity, and Simplicity’

The doctrines of the Trinity and divine simplicity raise theological puzzles. I consider a puzzle that concerns their compatibility. And I argue that a version of the relative identity account of the Trinity solves the puzzle.

The doctrine of the Trinity says that, in the Trinity, different divine persons have the same divine nature. The relative identity account says that, in general, we count Ns by the relation of being the same N as. The Father and Son are the same being and so, counting by same being, are one being. They are different divine persons and so, counting by same person, are two persons.

The doctrine of divine simplicity says:

> (DS) For every true intrinsic divine predication of the form ‘*a* is F’ *a*’s F-ness exists, which is the truthmaker for that predication, and is identical to *a*.

A truthmaker is any entity because of whose existence some claim is true. And an entity is one because of whose existence some claim is true only if necessarily, if that entity exists, that claim is true. There are well-known puzzles for divine simplicity about what God contingently knows or wills.

But what puzzles are there for the Trinity? I start with a general account of truthmakers for true intrinsic predications about each divine person and how that relates to truthmakers for true intrinsic predications about God. I do, though, address a puzzle. The Father and Son have the same divine nature. By (DS), the Father’s divine nature exists and is the Father, and the Son’s divine nature exists and is the Son. If, however, the Father is the Father’s divine nature, which is the Son’s divine nature, which is the Son, then the Father is the Son, contrary to the doctrine of the Trinity.

We must distinguish two senses of the word ‘nature’. In the abstract sense, the divine nature is the abstract feature of being divine. In the concrete sense, the divine nature is the concrete divine being. In the abstract sense, everything divine has the feature of being divine, but nothing divine is identical to that feature, for nothing divine is a feature. In the concrete sense, everything divine is a divine being, and so each of the Father and the Son is a divine being, but though the Father and Son are different divine persons, they are the same divine being.

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3. Ben Page & Max Baker-Hytch: ‘The Wright Account of the Atonement’

A dominant strand of thought in the earliest centuries of Christianity was the idea that Jesus’ achieving victory over the powers of darkness was at the heart of what Jesus’ death accomplished. Despite the apparent popularity of this view in earlier centuries, it is seldom discussed in the contemporary literature on the atonement and this omission is especially striking in the analytic theology literature, which has focussed heavily on penal substitutionary and satisfaction models. With that said, one figure in the contemporary Biblical studies scene has notably emphasised the motif of Jesus’ victory over the powers of darkness is N. T. Wright (though Wright acknowledges the presence of other motifs too). In contrast to many modern discussions of the atonement, which seem to isolate certain Biblical texts and construct models that might make sense of them, Wright is insistent that the entire sweep of the Biblical narrative must remain in view throughout – a narrative of God’s bringing order out of chaos and creating humans with a special vocation to be image-bearers who reflect God to creation and reflect creation’s praise back to God; of humans succumbing to idolatrous desires which give power to forces that ultimately keep us captive; and of God becoming incarnate to inaugurate a kingdom that subverts these dark forces, ultimately allowing these forces to do their very worst to him and in so doing, somehow defeating them. It is the question of exactly how the dark powers are defeated by Jesus’ death that is of particular interest to us. This question of the mechanism of Jesus’ victory is something we suspect Wright prefers not to speculate about, perhaps viewing it as lying beyond the scope of the Biblical texts. As philosophers, we feel bound by no such constraints, and are happy to speculate insofar as we don’t clearly contradict the Biblical material. To that end, our paper will attempt to sketch a few possible models of the mechanics of Jesus’ victory over the powers of darkness. These will include the thought that the dark powers exhaust themselves in their effort to annihilate God incarnate, the related thought that Jesus’ lack of beholdenness to these powers makes him immune to their attacks, and the idea that confronting violence not with violence but with self-giving love somehow subverts the dark powers.

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4. Ferhat Taskin: ‘Could God Be Perfectly Free and Rational in Actualizing a World If There Are Infinitely Many Surpassable Worlds?’

Suppose that there is no single best of all possible worlds, but instead infinitely many surpassable worlds that God could actualize. On this “infinitely many surpassable worlds” (IMSW) scenario, it has been argued that an omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnirational God appears unable to exercise genuine freedom in actualizing a world, since for any world chosen, a better world is available. William Rowe contends that this undermines either divine freedom or omnibenevolence and renders God surpassable in both action and choice.

Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder famously have argued that God might create a randomizer that generates random outputs and then actualizes the world whose number has been generated by the randomizer. Given that there are infinitely many surpassable worlds and the bare world is not good enough to be actualized, God would be making a rational decision (and thus justified) to create any world the randomizer selects. Also, Brian Leftow has suggested that given that God has non-rational brute preferences and that God’s personal preferences (love, for instance) don’t track objective intrinsic value, his preferences can still be considered morally appropriate. God with personal preferences can choose and do otherwise regarding actualizing possible worlds on (IMSW) without compromising his own omnibenevolence.

In this paper, first, I argue that the randomization strategy should be rejected as it compromises God’s full-blooded agency and genuine control over creative choices. I suggest that since (a) the goodness of divine character is not necessarily expressed by the value of God’s choice and (b) God is not an aggregate value maximizer, the theistic God can choose and do otherwise on (IMSW) while preserving his perfect freedom without arbitrariness. Second, I claim that though Leftow is right that God has non-rational preferences which can be morally relevant, he is wrong in considering love as more central than wisdom to God’s character. Since all of God’s essential attributes are central to his character and since this implies that he does not only have rational and moral preferences but also non-rational and non-moral preferences, each of his attributes (again including non-rational and non-moral ones) can be seen as a grounded consideration to actualize an inferior world on (IMSW). God, in this picture, neither makes arbitrary choices nor loses his full-blooded agency. Therefore, though he has non-rational and non-moral preferences, he is still unsurpassably rational and good. Finally, I argue that a God capable of rational, moral, aesthetic, and other forms of preference exhibits a richer and more robust form of perfection than a purely value-maximizing or algorithmic agent.

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5. Junbo Cao: ‘Two Kinds of Motivational Ultimacy: Reconsidering the Charge of Egoism against Glorificationism’

Contemporary discussion regarding God’s motivational framework does not account for the distinction between two forms of motivational ultimacy. Accounting for this distinction helps to untie some knots—that a self-regarding ultimate end implies that God is problematically egoistic—in the debate. This paper has two aims: it argues that (1) the debate about God’s motivational framework must give due consideration to the distinction between two forms of motivational ultimacy: noninstrumental and hierarchical; (2) a hierarchical construal of glorificationism (or other self-regarding hierarchically ultimate end for creation) is immune to the amorists’ objections that glorificationism implies that God is problematically egoistic. First, this paper summarizes the amorists’ main objection against glorificationism and point out its similarity to the charge of egoism against eudaemonism—a theory of human motivational framework. Next, this paper shows that those who charge eudaemonism of being egoistic misunderstand it as espousing a noninstrumentally ultimate end of human motivation. Instead, eudaemonism espouses a hierarchically ultimate end, which is not susceptible to the charge of egoism. Lastly, this paper argues that, insofar as human motivational framework is a helpful model for studying God’s motivational framework, self-glorification (or some other self-regarding end) as God’s hierarchically ultimate end is also immune to the amorists’ charge of egoism. In fact, those who insist that God’s hierarchically ultimate end must be other regarding (e.g., love for creation) must bear the burden of identifying a coherent candidate for God’s hierarchically ultimate end.

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6. Seyma Yazici: ‘Theodicy without Harm: Disputing the Morality Premise of Anti-Theodicy’

This paper contests the anti-theodical moral demotivation argument, which posits that practice of theodicy should be entirely abandoned due to its purported morally harmful consequences. Accordingly, since in theodicies all evil states of affairs serve the end of attaining greater goods, they cannot be *ultimately* harmful and cannot be considered as *genuinely* evil. If an action is not genuinely evil, one cannot have moral motivation fight against it. Thus, this perspective about evil undermines our moral motivation. I will argue that the anti-theodical moral demotivation argument fails and hence it doesn’t force the theodicist to give up the idea of greater good, nor does it diminish her moral motivation to fight against evil.

Firstly, I will outline the connection between the concept of the greater good and theodicies, as well as the relationship between ultimate harm and genuineness of evil, and the role this connection plays in moral motivation as set forth by the anti-theodicist. Then, I argue that the anti-theodicist’s stance on the nature of moral motivation is ambiguous. In other words, it is unclear whether the argument assumes a Humean or non-Humean theory of moral motivation and whether it makes an empirical or conceptual claim. Regardless of how we interpret the argument, I contend that it has problems.

Next, I criticize the relationship between the concepts of harming and genuineness of evil as postulated by the anti-theodicist, claiming that it does not align with our moral intuitions and moral experience. To do that, I examine prominent accounts of harm and I conclude that the theodicist could employ one of the following strategies to challenge the plausibility of this relationship: a) to argue that the anti-theodicist’s assumed account of harm (the counterfactual comparative account, CCA) is inadequate, or b) appeal to an alternative account, such as Shiffrin’s (non-comparative account, NCA) or Hanser’s (harms as losses of basic goods, LBG). Alternatively, given the absence of a unified, morally, and philosophically satisfying account of harm, c) they could reject the anti- theodicist’s connection between genuine evil and harm altogether. More plausibly, d) the theodicist can endorse a pluralistic approach to the nature of harm, claiming that there are serious and genuine instances of harm that fit one account or another.

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7. Tasia Scrutton: ‘‘Thy Kingdom come’: divine and human action in Catholic ecotheology relating to the Kingdom of God’

Within Roman Catholic churches, it is common to encounter the idea of the Kingdom of God (‘the Kingdom’) as a focus for human action relating to ecological/social justice action. According to this theology, the Kingdom is already present imperfectly in the actions of Christians and others working for justice and peace. At the same time, Christians and others are called to make the Kingdom fully present in human society throughout the world by establishing fair and peaceful social structures. These structures are spoken of in terms that relate not only to other humans but also in relation to non-human animals and to the earth as our shared home (e.g. Laudato Si’ 246). The Kingdom, fully realised, involves or paves the way for not only perfect human structures, but also aspects that can only be brought about through divine action: the resurrection of the dead and creation of the new heaven and new earth; the cessation of death; the second coming of Christ; the last judgement.

Recent studies suggest that the idea of the Kingdom can do significant work when it comes to motivating sustained ecological/social action (Malcolm and Scott 2025). Yet the concept of the Kingdom also involves a puzzle. If human action is necessary for the Kingdom, we have grounds for despair: human beings in general and the societies they construct do not overall seem to be becoming more just, peaceful or caring of nature. The gap between rich and poor has become wider; ecological action plays second fiddle to ‘business as usual’ in the capitalist pursuit for wealth; we have moved from the slingshot to the atom bomb (Adorno 1966). On the other hand, if the Kingdom is brought about primarily by divine action, it is not clear why human striving is necessary, potentially leading to quietistic theology that asserts that sorting out ecological issues is ultimately ‘God’s job’ rather than ours (Scrutton 2025).

For these reasons, it seems important to affirm an interplay between divine and human action. Yet exactly what this interplay involves remains unclear. Does God work (only) through humans (‘God has no hands but our hands to do his work today’)? Alternatively, does (or will) God augment human achievements with more direct divine action? I will consider this question in conversation with key thinkers such as Jürgen Moltmann and Terry Eagleton, and with Catholic Social Teaching.

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8. Ryan Byerly: ‘An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Transformative Experiences of Connectedness’

People sometimes report having experiences in which they feel connected to something vast such as everyone, everything, the earth, or the universe. These experiences are closely related to yet distinguishable from other experiences such as awe, ego dissolution, mystical experiences, and non-dual awareness; and they are often reported in religious or spiritual contexts. This programmatic talk will hit the high points of a book project devoted to these experiences, under contract with Oxford University Press, which I will have nearly completed by the time of the conference—the first book-length academic treatment of this topic. I will present a theory about what these experiences involve; argue that they make distinctive contributions to many different dimensions of human well-being; evaluate whether there are different subtypes of these experiences reflecting more specific ideologies which differ in their accuracy; describe some of the most important causes of these experiences; and develop an account of a virtue of skilfully cultivating these experiences for good reasons. I’ll do each of those things quickly, leaving ample opportunity to discuss the topics that most interest the audience.

To briefly anticipate some of these things, I contend that these are episodic, conscious experiences that represent a person as somehow connected to something vast, accompanied by a distinctive qualitative feeling of connection. There is mounting empirical evidence that these experiences, even moreso than and often in contrast to neighbouring experiences, contribute to positive affect, reduced stress and depression, prosocial and proenvironmental attitudes and behaviors, felt meaning and spiritual fulfilment, epistemic goods, and overall life satisfaction. Researchers and the general public need to take seriously the possibility that there are diverse types of connectedness experiences which differ in their accuracy, including types reflecting diverse religious ideologies of connectedness, whether these differences affect the contents of these experiences or only their interpretations. Causes of connectedness experiences include spacious natural beauty, chill-inducing music, devotional chanting, various forms of meditation, hypnosis and other types of suggestion, floatation tank experiences and other types of sensory deprivation, intentional hyperventilation, group assemblies and synchronous movement, psychedelic drugs, as well as individual differences in past experience, connectedness ideology, and trait absorption. Finally, those with the virtue of connectedness tend to make skilled use their resources to cultivate connectedness experiences, because of their appreciation of both genuine values that these experiences have as well as the limits to their value and liabilities associated with some of them.

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9. Alec Siantonas: ‘Sin and The Dialect of the Tribe’

According to the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin, humankind is generally sinful: inclined to evil and the rejection of God. This sinfulness, moreover, is not merely a matter of individual choice, nor of imitating sinful examples, but in some sense inherent to our nature. Yet, to complicate matters further, this is a corruption of a nature that was created good, which corruption is, in some sense, an inheritance from our ancestors. How might this work? This paper suggests turning to externalism about mental content for resources. The contents of our thoughts - including the thoughts of our hearts - are determined by external conditions - including general human sinfulness. Thus, independent of any choices that we make, or examples of concrete sinfulness we follow, sin already shapes the dispositions of our hearts. Some toy examples are considered as proof of concept, and then two potential objections are answered: first that this proposal is overly intellectual, and secondly that it reduces sin to (bad) social conformity.

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10. Daniel Woolnough: ‘Calibrating Theistic Evidence: Theodical Transparency, Hiddenness Goods, & Skeptical Theism’

Debates about the evidential problem of evil, divine hiddenness, skeptical theism, and natural theology are often pursued on separate tracks. This paper connects them by treating them as interacting constraints on the public evidence, understood as what is in principle available to shared inquiry and intersubjective assessment.

First, I isolate a pattern that would constitute strong public evidence for theism if it obtained. Call this theodical transparency: a publicly discernible, systematic, non-ad-hoc alignment between many serious evils and morally weighty goods, trackable in a disciplined way across a wide range of cases. I argue, comparatively and in Bayesian terms, that such robust moral fit is more expected on purposive moral governance than on salient nontheistic competitors that do not posit an aiming agent, conditional on the raw data about evil.

Second, I argue that hiddenness-motivated considerations impose limits on how supportive the total public evidence can be. If there are hiddenness goods, goods that require theism not to be epistemically compulsory for a nontrivial range of competent inquirers and times, then the total public evidence should often keep rational credence in theism within an intermediate band. This yields an evidential compensation result: when non-evil public evidence is strong, hiddenness can force limits on how confirmatory evil-related public evidence can be overall, and can even render it neutral or disconfirming conditional on the non-evil support.

Third, the package motivates a modest, domain-specific skeptical theism. If, per argument, hiddenness goods constrain the maximum public support theism can receive in the relevant range, and if theodical transparency would substantially increase that support, then we should expect limited public access to God’s detailed reasons in many evil cases. This also weakens no-see-um inferences from the absence of apparent reasons to the absence of reasons.

The framework offers several theistically friendly upshots. It explains why there is a strong prima facie public problem of evil, why many theodicies may predictably seem dialectically unsuccessful even if God has justifying reasons, and why persistent reasonable disagreement about the strength of theistic evidence is to be expected.

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11. Gregory Stacey and Tyler McNabb: ‘Divine Epistemology and Proper Function’

Alvin Plantinga’s analysis of knowledge as ‘warranted true belief’ has influenced both contemporary epistemology and the work of analytic theologians. Some have used Plantinga’s work to elucidate the religious epistemologies of historical theologians including Aquinas, Newman, and Barth. Others have appropriated it to develop accounts of the Church’s group belief and the development of doctrine.

Despite this impact, an emerging critique alleges that Plantinga’s ‘proper functionalism’ is undermined by his own theological commitments: notably, the claim that God is omniscient. According to Plantinga, warranted beliefs are produced by cognitive faculties functioning in line with their ‘design plan’. Since God lacks any design plan, Daniel Lightsey argues that on Plantinga’s analysis, none of God’s beliefs are warranted. Moreover, Perry Hendricks and Tina Anderson note that elsewhere in his work (the Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism), Plantinga holds that when a subject reflects upon the origins and reliability of their cognitive faculties, they must be able to judge that the probability of their cognitive faculties reliably producing true beliefs is high rather than low or inscrutable. Otherwise, they will have an undercutting defeater for all their beliefs. Yet if God’s cognitive faculties were not produced by a providential designer, what reason could He have for thinking that they are reliable? How then can His (defeated) beliefs count as knowledge?

In this paper, we respond to these concerns by considering how analytic theologians who are attracted to Plantinga’s analysis of human knowledge should apply that analysis to God. In brief, we argue that Plantinga’s commitment to divine omniscience is entirely compatible with his analysis of human knowledge as warranted true belief. As Plantinga has briefly suggested, God and creatures possess knowledge in an *analogous* sense. Drawing on Scholastic accounts of analogy as ‘focal meaning’ and ‘proportion’, we expand on Plantinga’s suggestion by exploring just what it means for proper functionalists to say that God has knowledge. As we illustrate, the precise nature of the analogy depends on one’s preferred metaphysics of God. We further show that God faces no unique undercutting defeater for His beliefs, if indeed God has beliefs. We conclude by offering a reflection on the extent to which proper functionalists should think that divine epistemology differs from human epistemology and on the broader implications that this may have for the doctrine of God.

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12. Damiano Migliorini: ‘Omnipresence and Pantheism’

Divine omnipresence (DO) can be defined as follows:

DO = if something X exists, then the entire essence of God is fully present in X.

X can be: abstract or material objects, numbers, act of being, tropes, bare particulars, powers, and so on. This definition implies that God is present even in non-spatial and non-material entities. The paper shows that, if DO is taken seriously, the statement “God is present in everything” entails the stronger conclusion that “God is everything” (pantheism).

Prior to creation, only God’s “substance” existed as infinite and non-spatial. According to the “Vacancy Problem” (Lebens, 2025), in order to create a world distinct from Himself, God would have to “withdraw” from some “place” (e.g. theory of *tzimtzum*). However, if the created world and God can be co-located, it is no longer necessary for God to “limit Himself” in order for creation to occur. For this reason, Lebens reformulates the “Vacancy Problem” as the “Really Real Problem of Creation” (RRPC): if God is perfect, nothing could exist somehow outside of God. Consequently, there is no room in *logical space* for a universe existing somehow outside of God.

My argument reinforces RRPC. Assuming that God can create something that is “logically distinct” from Himself without thereby becoming less perfect, what can differentiate God from the creature? Two hypotheses: (α) the distinguishing element is something *material*; or (β) it is something *formal*.

If God creates a world distinct from Himself by creating something material (without committing to any particular account of spacetime), and if God (G) is present in every infinitesimal part of a material object X, then it is unclear what could distinguish X from G. One might appeal to a material component Y, but G is present in every infinitesimal part of Y as well. Hence, no material feature can ground the distinction. If X=G+Y, and Y=G, then X=G+G; and since G is infinite, G+G is equivalent to G. *Everything is G*.

A similar result follows under hypothesis (β). Suppose that what distinguishes God from a chair (C) is a “formal quality” such as contingency (Co). If contingency is tied to materiality, the previous argument applies. The chair has a form (F). If (Co) is purely formal, then the chair whose metaphysical structure is C=G+F+Co, cannot be distinguished from God either, since G is present in both F and Co. *Pantheism* therefore appears unavoidable if DO is affirmed, yet it remains deeply problematic. This tension motivates either a retreat into mystery (Price, 2023) or the search for an alternative ontology.

References:

LEBENS, S.(2025), *On the Locations of God: Jewish Approaches to Omnipresence*, in A. Marmodoro, D. Migliorini, B. Page (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Omnipresence*, OUP, chap. 22.

PRICE, R.J. (2023), *A paradoxical Account of Divine Omnipresence*, in Heythrop 64, 367–382.

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13. Valerian Gamgebeli Doroshenko: ‘Divine Perfection and Infinite Debt: A Necessary Connection Argument for Eternal Conscious Torment’

This paper argues that within the framework of Perfect Being Theology (PBT), the traditionalist doctrine of Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT) is not merely compatible with PBT but necessarily follows from it under certain conditions. Thus, while there is a putative incompatibility between the idea of a perfect, just, and loving God and the idea of everlasting punitive suffering—constituting a major challenge to biblical theism—I contend that the metaphysics of the Greatest Possible Being (GPB) makes ECT a just and unavoidable consequence, and demonstrate why existing alternative eschatological models fail.

My central thesis is that, necessarily, the existence of the GPB—a qualitatively infinite (QI), perfectly holy and just being—implies ECT for any free moral agent (FMA) who commits Sin (rejection of God’s lordship), unless the FMA’s QI moral debt is satisfied via substitutionary atonement by a Sin-less QI substitute.

I advance a concise deductive argument:

P1. Sin against a QI GPB constitutes an offense of infinite gravity, accruing a QI moral debt (Infinite Debt Thesis).

P2. Perfect retributive justice, an essential attribute of the GPB, demands that this QI debt be paid.

P3. Finite FMAs are metaphysically incapable of rendering satisfaction of QI value.

P4. Alternative views of hell (annihilationism, universalism, and the choice model) would leave the QI debt eternally unsatisfied, violating the GPB’s divine justice.

C1. Therefore, the only coherent outcome for Sinner FMAs is ECT.

P5. Only a Sin-less QI substitute is capable of satisfying a QI debt on behalf of FMAs via substitutionary atonement.

C2. Consequently, ECT is the necessary and just consequence of Sin against the GPB that all FMAs must suffer unless they are redeemed by a Sin-less QI substitute.

I formalize this necessity symbolically as:

$\Box[\mathrm{GPB} \rightarrow \forall \mathrm{PW} \forall x((\mathrm{FMA}(x) \wedge \mathrm{Sinned}(x) \wedge \neg \mathrm{Redeemed}(x)) \rightarrow \mathrm{ECT}(x))]$

This can be read as:

Necessarily, if a GPB exists, then for every possible world and for every individual x, if x is a Free Moral Agent and x has Sinned and x is not Redeemed, then ECT obtains for x.

The primary contribution of my paper is to shift the debate from assessing the compatibility of PBT and ECT to demonstrating their necessary interconnection. In this way, I seek to offer a rigorous philosophical defense of the traditionalist view of hell as retributive punishment. The argument reinforces the coherence of theism and clarifies the unique role of Christ’s atonement in Christian theology.

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14. Nathan Coundon: ‘Anselmian Atonement and The Immaculate Conception’

In this paper, I offer an original ‘Anselmian’ defence of the Immaculate Conception (ICM), the tenet that Mary the mother of Christ was conceived without original sin. I show that Anselm’s argument in Cur Deus Homo, in which he proposed that God had to become human and sacrifice his human life to merit the forgiveness of human sins, proves more than Anselm noticed: on Anselm’s axiology, the God-Man’s sacrifice can also merit the existence of one morally immaculate human alongside Himself. This second innocent person could play the role which Anselm ascribes to Mary. Whilst Anselm did not affirm that Mary was born sinless, he maintained that she had to be completely purified of sin prior to becoming Christ’s mother. I show that Anselm provided the resources to uphold the tenet that God granted Mary moral immaculacy as a compensatory response for Christ’s offering of his immaculate humanity in his death. My Anselmian argument for ICM develops our understanding of the origins of premises required by arguments for Marian immaculacy. Whilst, as Adams (2010) has shown, it was later theologians, particularly Duns Scotus, who explicitly argued for ICM while developing Mariology after Anselm, I demonstrate that the tools for justifying ICM were already present in Anselm’s work, which was not noticed by Anselm nor in recent scholarship on his atonement theory.

I develop the Anselmian case for ICM through an analysis of Anselm’s axiology. In response to Evans’ view (2004) that Anselm’s account is based on placing God in feudal social categories, I argue that Anselm’s use of feudal imagery is a foil for a fascinating axiology according to which proportionate goods can be exchanged between God and humans, whilst an agent can only ‘possess’ goods if the goods are below, or equal to, that agent in a hierarchy of value. In Christ’s sacrificial offering of his perfect humanity hypostatically united to his divinity, he gave the Father possessions of immense value; in Anselm’s axiology, this warrants the Father giving Christ return goods of equal worth. I propose that the bestowal of an impeccable human nature upon a person of Christ’s choosing, Mary, alongside the forgiveness of human sins, would be the proportionate response to Christ’s actions open to the Father within Anselm’s axiology. Thus, Anselm’s belief that Mary had a suis generis form of moral purity can be developed and honed through an analytic clarification of his atonement theory.

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15. Tammy Wiese: ‘Judgment, Verdict, and Validation: The ‘Trial-by-Ordeal’ Logic’

Recent analytic theology has called for greater clarity about the mechanism of atonement, namely, how Christ’s death removes the obstacle of sin and restores communion between God and humanity. While the Christus Victor tradition emphasizes Christ’s victory over the powers of sin, death, and the devil, it is frequently criticized for lacking a sufficiently articulated mechanism. This paper argues that the logic of ‘trial-by-ordeal’ provides the missing analytic structure required to render Christus Victor a defensible account of atonement.

Drawing on the Epistle to the Hebrews and Second Temple Jewish conceptions of judgment, I propose that Christ’s death functions as a ‘trial-by-ordeal,’ a test whose outcome yields a public verdict. Christ showed through both words and actions that God does not condemn; however, the devil, in contradiction, asserts that God’s post-mortem judgment should be equated with punishment. This belief naturally causes fear of death and leads to lifelong bondage. Christ is accused of false witness and blasphemy when he proclaims that God does not condemn, and the ‘trial-by-ordeal’ can evaluate such claims. If Christ’s claims are false, death would rightly claim him. The resurrection, therefore, serves as the divine verdict on this ordeal, validating Christ’s claim.

I formalize this argument using propositional logic to show that, given the resurrection, the condemnatory interpretation of post-mortem judgment is falsified. The defeat of the devil is thus epistemic and judicial rather than violent or transactional. The accuser’s claim is publicly overturned, and the fear-sustaining human bondage collapses. On this model, Christ “destroys” the devil by falsifying the very premise that underwrites his power.

This paper situates the trial-by-ordeal mechanism within analytic discussions of atonement, particularly Oliver Crisp’s criteria for doctrinal adequacy. It shows how this approach sidesteps issues associated with penal substitution, such as guilt transfer and retributive violence, and with ransom theories, which face challenges with their metaphysics of payment. At the same time, it retains the essential victory concept of Christus Victor. Overall, ‘trial-by-ordeal’ logic provides a non-penal, non-violent, and analytically precise mechanism of atonement, deserving serious consideration in modern analytic theology.

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16. Elizabeth Burns: ‘Divine Omniscience and Human Goodness’

This paper rejects common interpretations of divine omniscience on the grounds that they fail either to give an adequate account of divine aseity, or to preserve human freedom and responsibility. Based on analysis of texts from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur’an, it argues instead that the doctrine of divine omniscience is better understood in conjunction with a Platonic model of the divine as primarily concerned with both divine and human goodness.

If God exists timelessly, God sees all time-bound events simultaneously, in one atemporal instant. If God simply observes free human actions (Boethius), God’s knowledge is dependent upon human choice. If God’s knowledge is causal (Aquinas), either human freedom is diminished to the vanishing point or, if God’s knowledge is causal only in a limited sense, God’s knowledge remains dependent on the respects in which human choices remain free.

If God exists everlastingly within time but knows our future actions (Ockham), this implies that our actions are determined and, possibly, that God could prevent atrocities but often chooses not to. But if, following ‘open theism’, God cannot know the future because the future does not yet exist, God’s knowledge again appears to depend upon human choices – although we might reasonably expect that even a God whose knowledge is limited in this way would be able to extrapolate the likely outcome from past experience.

This paper argues that there is a satisfactory way out of this impasse which is both compatible with the scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths and more helpful for religious practice. Through analysis of scriptural texts, it develops Don Cupitt’s suggestion that God’s knowledge is not knowledge in general, but knowledge of that which is religiously relevant – i.e. of the nature of good and evil and human moral behaviour. It then draws on the work of Iris Murdoch to argue that God resembles the Platonic Form of the Good, an objectively-existing moral standard, and that divine omniscience can therefore be understood as the light which that standard casts upon our own moral worth. If the divine standard is described in terms of the metaphor of personhood then God is, metaphorically, a person who speaks to us through scripture, tradition and conscience, who thereby scrutinizes our moral behaviour and sometimes finds us wanting. Thus, God ‘observes’ us, and we are free to try to reflect God’s goodness, or to choose otherwise.

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17. Ho-yeung Lee and Tien-Chun Lo: ‘An Expansionist Approach to Omniscience’

This paper proposes a new response to Whitcomb’s (2012) grounding objection to omniscience. According to this objection, the existence of an omniscient being is inconsistent with some widely accepted principles about grounding. Roughly, the argument goes as follows. Let *p* stand for the proposition that *x* is omniscient, where omniscience is understood in the standard way, i.e. as knowing all true propositions. According to the grounding principle about universal generalization, a quantified truth is (at least) partially grounded in its true instances. Suppose that *x* is omniscient, i.e. *x* knows all truths. Note that one of these truths is simply *p* itself. Hence, *p* is grounded in the proposition that *x* knows *p*. Furthermore, knowledge is partially grounded in truth. Thus, the proposition that *x* knows *p* is partially grounded in the true proposition p itself. This result violates the non-circularity requirement on (partial) grounding.

In this paper, we explore a new way out of the grounding problem concerning omniscience. The originality of our approach lies in its compatibility with all the three grounding principles mentioned above, namely, those governing generalization, knowledge, and non-circularity (see, for example, Fine (2012) for discussion). Rather than rejecting any of these principles, our solution draws on an expansionist view of quantification, according to which the domain of every quantifier is always open to expansion, in a way that parallels the recursive structure of the open-ended set-theoretic hierarchy (Cf. Linnebo, 2018; Studd, 2019). The core idea is that the proposition expressed by “*x* knows all propositions” does not itself lie in the domain of ‘all’ as used in that very sentence—just as the powerset of a given domain does not belong to the domain itself. More specifically, the proposition that *x* knows *p* is not an instance of *p*, where *p* is the proposition that *x* knows all truths. Consequently, Whitcomb’s argument is blocked at its very first step.

We then discuss a few possible objections to our expansionist solution, including (a) the metasemantic challenge to expansionism, and (b) the worry that this solution weakens or undermines the doctrine of omniscience. In responding to these objections, we also show how similar ideas can be employed to address an older problem for omniscience, namely Grim’s (1983) set-theoretic argument against omniscience.

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18. Aysenur Unugur Tabur: ‘The Case for Open Theism: The Collapse of Frankfurt Cases and Its Implications for Divine Omniscience'

Human freedom, I argue, is inseparable from the ability to choose otherwise, which in turn requires genuine indeterminacy with respect to future human actions. The first part of the paper critically examines Frankfurt-style cases (FSCs), which are designed to show that moral responsibility does not depend on alternative possibilities. In these scenarios, an agent appears morally responsible for choosing A even though an external intervener stands ready to ensure that A is chosen if the agent were to incline otherwise. Since the intervener never actually intervenes, proponents conclude that the agent is responsible despite lacking the ability to do otherwise.

I contest this conclusion by arguing that FSCs either collapse into determinism or must tacitly presuppose the very alternative possibilities they aim to eliminate. The central difficulty concerns the epistemic position of the intervener. In order to intervene successfully, the intervener must be able to discern the agent’s decision prior to its occurrence. This requires access to “signs” of the agent’s forthcoming action. However, as David Widerker has shown, these signs generate a dilemma. If they are merely probabilistic, they fail to guarantee the prevention of alternative choices; the agent could still decide otherwise, thereby undermining the scenario. If, on the other hand, the signs are deterministic such that they are causally sufficient for the decision then the agent’s action is already determined. In that case, FSCs presuppose determinism rather than offering a counterexample to the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP).

Attempts to avoid this dilemma by construing the relevant signs as part of the decision process itself do not resolve the issue but merely relocate it. The libertarian can shift the locus of freedom from the decision to earlier stages, such as the formation of inclinations. Thus, FSCs either reintroduce alternative possibilities at a prior stage or collapse into a deterministic framework.

The final part of the paper draws out a significant implication for classical theism. If exact foreknowledge of future free actions is possible only under determinism, as the FSC framework suggests, then divine omniscience with respect to future contingents would entail determinism. To avoid this consequence while preserving genuine human freedom, I argue that classical theism should adopt a modest version of open theism. On this view, God knows all possible morally relevant choices and their likelihoods, given His exhaustive knowledge of conditions and dispositions, but does not know which option will be actualized. This limitation does not imply a defect in divine perfection provided that this is a necessary condition for the existence of human freedom and it is a ultimately a divine choice. As God restrains the scope of his power by giving promises, He restrains the scope of His knowledge by enabling human freedom.

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19. Andrew Loke: ‘In defence of Theistic Conceptualism and a new conception of God’

This article develops an argument for Theistic Conceptualism (Welty 2021) by showing that there are necessarily existing propositions such as Laws of Logic (LOL) (Loke 2024) with intrinsic intentionality and rationality, and hence are necessarily existing thoughts that belong to a necessarily existing mind. I show that objections to Theistic Conceptualism concerning reprehensible propositions and supposed restriction of God’s control (Schmid and Linford 2022) can be easily answered. Nevertheless, more difficult objections related to the claim that thoughts are (supposedly) concrete (Craig 2025) and private (Malpass 2020) while LOL are universals, as well as grounding and bootstrapping objections (Cleveland 2021), motivate rethinking the conception of God.

While God has been widely regarded as a concrete entity, I argue (on independent grounds) it is possible that some things are neither abstract nor concrete and that God transcends the concrete/abstract (false) dichotomy. I postulate that God has inseparable aspects, some of which have causal powers (unlike abstracta), while some other aspects do not but are exemplifiable and thus can be universals (unlike concreta) and publicly accessible. Thus, one can affirm that LOL are not abstract (nor concrete), but are exemplifiable/shareable aspects of God who is neither abstract nor concrete.

I show that, while the term ‘aspect’ is often used to refer to concrete particulars, it can also be used for individualized universals, and thus can be used to refer to something that is less than the whole of God. Divine aspects can be inseparable yet distinct from one other and from creatures. These aspects are united to God by essence, not by a dependence relation. (Just as the even-ness of 2 is distinct from 2 but essentially united to 2 without implying that 2 is dependent on even-ness, likewise, LOL are distinct from God but united to God who is essentially logical, without implying that God is dependent on LOL). Hence, divine aspects (e.g. LOL) are not more (nor less) metaphysically fundamental than God; this answers the Euthyphro-type objection concerning LOL (Leftow 2012). Moreover, some essential divine characteristics (e.g. omnipotence, being capable of divine thought) are not universals exemplifiable/sharable by anything else. Rather, they are aspects belonging only to God, thus preserving divine uniqueness.

I demonstrate that the above novel conception of God can answer the grounding and bootstrapping objections and avoid the problems with Absolute Creationism and other alternative views (Gould ed. 2014), and that it is defensible against other objections.

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20. Jace Snodgrass: ‘On the Simplicity of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity: An Exercise in Constituent and Non-Constituent Ontologies’

Roughly speaking, the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS) claims that God has no parts of any kind: no material parts, no spatial or temporal parts, and no metaphysical parts either—that is to say, no constituents. Contemporary discussions of DDS are and have been predominantly conducted against the background of a constituent ontology, according to which an entity has a property if and only if that property is a part (or constituent) of that entity.

The present paper will argue that this background ontology is not neutral, and that DDS can instead be reconceived within a non-constituent ontology, according to which an entity can have a property without that property being a part (or constituent) of that entity. The central claim of this paper is a methodological one: interpreting DDS against the background of a non- constituent ontology is, at the very least, a neglected but serious alternative for understanding and assessing the doctrine.

This paper will develop this claim in three steps. First, it will set out the distinction between constituent and non-constituent ontologies. Second, it will show that DDS does not in and of itself require adopting a constituent ontology as opposed to a non-constituent ontology. Third, and finally, it will take a familiar objection—namely, the objection that God is identical to God’s properties, and that those properties are identical to one another—as a test case for assessing the significance of understanding DDS in the context of a non-constituent ontology.

This paper does not attempt a full defense of DDS, nor of a non-constituent ontology in general. Its more limited aim is to show that the standard constituent-ontological framing of DDS is not mandatory, and to motivate the idea that a non-constituent ontological framing is a promising way of understanding the doctrine. The aim, in other words, is to invite reconsideration of the background ontology within which DDS is often interpreted and discussed, rather than to settle all disputes about the doctrine.

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21. M.J. García-Encinas: ‘It is Impossible to Think its Negation’

Traditionally, philosophers have maintained that it is possible whatever we can conceive. Under different forms:

(1) If A is conceivable, then A is possible.

(2) If A is necessary, then no-A is inconceivable.

These theses have been indistinctly held by rationalist or empiricist philosophers. Few philosophers have also maintained their converse:

(1c) If A is possible, then A is conceivable.

(2c) If no-A is inconceivable, then A is necessary.

(1)-(2) are questionable. For instance, looking at a picture of Escher, we can very vividly imagine the impossible. But (1c)-(2c) look even more controversial: the realm of possibility must be independent of what we can even dream. Yet (1c)-(2c) could be at the base of our acceptance of truths of logic: Aristotle is usually interpreted as having argued for the necessity of the principle of non-contradiction because it cannot be denied without its own presupposition.

I want to argue that (2c) plays an important role in Saint Anselm’s intriguing argument for the existence of God, in Proslogion 3. There, Anselm asks us to compare,

(i) Something that can be thought to exist but cannot be thought not to exist.

(ii) Something that can be thought to exist but also can be thought not to exist.

Something described in (i) is greater (in being) than something described in (ii). For instance —such as Anselm responses to Gaunilo’s famous objection— one can think that the greatest island exists but one can also think that the greatest island does not exist. This implies, according to Anselm, that the being of the island is less than the being of something that can be thought to exist but that cannot be thought not to exist. Now, as God is defined as the greatest in being we can think of, God is “described” in (i) rather than in (ii), on pain of contradiction. Thus, it cannot be denied that God exists. And Anselm concludes that God exists necessarily. But for this last conclusion to be reached, Anselm would have to accept that if it cannot be thought that A is not, then A is necessarily —a form of (2c). I want to show that Anselm could have held (2c) in his mind under the form of supposition, i.e., that supposed that God exists, not even the fool can deny it, so it is necessary that God exists.

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22. Daniel Molto: ‘The Consequences of Theology’

What follows from theological truths? That depends on the nature of consequence. Logic provides us with one or more relations of consequence, but any meaningful theory has further semantic consequences determined by the meanings of the terms of the theory.

We may illustrate with a simple example: ‘x is a dog, therefore x is not a cat’. This inference is not underwritten by logic and yet is truth-preserving. If the premise is true, the conclusion *must* be true. The ‘must’ in the last sentence is essential for capturing the nature of consequence in general. As Jc Beall has recently put it: ‘At the core of the definition <of consequence> is *absence of counterexample’* (Beall 2023: 26). To say of a conditional relation that there is no counterexample is to say that there is no possibility according to which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false.

So how about the meanings of key theological terms: ‘God’, ‘mystery’, ‘miracle’, and the like? The central purpose of this paper will be to test some hypotheses about consequence relations and theology. We begin with a hypothesis about consequence in general: the range of the quantifier in the quantified expression, ‘no possibility according to which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false’, is context-dependent. What counts as a possibility depends on the subject matter we are talking about. On our view, the range of ‘no possibility’ is restricted not merely by ruling out logical possibilities that a theory stipulates are false, but also possibilities that are ruled out without regard to their truth or falsity.

With this hypothesis in place, we can pose two further hypotheses

(1) With respect to the consequence relation governing sentences expressing religious mysteries, the range of the quantified expression ‘no possibility according to which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false’ includes all logical possibilities.

(2) With respect to all consequence relations except logical and theological consequence relations, the range of the quantified expression ‘no possibility according to which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false’ excludes “miraculous possibilities”.

We show that (1) provides a novel and intriguing way of understanding apophatic and negative theological traditions. We show that (2) provides an interesting account of miracles, according to which a miracle can involve a non-relevant, non-falsifying counter-example to some semantic consequence.

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23. Tommaso Soriani: ‘When God Chooses a Metaphysics: Theological Stakes in Theories of Personal Persistence’

Debates about personal persistence—whether individuals persist wholly through time or by having temporal parts—have traditionally been assessed in terms of metaphysical desiderata such as parsimony, explanatory power, and coherence with physics. Yet these debates also bear directly on theological and normative concerns. Perdurantism is often associated with the B-theory of time, while endurantism aligns with versions of the A-theory. The choice between them has far-reaching implications for doctrines concerning God’s relation to time, divine action, and eschatology [1] [4].

Each theory also generates distinctive puzzles with clear theological resonance. For perdurantism, Mark Johnston’s Personite Problem suggests that worlds with temporal parts may contain an overpopulation of quasi-persons, raising concerns about moral status and divine justice. For endurantism, puzzles such as temporary intrinsics, the continuity of identity through death and resurrection, and the Incarnation raise questions about how a wholly present individual can persist through radical change without contradiction. One might think that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God could therefore prefer a world metaphysically structured to minimize or avoid such paradoxes [3] [6].

This raises a broader issue: can theological and normative considerations legitimately guide our choice between competing metaphysical theories, or must they remain subordinate to traditional desiderata? Some maintain that such stakes become relevant only once the metaphysical landscape has been settled, while others contend that they may themselves provide substantive reasons to favor one theory over another [2][5].

By engaging these tensions, the paper aims to demonstrate that debates about persistence are not merely metaphysical disputes but also carry significant theological and normative stakes. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how theory choice in persistence connects with questions about the nature of God, the structure and composition of the world, and the ethical and eschatological implications of adopting different models of persistence.

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24. Emily Hammer: ‘Aborting the Embryonic Christ Argument: Rethinking Personhood and Theological Implications for Embryo Research’

Recent theological debates have argued that personhood begins at conception, drawing on the premise that Christ, as both fully human and fully divine, must have been a person from the moment of conception. This position, notably articulated by Oliver Crisp in his 2009 book *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology*, suggests that if Christ is the blueprint for humanity, all human embryos must likewise be persons from conception, thereby raising the moral status of embryos and complicating the theological defence of early embryo research and fertility treatments.

This paper critically evaluates the embryonic Christ argument, first by summarising Crisp’s position and then by exposing its philosophical and biological limitations. Crisp’s ‘concrete-nature view’ maintains that Christ’s human nature, as a body-soul composite, is present from conception, and that orthodox Christology requires Christ to be fully human and divine from the moment of incarnation. He rejects delayed ensoulment theories and argues that all humans, by analogy, possess personhood from conception.

However, this paper challenges the assumption that personhood is established at conception by introducing two key objections: the ‘same-one objection’ and the ‘unique cells objection’. Drawing on Norman Ford’s criteria for ontological individuality, it is argued that true personhood requires both ontological distinctness and continuity of being. These conditions are not met until the primitive streak stage, approximately two weeks after conception. Prior to this stage, the embryo is a totipotent cluster of cells, lacking the individuality necessary for personhood, as evidenced by the possibility of monozygotic twinning and the absence of a differentiated body.

The paper concludes by offering two theologically sound alternatives: either Christ’s personhood begins at the primitive streak stage, aligning with biological individuation, or Christ is unique in being a person from conception, with this exception justified by the miraculous nature of the incarnation. Both options preserve orthodox Christology while supporting the view that personhood (and thus higher moral status) does not begin at conception for all humans. This reframing removes a key theological obstacle to early embryo research and fertility treatments, advocating for a more nuanced and biologically informed approach to personhood.

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25. Jonathan Hill: ‘Christ’s temptations and the divine nature’

The New Testament tells us that Jesus underwent temptation. But what was this like for him? In particular, when he was tempted to do something, did that mean he experienced any desire to do the thing in question? A number of analytic theologians have suggested that he did (a position I call *internalism*, because on this view, Jesus’ temptations involved a conflict of desires within him).

According to some internalists, Jesus’ success in always resisting these sub-optimal desires can be explained psychologically – e.g. he had optimal desires that outweighed them, or perfect control over his will. According to others, however, there was nothing *psychologically* unusual about Jesus in this way. He always resisted temptation, but for some other reason.

This position, which I call *open internalism*, is what I consider in this paper. I argue that open internalism is caught on the horns of an impossible dilemma, which can be expressed like this. Is there *anything* special about Jesus which explains his ability always successfully to resist temptation?

If the answer is yes, then what is special about Jesus? It cannot be psychological differences from everyone else, because that is explicitly ruled out by open internalism. Could it be that his divine nature directly controls his actions? That is problematic (if one holds to dyotheletism), and seems to be a rejection of open internalism, because, if the divine nature had exercised such control, it could only be by affecting Jesus’ psychological state. What if his divine nature had stood ready to act in this way, but never actually had, thus guaranteeing his impeccability without interfering with his human will? That is the view suggested by Thomas Morris and defended by a number of authors since. But this view cannot explain how, *in fact*, Jesus avoids succumbing to temptation.

Suppose, then, that one says that Jesus has *no* special ability to resist temptation. But then one confronts the other horn of the dilemma, because now the problem is to explain why *nobody else* manages to live a sinless life. If Jesus could do it, why can’t we? Strikingly, the main defenders of internalism in antiquity were Pelagian authors such as Julian of Eclanum, who not only saw this implication but embraced it. I argue that, taken seriously, open internalism does imply Pelagianism. Theologians who wish to remain orthodox, then, should be very wary of it.

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26. Daniel Rubio: ‘Non-Trichotomous Afterlife Axiology’

One strategy for answering the argument from evil imposes what are called *sufferer-centric* conditions. A sufferer-centric condition on a successful response to the argument from evil imposes requirements on how the response addresses the particular sufferings of particular people.

One important example of a sufferer-centric condition comes from Marilyn McCords Adams: that whatever evil God allows, for God to be good to someone, their life must be an overall great good to them, and the suffering they endure must contribute to the goodness of that life. Plausibly, the only way to fulfill Adams-style conditions will invoke an afterlife. From this, we can draw two claims. First: sufferers must have a good afterlife. Second: that afterlife must be enhanced somehow by the suffering they endured.

The need for horrendous suffering to be incorporated into an overall improvement threatens perverse incentives. First: if, in general, lives touched by horrendous suffering end up better overall than lives that are not so touched, then anyone who does not suffer horrendously ‘misses out.’ Second: this removes the incentive for those of us down here to prevent horrendous suffering, or even to not inflict horrendous suffering on others.

This leaves a dilemma. Either you require that horrendous suffering be defeated and so undermine a lot of common-sense morality by undermining welfarist reasons for preventing horrendous suffering, or you abandon Adams-style requirements, and then you are stuck with lives still being marred by horrendous suffering, even if they end up overall good. Either result is a disappointment.

Fortunately, there is a way out. Recent work in axiology has put pressure on what is known as the ‘trichotomy thesis,’ which says roughly: for any two options, either they are equally good, or one is better than the other. This pressure has largely come from what Ruth Chang calls ‘hard choices,’ which motivate the introduction of new axiological relations. Two in particular stand out. Chang suggests one she calls ‘parity.’ Two options are on a par if the difference between them has magnitude but not direction. Parity behaves differently from strict equality, because slight sweetenings make no difference (that is: if two options are on a par, I can’t pay you a dollar to make one better). The second is incomparability. Unlike options on a par, incomparable options remain incomparable no matter what sweetening you add to them.

If we say that potential afterlives are either all incomparable or all on a par, we can escape the dilemma. In either case, the afterlife the victim of horrendous suffering receives is different from what they would have received otherwise, but this difference does not tell in favor of one or the other. This restores the welfarist reasons to prevent horrendous suffering and undermines any welfarist reasons to inflict it. It also means that people who do not suffer horrendously are not ‘missing out.’ What they receive is different. But that difference does not underwrite a judgment of ’better’ or ‘worse.’

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27. Luke Wilson: ‘Divine Motivation and Brute Preferences’

There has recently been fruitful discussion about the nature of divine motivation. Brian Leftow (2017) and others have developed models on which God has brute preferences/desires (or brute personality traits).1 Opponents have objected that these models are rationally or theologically unacceptable.2 This debate has significant implications for the simplicity of theism, puzzles about divine creation, and the nature of divine love. My paper contributes to this discussion on divine motivation by making important clarifications which provide a new reason in support of the brute preference model (BPM).

One sense in which God’s preferences could be brute is that God has some preferences that do not correspond to God’s objective normative reasons. These brute preferences might play a tiebreaking role or even motivate God to act contrary to God’s objective reasons (if divine satisficing is permissible). To say that God has brute preferences in this sense is to make a claim about the *content* of God’s motivation. However, it is important to distinguish the claim that God has brute preferences in this sense (the “Content Thesis”) from a claim about the *structure* of God’s motivation. Consider the debate about motivation between Humeanism (the view beliefs alone cannot motivate) and its denial, anti-Humeanism. Cognitivist internalist anti-Humeans hold that beliefs about objective reasons can be sufficient for motivation by generating grounded preferences. We could then understand a second sense in which God has brute preferences as the claim that God has preferences that are not grounded by God’s beliefs about objective reasons (the “Structure Thesis”.) The Content thesis, which is the target of most objections to the BPM, presupposes the truth of the Structure thesis, but the reverse is not the case. So, successful arguments against the Content thesis are not sufficient to disprove the Structure thesis. Furthermore, if Metaphysical Humeanism is true, so no agent, human or divine, is motivated by beliefs alone, and God has no brute structural preferences, then God would have no motivation whatsoever. It is a point in favor of the Structure thesis that it makes divine motivation consistent with more theories of motivation than does its negation. However, God might have ungrounded preferences that exactly correspond to God’s objective reasons. (Perhaps God’s sole ungrounded preference is to act on objective reasons alone.) But the Structure thesis is also compatible with the Content thesis; God’s ungrounded preferences may diverge from the objective reasons.

1 See also, e.g., Amijee (2022) and Wilson (2022; 2025); Rea (2018), Seagraves (2025), and Bailey & Rattler (2024).
2 For objections, see, e.g., Kraay (2021; manuscript), Wessling & Parker (2025).

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28. Isabel Cortens: ‘Self-knowledge, Understanding, and Union with God’

It is a common Christian view that union with God requires or even consists in knowledge of God. Some of the most revered mystics in the Christian tradition, however, have supposed that self-knowledge is necessary for knowledge of God and so also for union with God. One example is St. Catherine of Siena, who clearly emphasizes the role of self-knowledge from the very opening of the *Prologue*, wherein she describes herself as “accustomed to dwelling in the cell of self-knowledge...since upon knowledge follows love.”1

This general pattern of relations between self-knowledge, humility, and union is not unique to Catherine; rather, several other mystics from the contemplative medieval tradition and beyond identify self-knowledge as a crucial pursuit in the spiritual life.2 What isn’t so consistent nor clear, in surveying these authors, is the kind of knowledge about oneself that is actually relevant for or conducive to union. Several identify knowledge of one’s lowliness, sinfulness, and absolute dependence on God as the kind of self-knowledge that leads to union. But one could allegedly come to know one’s own dependence on God in virtue of knowing what sort of thing a human being is (i.e., a creature), and what sort of thing God is (an entity with sovereignty over all creatures). Why the arduous path of contemplation, then, and prolonged “dwelling in the cell of self-knowledge”?

In this paper, I seek to address this question by arguing that the self-knowledge at issue is actually a form of understanding. The distinction between mere knowledge and understanding has gained much attention in the literature on moral testimony, especially from those who see an asymmetry between the legitimacy of deference in non-moral cases versus its legitimacy in moral cases.3 What is lacking in the latter, as some argue, is the feature of understanding—a feature that is crucial for the moral life. I appeal to the particular notion of understanding that Laura Callahan develops to demonstrate why understanding oneself is requisite for intimate union with God and, more generally, union with other persons.4

In closing, I discuss the phenomenon of self-deception and suggest, in light of the conclusions of this paper, how self-deception opposes an understanding of oneself, and thus inhibits union with other persons and with God.

1 Catherine of Siena, “Prologue,” in *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Paulist Press, 1980), 25.

2 For an excellent discussion on these themes in Catherine of Siena, Margaret Poret, Margaret Ebner, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Angela of Foligno, and several others, see Christina Van Dyke “Many Know Much but Do Not Know Themselves”: Self-Knowledge, Humility, and Perfection in the Medieval Affective Contemplative Tradition. *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics 14* (Consciousness and Self-Knowledge, 2018):89-106.

3 See, e.g., Alison Hills, “Moral testimony and moral epistemology,” *Ethics* 120 (1):94-127 (2009), Hills, “Moral Testimony. *Philosophy Compass* 8 (6):552-559 (2013), and Robert J. Howell, “Google Morals, Virtue, and the Asymmetry of Deference,” *Noûs* 48. (3):389-415 (2012).

4 Laura Frances Callahan, “Moral Testimony: A Re-Conceived Understanding Explanation,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, (Volume 68, Issue 272, July 2018), 437–459, https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqx057.

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