

The Difference Holiness Makes: Replies to Cuneo & Strabbing, Fleischacker, Rutledge & Wessling, and Yadav

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ABSTRACT: Terence Cuneo & Jada Twedt Strabbing, Samuel Fleischacker, Jonathan Rutledge & Jordan Wessling, and Sameer Yadav have generously engaged with the accounts of divine holiness and its implications offered in my *Divine Holiness and Divine Action* (2021), criticizing its arguments and in some cases offering attractive alternative accounts. Here I respond to some of their criticisms.

I am grateful to Terence Cuneo, Sam Fleischacker, Jonathan Rutledge, Jada Twedt Strabbing, Jordan Wessling, and Sameer Yadav for their generosity in taking the time to work on *Divine Holiness and Divine Action* (hereafter: *DHDA*), not only exposing difficulties for its arguments but offering exciting alternative accounts of many of the subjects on which *DHDA* takes a position. I have learned much from the work of all of these good people in other contexts and I am glad to be challenged and instructed by them here.

A central point of agreement among us is that divine holiness is inadequately studied and that a more adequate understanding of it would likely make a big difference as to how we make sense of divine action. But that's pretty much where the agreement ends. There are many points that these respondents raise that I will not address, or that I will address incompletely and insufficiently. But I take up what seem to me to be the central themes discussed in these responses.

1. Primary holiness, mystery, and awe

The conception of primary holiness that I settle on in *DHDA* results from a two-step argument: first, that the experience of something as holy involves experiencing it as something that is both attractive and repulsive (in a very specific sense, that one is *out of place* when situated too intimately with respect to it), and second, that for something to be holy is for it to be something that has the features that makes experiencing it in these ways *appropriate* (*DHDA*, 34). These theses regarding the experience of the holy are indebted to the work of Rudolf Otto, whose account in his seminal *The Idea of the Holy* (1923) has been summarized in terms of the holy being's being a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. In *DHDA* I am trying to explain what it is to be absolutely *tremendum* and *fascinans*, and to say something about what a being would have to be like for an experience of a being in those terms to be veridical.

Yadav and Cuneo & Strabbing, in their own ways, both ask why the *mysterium* has disappeared in my account, and both explicitly frame their criticisms in terms of the absence

of awe as part of the experience of the holy. I think of the mysterious and the awesome as calling for very different treatments; I will say something about each in turn.

In *DHDA*, I do not drop Otto's *mysterium* from my account without comment. I say that the relevance of the *mysterium* is that the way in which God is *tremendum* goes beyond the ways in which any ordinary object of experience is *tremendum*, and that the way in which God is *fascinans* goes beyond the ways in which any ordinary object of experience is *fascinans* (*DHDA*, 25-26). That is, I think the *mysterium* part is important for holiness but not on its own account, as some additional element; it is important as *modifying* how we are to understand the attractiveness and repulsiveness of the divine greatness. That which is experienced *simply* as *mysterium*, on my view, does not even bump a little closer to the experience of the holy, so I think that the only way in which the holy's character as *mysterium* is relevant is through its relationship to the attractiveness and repulsiveness of the holy. Yadav thinks this sort of treatment is inadequate, but I actually think that Yadav's own view is best understood in these terms. On the view he is putting forward, what is important about the *mysterium* aspect is that it precludes our being in adequate relationship with a being who is much worth being in a relationship with, but with whom we cannot have such a relationship without some sort of mediation (Yadav 2023, 461). That would be an instance of the very strategy that I am using for understanding the relevance of the *mysterium*.

I do think, though, that there is a stronger case to be made that an account of holiness must incorporate somehow a treatment of how the response to what is holy includes awe — Otto's own view does this (1923, 20) — though with some hesitation I also want to claim that the experience of awe is distinct from the experience of something as holy. My first point is that even if awesomeness were not partially constitutive of holiness, there would be a strong temptation to think it was, because at their limits — *absolute* holiness and *absolute* awesomeness — they are necessarily co-extensive, and the feature that gives rise to absolute awesomeness — unlimited greatness — is the same feature that gives rise to absolute holiness (*DHDA*, 26, 56-57). So there is an error theory ready to hand for thinking that awesomeness is to be identified with, or is partially constitutive of, holiness.

Why, though, would we think of this as an error that needs explaining? My main reason for not taking awesomeness to be even partially constitutive of holiness is that as we move away from the cases of absolute holiness and absolute awesomeness, the overlap between awesomeness and holiness goes away, and because this overlap goes away, it is implausible to think of absolute awesomeness and absolute holiness as tied together constitutively. There are just so many things that are awesome and that we are not at all tempted to think of as holy (mountains, symphonies, storms). And there are just so many things that are holy but are just not awesome — I mean, I think of almost *nothing* that is secondarily holy as awesome. (Cuneo & Strabbing disagree with me on this — they describe holy water as something that one views with awe (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 412), but I just do not encounter it that way. Ditto with holy books, and holy ground, and holy times of the year. I view the holy *Eucharist* with awe — at least when I am not tired or bored or preoccupied with trivial stuff — but that is because it is the body of a primarily holy being, and so not really an instance of *secondary* holiness.)

The reason why this overlap goes away is that the characteristic concern involved in responding with awe differs from the characteristic concern involved in experiencing something as holy. The experience of the holy centers the prospect of intimate union and its valence, whereas the experience of awesomeness does not (see Roberts 2003, 269-270, for a discussion of awe), and so I think we really should distinguish between responding to something as awesome and responding to it as holy. I confess that I am not entirely persuaded by this response: it seems a little precious to make very fine distinctions between the experience

that is characteristic of encountering God as holy and the experience of God as awesome, especially when in both cases what is being responded to is God's absolute greatness. But it does strike me as important that there is a distinctive practical stance that God's absolute greatness calls for that is puzzling and thus deserves to be singled out, that which is focused on the prospect of intimate relationship with God — taking it as both desirable and undesirable — and we can ask what would follow from such a combination being appropriate, both for our action and for divine action.

One might wonder how much this really matters with respect to the issues that I am considering in the second part of *DHDA*. I am not sure how extensive the revision of my account of the difference holiness makes to divine agency would have to be were I to incorporate such a modification of my view of the nature of divine holiness. Not every feature of divine holiness is helpful in giving an account of God's reasons; for example, in *DHDA* I argue that the best explanation of the *tremendum* feature entails that God has requiring reasons to keep distance from limited beings, but the *fascinans* feature tells us nothing about God's requiring reasons with respect to creatures (*DHDA*, 120). So even if we incorporate the awesomeness feature into a theory of holiness, that may help us get holiness right while not making a difference to the theory of divine action.

Yadav, though, would say that it does make a difference, for the following subtle reasons. He thinks that some of what I have taken to be evidence of its being fitting for us to keep distance from God is really just evidence of God's being so awesome and mysterious that we don't really know what to do unless God does something to bridge the gap and make it possible for us to benefit from the divine presence (Yadav 2023, 461). Thus I am misled into thinking that a need to keep distance from God is part-and-parcel of the experience of the holy, and this infects the account of primary holiness built upon it. I have no objection to the notions that divine action is often for the sake of making it possible for us to encounter God and enter into relationship with God in ways that will be for our good (this is the central theme of Fleischacker's contribution to this symposium) and that sometimes this might involve God's keeping a sort of distance from us. I don't think I can sensibly deny this, given the gap between God and us and my view that God acts lovingly by entering into relationship with us. But I would add that it does not follow that the rationale of divine action in keeping distance from us is *exhausted* by what promotes our good, nor do I think that we have any reason to believe, given the texts to which Yadav appeals, that it is not the unfitness of being in union with God that is itself at least part of what undermines its being for our good to be more closely unified with God.¹ I will discuss this in more detail below, but it seems initially implausible both to think what is called for by the divine greatness would be exhausted by the value of making it possible for creatures to better enter into relationship with God and to think that all of the guidance for human action that God places us under is simply to mediate the mysteriousness of God.

¹ Yadav flatly states, "On Murphy's picture divine withdrawal does not serve our good" (Yadav 2023, 464). I don't say this. It may well be that in some cases divine withdrawal *does* serve our good, for though we yearn for unity with the Holy One, it could be that we are either in a poor condition to unify with God or that the massive unfitness of being unified with God would itself be bad for us. This latter possibility I explore a little in discussing why the account of holiness that I offer suggests an *epektatic* account of Heaven (*DHDA*, 215-216). What I do deny is that divine withdrawal is justifiable solely in terms of the serving of our good.

2. Teleological and nonteleological accounts of secondary holiness

DHDA for the most part focuses on God's underivative holiness, *primary* holiness, rather than the derivative holiness, *secondary* holiness, that creatures can have. But *DHDA* does offer an account of secondary holiness, in part because a theory of primary holiness should not be trusted unless there are good prospects for providing an adequate account of secondary holiness in relation to it. In his response, Sam Fleischacker offers an account of secondary holiness alternative to that offered in *DHDA*. Fleischacker leaves open, though, whether that account really is incompatible with the *DHDA* account (Fleischacker 2023, 435). One *could* affirm both Fleischacker's position and my own positions, but I think that Fleischacker's view has an implication that should be resisted. I also want to raise a question for Fleischacker about how his account of secondary holiness fits with an account of primary holiness.

Fleischacker and I both aim to incorporate into our accounts of holiness the fact that holiness involves *separation* in some sense (*DHDA*, 12-14; Fleischacker 2023, 427). I argue, boringly obviously, that separation cannot be the whole story about holiness, because there are so many senses of separateness and so many of them are plainly not related in any interesting way to holiness. So while any theory of holiness should accommodate the fact that holy beings are somehow separate, any adequate theory will have to elaborate upon the sense in which this is true.

The account of secondary holiness in *DHDA* is multiplex — on my view, there are lots of ways of being secondarily holy, united by their standing in one or another explanatory relationship to the primarily holy God. But the notion of secondary holiness that dominates is built on the normative features of something's being secondarily holy. On my view, to be secondarily holy is for a creature to be such that to be intimately related to that creature *constitutes* being intimately related to God, with the result that such relatedness to the creature participates in the desirability of being united to God and the unfittingness of being so related, especially if not properly disposed (*DHDA*, 62-63). This feature makes secondarily holy objects quite different from other, profane objects — set apart, separated, from them *normatively*, in terms of the sort of treatment of them that is called for. This account is non-teleological in the following sense: there is no particular purpose that is ascribed to a thing's having the relevant sort of separation. For example, while it is true that the secondary holiness of objects can enable one to enter into more intimate relationship with God, it is not part of this account that an object is secondarily holy *in order to* enable such a relationship.

Fleischacker emphasizes, as *DHDA* emphasizes, that holiness is a sort of separateness. He also agrees that mere separateness does not holiness make. The account of secondary holiness that Fleischacker offers is, by contrast to the *DHDA* account, teleological. What makes the difference is that what is secondarily holy is set apart by God *for a particular purpose*. Fleischacker “cash[es] out holiness in terms of a condition that makes it possible for God to enter into a personal relationship with us” (Fleischacker 2023, 435). What is crucial to Fleischacker's account is that the setting apart of some things for special treatment is *for a certain purpose*, for making it possible for us to engage with God personally through our interactions with things that God has made.

I don't think that Fleischacker's and my own accounts are strictly incompatible. One could say that a full account of secondary holiness requires both a story about the normative effects of secondary holiness (the difference it makes in terms of treatment of an object that it is secondarily holy) and a story about its constitutive ends (the purposes for which secondarily

holy objects are set apart by God). I don't think, though, that Fleischacker would accept the particulars of my view; I suspect that he would take there to be more variation regarding the normative effects of setting something apart as secondarily holy, perhaps unified by the purpose which God would have in setting apart that object or objects of that kind as holy.

My central objection to Fleischacker's account is that I think that we can distinguish, in the case of the secondarily holy, between the holiness of an object and the purposes for which an object exhibits its holiness. I think those purposes might vary with God's own very good but contingent objectives in creating, so that even if what Fleischacker is offering are the actual characteristic purposes God has when God sets apart some things as holy, I don't think that those characteristic purposes should enter into the analysis of holiness itself.

Why not, though? Consider 'accidental holiness': an object exhibits accidental holiness when it is secondarily holy but it was not God's purpose to set that object apart in the way characteristic of holiness. Accidental holiness is impossible on Fleischacker's view, given that holiness is analyzed in terms of God's aims in setting things apart. It is not ruled out by my view: an accidentally holy object could have the same normative effects as a non-accidentally holy object has, though it was not part of God's aim to generate those normative effects. But accidental holiness is possible and indeed actual. In *DHDA* I argue that normative force can be exerted by circumstance or by determination (*DHDA*, 64). Determination is, at least paradigmatically, intentional: an authoritative agent specifies that a certain way of acting will count as, or not count as, responding appropriately to some normatively powerful being (*DHDA*, 64-65). If all cases of secondary holiness were like this — God specifies that a certain way of acting will count as drawing close to God — then accidental holiness might indeed be an incoherent or just uninstanced concept. But normative force can be transmitted simply circumstantially (*DHDA*, 68-69). That a certain instrument was used by Abraham Lincoln to sign the Emancipation Proclamation sets it apart for a distinctive sort of treatment that is not due to other qualitatively identical writing instruments. Now consider some sites that Christians take to be holy. That some site is where Christ's cross was in fact raised, or that some path is where Christ walked on the way to his crucifixion, or that some piece of ground is where Christ was last on earth before ascending into heaven — these circumstances make it true that treating these sites in particular ways are ways of being better or worse unified with God. But their being holy did not require God to set these sites apart for the purposes that Fleischacker mentions, or indeed any particular purpose.

A final remark. I do not share Fleischacker's very strong view that we encounter the holiness of God only through secondary holiness:

On the Jewish view, there is no other way for God to enter into a personal relationship with us. *We* need to make space for God to appear among the things of this world, otherwise that appearance will be impossible: we will not be able to see God, as a person, anywhere. We might still be able to worship God as a perfect Being, a distant source of the rest of reality. But we will not be able to worship God as a being who can come into intimate relationship with us (Fleischacker 2023, 433-434).

I agree with Fleischacker that the typical way of coming into relationship to God is by way of "God's things" — the things of this world that are such that, by relating to them in a certain way, we can be related to God in a desirable way. But I think that mystical experience can be genuine, and that those headed to heaven will indeed have an unmediated awareness of the divine essence, and (though my confidence level is *much* lower on this) there is a venerable

theological tradition that Christ himself had this beatific vision in his human mind during his earthly life.

This difference between us makes sense of why Fleischacker's own thinking about holiness gives the secondarily holy a much more central place than my own account does. I see the attractions of Fleischacker's method of beginning with the secondarily holy, and I can imagine having written *DHDA* in a way that follows that path. But I confess that I do not see easily what Fleischacker would want to say about the characterization of *primary* holiness — the holiness that is had by God, and God alone, and from which all other holiness derives. My account is supposed to meet the desideratum that an account of secondary holiness is such that it plainly derives from primary holiness — not just that secondary holiness is God-explained, but that it is God's-holiness-explained (*DHDA*, 61-62). To do this you need to eventually have in hand an account of primary holiness and an account of how one's theory of secondary holiness is God's-holiness-explained. I am not sure what Fleischacker wants to say about what it is for *God* to be holy, and so I cannot say whether his view can meet what strikes me as an important desideratum for theories of secondary holiness.²

3. Reasons of status, human and divine

In *DHDA* primary holiness is analyzed partially in terms of the unfittingness of being too closely related to the Holy One, and this unfittingness involves both some creatures having good reason to keep distance from God and God's having good reason to keep some creatures at some distance from God. Spelling these ideas out requires taking stands on two issues: *What is the best account of why there are such reasons to keep distance?* and *What is the class of beings that are unfit to be too closely united to the Holy One?* My answer to the former question is *Reasons of status*. My answer to the latter question is *All creatures*. Both of these answers are severely criticized in the respondents' pieces.

Cuneo & Strabbing and Yadav think that I have false views on the way that reasons of status arise and the way that they can give reasons for action. Here is the view as I present it in *DHDA*. The *DHDA* view is that status is a feature that is relevant to our reasons for action (*DHDA*, 112-113). To have a certain status is to exhibit greatness or excellence in some dimension (*DHDA*, 113-114). That some other being has some status can make a difference as to how it can be fitting to act toward that being, or more generally to be related to that being (*DHDA*, 113-120). The reasons for action that one has to act or more generally to be related to a being, given its status, are expressive reasons (*DHDA*, 120-125). Status explains phenomena such as why an artist has reason not use materials that are inadequate to the artist's skill, why good people have reason not to take up with jerks, why it is good when virtuous people flourish and vicious people languish, and so forth (*DHDA*, 114-116). Applied to the case at issue in the book, I claim that God's absolute greatness confers upon God an absolutely exalted status with respect to all possible creatures, such that God has strong reasons not to enter into intimate relationships with them: creating, conserving, concurring with their activity; knowing them and being known by them; having personal relationships with them; and so forth. Because such reasons would explain why we have reason to take ourselves out of place

² This strikes me as also a pressing task for Cuneo & Strabbing, who endorse an alternative morality-centered account of primary holiness. What will a theory of secondary holiness look like on their view, and how will it meet the constraint that secondary holiness is derived from primary holiness?

when closely related to God, and this response has been already identified as an aspect of the experience of the holy, I call these reasons “reasons of holiness” (*DHDA*, 120).

Cuneo & Strabbing present my account of God’s reasons to keep distance as moving directly from a premise about one being’s having greater value than another to there being reason for the greater to keep distance from the lesser (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 415-416). I should have been more explicit here. But when I do spell out my reasoning about status and fittingness with respect to interpersonal relationships, the elaboration is contextual: “given a context of personal interaction and the status relevant to that context, some are so far beneath another’s status with respect to that context of interaction that it is unfitting for the higher status to be united to the lower status person in that context” (*DHDA*, 116).

I think that the recognition of the context-sensitivity of my own position eases the worries raised by the counterexamples that Cuneo & Strabbing offer. Here are their counterexamples:

Hummingbird. There is hummingbird that regularly comes to your window. There is a significant ontological/value gap between you and the bird. But your connecting with it by feeding it and enjoying its presence isn’t unfitting (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 416).

Verlander. The baseball great, Justin Verlander, has been asked to play in a local charity baseball game. There is a huge gap in skill and thus a value gap between him and nonprofessional baseball players. But it would not be unfitting for Verlander to join in a charity game with nonprofessionals (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 416).

According to Cuneo & Strabbing, you don’t have status reasons not to hang out with the bird, and Verlander doesn’t have status reasons not to play in a charity ballgame. But according to Cuneo & Strabbing, my views imply that you and Verlander do have such reasons. By calling into question the implications of my views about reasons of status in ordinary human cases, Cuneo & Strabbing call into question the central use to which I put my account, that is, in holding that God has requiring reasons across the board to keep distance from creatures.

I agree that in *Hummingbird* there are no relevant reasons of status to keep distance, but I don’t think my view has particular problems accounting for that fact. Any two creatures, especially any two vertebrates, are roughly on a par ontologically speaking; the hummingbird has some powers that I lack, I have some powers the hummingbird lacks, and even though it is true that some of my powers are of a greater kind than the hummingbird’s, in the context in which I can take pleasure in something that the hummingbird can provide but which I lack, there is no reason to think that this is a relationship that is unfitting due to reasons of status. My attitudes are mixed about *Verlander*. The context of a charity game may be such that the very *point* of including him in particular is to honor his status as a Hall-of-Fame level player.³ Suppose this isn’t the case and he is just being asked to play because they need a ninth player, and he will need to tone down his stuff considerably in order to make it hittable. It is not obvious to me that there are no reasons of status that tell against his playing the game. The fact that Verlander would count as standoffish and sort of a jerk if we were to appeal to his status in refusing to play in a charity game is, as I argue with respect to a similar case in *DHDA* (115-118), a function of the fact that we humans have reasons not to act on reasons of status in order to realize goods of community and solidarity, *not* because those reasons of status are unreal (*DHDA*, 118).

³ Except in his World Series starts, about which the less said the better.

My position is, like Cuneo & Strabbing's proposed alternative (2023, 416), one on which the sort of superiority that makes for reasons of status to keep distance is context-sensitive, though I would disagree on details about how context matters. My argument in *DHDA* is that given the vast gulf between God and us, it must be true that across all relevant contexts there is going to be differences in greatness that ensure that there will be reasons of status for God to keep distance from us (*DHDA*, 118). Yadav suggests that I have failed to take into account that there are different sorts of relevant relationships, some of which are inequality-*entailing*. It is not as if being more expert in some discipline makes it unfitting to be in relationship with someone less expert, when the relationship is *being the teacher of*; the very point of the relationship requires such inequality (Yadav 2023, 463). So it is not clear why it would have to be the case that there would be requiring reasons against God's entering into relationship with all creatures, even given the vast gulf of value between God and all other beings.

I accept the general point that, when thinking about the various contexts in which relationships might be present, it is important that some of these relationships are not threatened by inequalities of value. But I am not sure why this would make trouble for my argument. First, it would not matter if it were true that we could construct *some* relationships of inequality in which value gaps do not threaten the fittingness of the relationship if it still turned out to be inevitable that for all possible creatures there are relationships of intimacy such that God stands in them in some degree with respect to creatures and which God has reason not to stand in with respect to creatures. If the most fundamental relationships that God must stand in with respect to creatures are such that it is in some way beneath God's status to be in that relationship — if, for example, *intimately knowing creatures* and *serving the good of creatures* were beneath God's status — then the fact that there might be other relationships that do not provide requiring reasons against God's entering into them with respect to creatures would not make trouble for my argument. Second, even in relationships that are inequality-entailing, it isn't as if it is not still possible for there to be such a gap between parties that it is unfitting for them to be in that relationship. Take the teacher relationship, which is one of Yadav's examples. In standard cases, we are thinking about one imperfect human who is a bit further along teaching another imperfect human. But turn up the volume and imagine the knowledge gap between them being so extreme and the willingness to devote energy and attention to the subject so different; it might well seem beneath the teacher to devote efforts to instructing that student. I know people really dislike this thought. But it seems to me part of what we admire in the humble devotion of a superbly expert teacher to bringing around an extremely stubborn or uninterested student is that in some way the teacher doesn't *have to* put up with this, indeed has *some reason* not to — there may well be students who are better fit for instruction (and not just in the sense of more likely to learn), but the teacher puts up with that in helping this student to make progress. And this is, in part, how I see the story of creation: this is a world in which the ongoing existence of an active universe requires constant creation, conservation, concurrence, God's serving the being and activity of creatures even though what can be created is *so* meager and *so* dependent in relation to God.

On my view of the reasons of status that make for holiness, it is *all creatures* from which God has reason to keep distance, because all creatures are limited and deficient in a way that God is not. Cuneo & Strabbing and Yadav suggest that the phenomena that I try to capture in terms of reasons of status that default to God's keeping distance from what is limited in goodness is better captured by an appeal to God's having reason to keep distance from *what is sinful*.

Yadav presses this point in terms of whether I have offered an adequate *scriptural* account of holiness. He and I agree that there is some sense in which God is willing to withdraw God's

presence in light of the sins of the people, so at the very least the notion that God's holiness bears on God's inclination to remove Godself from the sinful presence is left open by his criticisms (*DHDA*, 127-128; Yadav 2023, 460). What is at issue is whether I can make the broader claim that what gives God reason to withdraw is not just this specific sort of defect — sinfulness — but the creaturely condition of deficiency and imperfection as such.

I am not sure that I would concede any of my view to Yadav even if I were convinced that the evidence we can get from Scripture exclusively focuses on God's having reason to keep distance from sin and not at all from the imperfection endemic to creatureliness as such. While I am drawing on Scripture and take myself to be bound to remain within its constraints, I don't see that Yadav has given good reason to think my view is incompatible with Scriptural evidence. What would need to be done would be to ask whether it is more plausible, overall, to think that God's reason to keep distance from creatures applies only to sin or whether sin is a particularly prominent version of a more general sort of creaturely limitation. (And there is a reason why Scripture would be centered on sin, even if the reasons for God's keeping distance from us go well beyond sin alone.)

At any rate, I *do* think that there is a scriptural basis for going further. Part of the case that I offered for the scriptural bona fides of my view is to appeal to the holiness code in Leviticus, which is hard to square with the position that what matters is simply *sin as such*. The argument that I offer there, which is indebted to the work of Frymer-Kensky (1989), Milgrom (1998), and (especially) Klawans (2000 and 2005), is that what the holiness code does is symbolically distance ourselves from features of our creatureliness — our being subject to death and decay, and our needing to procreate for our kind to continue — in order to be better fit to stand in intimate relationship with the unlimitedly great God (*DHDA*, 128-130). But this is a huge issue and I recognize that what I have to say in *DHDA* is inadequate to it.

Cuneo & Strabbing's challenge is of a slightly different sort. They agree that the holiness/sin opposition is nonnegotiable, but they say that my view does not account for that opposition well, whereas an alternative view that they propose can accommodate it. Here is the Cuneo & Strabbing sketch of how an account might go:

According to [our] alternative framework, God is holy in virtue of being unsurpassably morally good. Human beings, in contrast, are deeply twisted: defiant, destructive, dishonest, deluded. They have deeply wronged and are prone to wrong God by (inter alia) repeatedly visiting misery on each other and the creation. Now add that humans have often expressed and are prone to express little interest in reconciling with God. Nor have they tended to take responsibility for what they've done to each other, the creation, and God. *Plausibly, though, morally good agents who are subject to such mistreatment have moral reason to keep their distance from those who have badly mistreated them; that is an important way by which to uphold the moral status of victims, as well as honor the good things that have been neglected, victimized, damaged, lost, and destroyed.* It follows that God, the unsurpassably good moral one, has reason to keep distance from human beings (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 418-419, emphasis added).

Put to the side their reliance on the morality framework, which I think is false; I will return in the next section to their criticisms of my rejection of that framework for divine action. My basic misgiving about Cuneo & Strabbing's alternative account of why God has reason to keep distance from the sinful is that I think that the moral reasons to which Cuneo & Strabbing appeal, even on the most generous assessment, could make sense only of reasons for decent humans to keep distance from nasty ones with respect to specific kinds of relationships, but I

think that God has reason to keep distance from sinful humans with respect to a much broader range of relationships. Decent folks may have moral reasons not to *make friends with* nasty folks or to *enter into mutually advantageous business relationships* with them, and the like. But the relatively-good may very well have good reason to enter into other close relationships with the relatively-nasty: to rebuke them, to punish them, to educate them, and so forth. These are forms of relationship, and they can be very intimate, and moral reasons seem to me to give no account of why decent folks would keep distance from these sorts of accountability-holding relationships. The failure of Cuneo & Strabbing's moral reasons account to explain reasons to keep distance from these sorts of relationships becomes even clearer in the divine case. But I think God *does* have reason to keep distance even with respect to holding us accountable for our wrongs; these accountability-holding relationships require knowledge and personal engagement with the very bad, and on my view it is only because God is willing to condescend to serve us in this way that we are on the receiving end of divine rebuke. That God is willing to engage with us to hold us accountable for our sins and to help us be better is yet one more aspect of divine humility.

I also think it is not true that my own account lacks the ability to say why sin in particular is such a huge obstacle to unity between God and creatures. God has reason to keep distance from what is deficient and defective, not realizing the greatness that God realizes. All creatures will be limited just in virtue of being creatures, and all will fail to even live up to the standards internal to their kind, and thus be deficient. But to sin is not just to fall short with respect to the good, but to be against it. It is different in kind from other sorts of creaturely defects in that way (*DHDA*, 186). Here is a way of thinking about it. *Every* Christian view is committed, *ex ante*, to a view on which sin is (a) a creaturely defect and (b) different and worse in kind than any other sort of creaturely defect. If that is right, then, in combination with my view of divine holiness, Christian views are further committed to the position that God has additional reason to keep distance from sin and this reason would be dramatically greater and different in kind from the reasons to keep distance from other sorts of deficiency and imperfection.

4. Should we reject the morality and love frameworks?

Rutledge & Wessling and Cuneo & Strabbing offer alternatives to the holiness framework as I characterize it. Their defense of their accounts requires criticism of my attacks on the love and morality frameworks, respectively.

Rutledge & Wessling argue that the Trinitarian persons necessarily will also be loving *ad extra*, motivated in a loving way toward creatures (Rutledge & Wessling 2023, 441-442). This would involve seeking to promote their good for its own sake (benevolence) and seeking unity with them (univolence). One of the Rutledge & Wessling arguments is from the character of intraTrinitarian love, one is from the value of creatures.

Rutledge & Wessling and I agree about the necessity and intensity of intraTrinitarian love (Rutledge & Wessling 2023, 441; *DHDA*, 98). But I do not think that there is a successful argument from what we agree on with respect to the motivational states of the Trinitarian Persons to necessary divine love for creatures. The explanation that I would give for why this love is necessary and maximal is that the Persons of the Trinity are necessarily and maximally lovable (*DHDA*, 98). But if that is the explanation, then we cannot project to how the Persons of the Trinity must be motivated with respect to (e.g.) me — I am not necessarily and maximally lovable. (I mean: I think the Son loves the Father more than he loves me. At least

part of the answer why is that I am not lovable in the same way that the Father is.) So insofar as their case relies on projecting from the intraTrinitarian love of Persons for each other to the extraTrinitarian love of Persons for creatures, I am not persuaded. Nor am I persuaded by their pointing out, correctly, that reasons of love can be agent-relative. Perhaps there is more to the explanation of the Trinitarian Persons' loving each other than their value. But it seems to me that the relationships in which God necessarily stands to creatures do not generate agent-relative requiring reasons to love creatures. And while perhaps it is true that the Persons' being related to each other as Father, Son, and Spirit enter into the explanation of their necessary love for each other, that relationship is realized nowhere else in the world and is no basis for suggesting that Trinitarian love might necessarily be directed *ad extra*.

Rutledge & Wessling offer another argument, which appeals to the intrinsic value of creatures (Rutledge & Wessling 2023, 441). I deny that creatures have intrinsic value, at least in the sense of 'intrinsic value' typically in use, and I have given the reasons in *DHDA*: I think that intrinsic value of creatures is at odds with the greatness of the Anselmian being; all creaturely goodness should, on the Anselmian view, be no more than goodness 'by participation' — derivative from and a likeness to the divine goodness (*DHDA*, 94-95; see also Murphy 2017, 80-83 and 131-132, and Murphy 2019). Against Rutledge & Wessling's reading of my position, I don't think that what renders God's love for us contingent is the distance between God's goodness and ours (Rutledge & Wessling 2023, 440); it is that our goodness is not even of the right sort — while God is good in Godself, we are so merely by participation — and so our value lacks the normative power to necessitate divine motivation.

The Rutledge & Wessling argument is meant to help support the claim that the framework for divine action that they are offering in place of the holiness framework — an agapist framework in which necessary divine love for Godself and for creatures explains divine action (Rutledge & Wessling 2023, 439) — is at least on a par with the holiness framework. I am not persuaded by this. But I understand that how one assesses this is going to depend on just how convinced one is, going in, about the necessitating normative force of creaturely value. Given how much disagreement there is and will continue to be on that issue, it is very important to articulate — as Rutledge & Wessling admirably do — systematic, large-scale alternative accounts of divine action in order to assess their overall attractiveness.

Rutledge & Wessling aim to rehabilitate the love framework as part of a more complete, embracing framework for divine action; Cuneo & Strabbing focus their skepticism on my rejection of the morality framework. Cuneo & Strabbing offer two main lines of criticism: first, that I rely on an unsuccessful argument by Jonathan Dancy (2004, 15-17) that moral requirements as such do not provide reasons for action, and second, that my central argumentative strategy, which is a survey argument,⁴ deals with an inadequate set of accounts of reasons to promote others' good.

While I agree with Cuneo & Strabbing that Dancy's argument is susceptible to the objection that they formulate, I do not see why the success of their objection to Dancy makes any difference to the success of my argument against the morality framework. For in *DHDA* I explicitly *reject* Dancy's argument that all-things-considered moral requirements cannot be reasons for action. The considerations Dancy raises, I argue in *DHDA*, do not show that moral requirements are not themselves reasons to perform the actions required; but those

⁴That is, it relies at one point on a survey of possible views, views on how we are to account for reasons to promote others' good. My view is that of the theism-eligible accounts of how to account for requiring reasons to promote others' good, none of them so much as suggest that God would have such reasons (*DHDA*, 91-96).

considerations do show, I argued, that if moral requirements are reasons for the actions required, they attain their reason-giving status only by way of the existence of prior, more fundamental reasons to perform the relevant actions (*DHDA*, 90-91). Thus we cannot solve the problem of whether God has reasons to perform the actions of characteristic welfare-centered morality — promoting and preventing setbacks to creaturely good — by appealing simply to the moral requirements that God is under (*DHDA*, 90-91). I don't see that Cuneo & Strabbing's criticism of Dancy, which appeals to the possibility of multiple adequate grounds for any given moral requirement, affects this point.

What, then, of the survey argument? Cuneo & Strabbing complain that it is inadequate: "it considers a fairly small inventory of theories and . . . does not canvass the most promising ones. The most promising theories presumably would be ones that have their home in the theistic tradition" (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 422). But look, here are the views I consider: Hobbesianism, Humeanism, Kantianism, Aristotelianism, intrinsic value views (as applied to both substances and states of affairs), and final-but-not-intrinsic value views (as applied to both substances and states of affairs). This does not look to me like a small sample of positions, but rather the most important and widely-held views, covering most of the space of moral theory. (And Hobbes, Kant, and Aristotle *were* theists, and the Aristotelian view was incorporated into the natural law accounts of philosophers like Aquinas and of theological voluntarists about rightness like Duns Scotus.)

A survey argument is not an impossibility proof, and so there is always room for someone to raise their favorite of the unaddressed accounts. Cuneo & Strabbing mention Wolterstorff's position (2009 and 2012), on which our worth is based on our being images of God. Wolterstorff's particular version of the image-of-God view strikes me as not useful for finding a way around the survey argument. On his view, what makes us images of God is that we belong to a kind such that, when we develop in ways characteristic of our kind, we are suited to play a certain role in the world (Wolterstorff 2009, 345-346; Wolterstorff 2012, 199). But on his view, being an image of God in this sense is *not* sufficient to explain why one must respect that being as having rights; Wolterstorff thinks that we need to add that God *confers* worth on such beings (Wolterstorff 2009, 352; Wolterstorff 2012, 196-200). There is no argument in Wolterstorff that such conferral of worth is something that God must do for any being that meets these criteria. Thus this strikes me as providing no help for the problem at hand.

Suppose we ignore the details of Wolterstorff's position and just say: the basic explanation is *moral patients universally exhibit some set of features, and in virtue of exhibiting those features, they have intrinsic worth, and so not only we humans but God as well must respond to them in a certain way*. If that is the view, it is a version of the intrinsic value account, and I would criticize it as implausible in combination with the view that God is an Anselmian being, in which all good is present even prior to creating (*DHDA*, 93-95; Murphy 2017, 76-81). Or if the view is *moral patients universally exhibit some set of features, and in virtue of exhibiting those features, they image God, and thus have a sort of worth to which certain responses are fitting*, I will then note, as I do in the book (*DHDA*, 95-96), that God is not related to images of God in the way that we images of God are related to other images of God; it seems very implausible to me that God must have the sort of requiring reasons to what are (very distant) images of God that we images have with respect to each other. (I mean: my reasons with respect to what are images *of me* are pretty flimsy; and we are images of God in a much more attenuated sense than that. Perhaps 'image of God' means something very different than 'images of me.' In that case, I wonder whether we are getting an informative explanation at all.)

The book's argument in favor of the rejection of the morality framework is compressed, and was primarily meant to help folks take seriously that there is a lesson to be learned by examining the results if we try to explain divine action relying only on the holiness framework (*DHDA*, 84). I agree that these arguments are quick. I try to do better in defending this rejection and making it plausible elsewhere (Murphy 2017). But I also agree that there is much more work to be done, and that we should also be asking how the explanation of divine action goes when we appeal to the holiness framework and frameworks built around morality or love.

A final remark, on whether my rejection of the morality and love frameworks leave open too many possibilities of contingent divine action. Yadav asks, "Might the divine nature have equally well made possible a contingent *dis*-valuing toward creatures that overrides the default with, for example, reasons of hate that motivate God to everlastingly torture all creatures just because they are creatures" (Yadav 2023, 465)? My answer is: No. Creatures are good. They do not *necessitate* divine action promoting their creaturely good, but there is nothing about creatureliness as such that makes intelligible *malevolence* toward them, and divine holiness entirely precludes God's intending evil (*DHDA*, 150-152; also Murphy 2017, 85-102).

5. How well does the holiness framework explain divine action?

Much of *DHDA* is devoted to trying to explain divine action in terms of the holiness framework, on which God has requiring reasons to keep distance from creatures, along with an acknowledgement that God has justifying (but not requiring) reasons to promote and protect creaturely good. In terms of this view, I offer accounts of creation, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and Heaven and Hell, and I treat this account of divine action as unified by the theme of divine humility: God's acting on reasons of love, bypassing available reasons of status, to tend to our good.

The respondents to this symposium offer a number of criticisms of the attempt to employ the holiness framework to explain divine action: that such a view lacks the resources in principle to explain divine action; that it fares less well than some other plausible views; and that it has false implications, or leaves worrisome explanatory gaps.

Cuneo & Strabbing raise this in-principle worry:

[G]iven that God has powerful requiring reasons not to perform the actions mentioned above, it is difficult to see how God's love could provide adequate justifying reasons to perform them. Otherwise put, we're worried about how it could be a *rational* option for God to do these things, given the weight of God's status reasons to not create, become incarnate, and atone (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 415).

One might think that the worry here is that I am treating the reasons of love that are supposed to explain God's departing from the default of keeping distance as justifying only. But actually this is not the problem. Even views on which the reasons of creaturely love are also requiring would have the same problem here, which is that my playing up of the strength of the requiring reasons of status to keep distance raises the question of whether creaturely goodness could give adequate reason to overcome this default.

Cuneo & Strabbing suggest that my only response to this worry is to say that because God is rational and did create, it must be rationally possible for God to act on reasons of love with respect to creatures, thus acting contrary to the default set by God's reasons of status (Cuneo

& Strabbing 2023, 415-416). But that is not quite right. I discuss the specific objection they raise here in the context of creation in particular (*DHDA*, 157-158). My response is to note that it is a mistake to think of how much justifying force reasons can have in relation to requiring reasons solely in terms of the values that give rise to those reasons (in this case, that of creatures and that of God). We also need to focus, first, on the agent who has these reasons and, second, on the sort of response that the values in question call for. To illustrate the first point, think of your own children, and the extent to which it can be reasonable for you to take on sacrifices of your own well-being for their sake that may not be outweighed from the Point of View of the Universe by their increase in well-being. You have discretion to do this (it might even be required, due to the role you play with respect to them), and in part that discretion is due to the (limited) sovereignty that you have over your own good. But we should expect *divine* discretion to be extremely wide, *much* wider than the discretion of limited beings like us, the norms of action for which are set by our creaturely kind (*DHDA*, 157). Therefore, etc. To elaborate on the second point, note that the justifying reasons in play are reasons to *promote* the good of creatures and the requiring reasons are reasons to *express* the divine greatness; we don't really have a good theory of how the fact that some action expresses the good and some action promotes the good interact with each other in deliberation, and so I don't know why we would think that reasons to promote creaturely good could not justify God's departing from the default of expressing God's greatness by keeping distance from what is limited in goodness.

Suppose that we do not treat this in-principle worry as a deal-killer. We can then ask how well the arguments of Chapters 7-10 go in accounting for various features of the Christian story of divine action — about creation, incarnation, subjection to atoning death, and so forth. We can use nearby alternative frameworks to test the *DHDA* holiness framework account, and see whether it perhaps falls short in comparison. That it does fall short is the central line of argument offered by Rutledge & Wessling and is one of the important criticisms raised both by Cuneo & Strabbing and by Yadav.

The Rutledge & Wessling paper is rich and detailed on this issue, and I think the right thing for the reader to do is just to go back to that paper to reflect on its arguments; any engagement here on the particular comparisons in explanatory power would be so selective as to feel like cherry-picking. Let me just try to describe the comparison being made, grant something huge for the sake of argument, and then ask what follows. The comparisons that Rutledge & Wessling are making are between the *DHDA* holiness framework and their agapist framework, on which God is necessarily motivated by love — for Godself and for all creatures, in a suitable way (Rutledge & Wessling 2023, 439-440). This agapist framework is spelled out in a way that acknowledges the requiring force of reasons of status — for God to keep distant from limited, imperfect creatures — but also the requiring force of reasons of creaturely goodness. Rutledge & Wessling argue that with respect to a wide range of instances of divine action attested to in Scripture, their agapist framework predicts divine action better than the holiness framework does.

Suppose I *concede* the Rutledge & Wessling case as it has been presented thus far. Any account on which the reasons of love on which God acted are requiring rather than justifying will make the divine action for those reasons more predictable. Requiring reasons, all else equal, do more to help us predict the actions taken by a rational agent than do justifying reasons.

Have I just conceded that the agapist framework succeeds with respect to the explanation of divine action further than the holiness framework does? I don't think so. Here's an analogy. Suppose we are looking for an explanation of my eating a cup of plain yogurt. One explanation

appeals to my strongly desiring eating yogurt for its own sake. Another explanation appeals to my desiring the weak but real health effects that eating this yogurt would have, which desire co-exists in me with an extreme revulsion against pretty much everything about eating yogurt. Put to the side any other information we have about me and my tastes; the desire to eat yogurt for its own sake makes my eating the yogurt more predictable, and you might think that this better supports that hypothesis about my motivational structure.

But if the explanandum is not

Murphy's eating this cup of yogurt

but instead

Murphy's surprisingly eating this cup of yogurt

then matters are different. The explanandum has an added layer of complexity. You don't want an explanation that simply predicts the action of eating the yogurt; you want an explanation that does so in a way that preserves its being surprising that the action took place. When an action is surprising, and its surprisingness is part of the explanandum, you want something that preserves an account of the genesis of the action while not rendering it expected.

This is my main objection to the Rutledge & Wessling comparisons between their agapist framework and my holiness framework. I am not simply trying to explain the divine actions; I am trying to preserve their counting as something wondrous, surprising, unexpected. My worry is that the Rutledge & Wessling framework will have the result that creating, entering into our lives by revealing Godself to us, becoming incarnate, and dying an atoning death all become divine actions that an astute philosophical theologian can tell us is just what we should have expected. But I think these things are surprising and wondrous, not to have been expected, and that Scripture and the common practice of the Church has treated divine action as wondrous in this way.

This emphasis on preserving the wondrousness, unexpectedness, surprisingness of God's having done what God has done for us is shared by Cuneo & Strabbing, but they think that this can be captured by a framework for divine action that includes God's having a sort of necessary aim at the good of creatures, which necessary aim I deny. Here are Cuneo & Strabbing on this point:

Any position according to which the members of the Trinity live in perfect harmony and love will render it surprising that God creates. For creating would not remedy any lack in the Godhead (or, arguably, enhance the quality of God's life). But having created, it is not surprising that God endeavors to engage with and be united with various elements of the creation, given God's love for creation. This, however, is compatible with it being highly surprising that God has done so in the ways God has. God could have accomplished these things in a variety of manners. That the second person of the Trinity became incarnate, suffered, died, and was resurrected is highly surprising. If these claims are correct, when suitably supplemented with orthodox Christian commitments, the alternative framework sketched above can handle [the desideratum of accounting for the thesis that "there is something surprising about God's actions to create, become incarnate, and atone"] (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 417-418).

I am as yet unmoved: I don't see that these considerations are promising starting points as ways to accommodate the wondrousness and surprisingness of creation, incarnation, and atonement. With respect to creation: Why would God's having a perfectly loving intraTrinitarian relationship make it surprising that God would create, given the existence of strong requiring reasons to promote creaturely goodness, any more than my being extremely well-off would make it surprising that I would avoid treading on another's gouty toes? God is perfectly responsive to all of the good reasons that God has, and if there are indeed requiring reasons to promote creaturely good, it is unclear why it would not be *obvious* that God must create, even if God's intraTrinitarian life is top-notch.⁵ With respect to incarnation and atonement: the fact that there are *multiple paths* for achieving divine purposes does not in itself make surprising that God chose a *particular one*; there must be something about the particular one chosen that makes it surprising and wondrous that God employed it. (There are a dozen on-a-par ways for me to get from my home to work at Georgetown; that I take a particular one of them on some day is not surprising.) I have offered an account of what it is that makes these divine ways of acting with respect to us surprising: that doing these things is something that there is a normative default against God's doing. I am not sure what resources Cuneo & Strabbing have available to preserve that result.

In addition to these sorts of comparative worries, one might worry that the holiness framework account just leads to obviously false implications. Yadav thinks so: he thinks that on my view, the story of divine action in the world is the story of the demands of holiness being violated (Yadav 2023, 465 and 466), which is deeply antisciptural. I don't think that this is an accurate characterization of my view, though I agree that some phrasing of mine might suggest this picture. What happens in divine action for the sake of creatures is that reasons of status are not being acted on in the way that God could rationally act on them, and God can refrain from acting on them only for the sake of adequate justifying reasons. God in fact does refrain from acting on those reasons of status for the sake of adequate justifying reasons: reasons of creaturely goodness. Acting against a default is not *ipso facto* the violation of a demand. And so what we have are not violations of the demands of holiness or of the demands of God's status; whether holiness makes these demands depends on other reasons that God has and is acting on. (I do not violate the demands of self-interest when I give up some trivial good for the sake of other-regarding beneficence. Self-interest, in my view, makes no such demands. What it demands is that I act adequately for its sake, and when I act contrary to it, that I do so for good reasons.) All my view says is that God sometimes acts on divine status less than God is entitled to, and this is scripturally unremarkable (Philippians 2:6-10).

I have discussed objections that the *DHDA* holiness framework account of divine action either falls short in comparison to rival plausible views or generates false implications about how divine action is to be characterized. Rutledge & Wessling and Cuneo & Strabbing, who press the comparative arguments, think that the *DHDA* holiness framework explanations of divine action are inferior to explanations that appeal to other frameworks, but they do not deny (nor do they affirm!⁶) the coherence of the model of God's acting on reasons of love, though contingently, for the sake of creaturely good. If I understand Yadav rightly, he thinks

⁵ This is the thrust of Norman Kretzmann's argument for necessitarianism: that the perfect goodness of the Trinity in relationship *must* spread outward, as the Dionysian Principle (*Good is diffusive of itself*) articulates (Kretzmann 1991).

⁶ Cuneo & Strabbing express some qualms about the justifying reasons category; see (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 414, n. 3).

both that this account has a massive explanatory gap and, even if we ignore that explanatory gap, that we cannot think of divine action, on my view, as loving with respect to creatures.

Here is the explanatory gap problem.

But if God's agent-relative valuing of creatures that affords God justifying "reasons of love" is a *contingent* valuing, then what are the more fundamental agentive dimensions of God it is contingent *on*? ... This seems to introduce an explanatory gap into Murphy's account. How can he make sense of God's contingent valuing of creatures without bottoming out in some notion of an essential, necessary, or defining divine disposition of benevolence or univolence toward creatures—or at least toward the creaturely natures or *possibilia* in the divine mind? Apart from some such underlying disposition, what is it in God that makes possible the contingent valuing of creatures? Is it simply a brute contingency (Yadav 2023, 465)?

I do *not* think that it is God's agent-relative valuing of creatures that gives God justifying reasons to promote their good. I think that God has those reasons necessarily; what is contingent is not the reasons, but God's acting on them.⁷ But this correction does not resolve but simply relocates the problem that Yadav is raising. He asks: What explains God's valuing creatures, which in turn gives rise to God's having reasons to seek their good? Putting my quibbles aside, Yadav's question is just as easily pressed as: What explains God's acting for the sake of reasons of creaturely love?

There is an explanatory gap. But it is an explanatory gap that we should expect to be present and is, as far as I can see, totally nonthreatening. Divine freedom *must* leave an explanatory gap, at least (a) with respect to standard forms of contrastive explanation⁸ and (b) when God's reasons for action do not determine a uniquely rational option. In the case of creaturely free will, we are disposed in various ways by our desires, habits, the graces of God, and so forth, so even our free choices admit of some ordinary sorts of contrastive explanation. (Even if the choice to get married or not is free and underdetermined by reasons, in a particular case we might explain a particular person's choosing to get married based on their desires, inclinations, dispositions, etc.) But when the ranking of options is not determined by reasons and we freely choose among them, we should not expect there to be a completely satisfying contrastive explanation available. (Why did this person, who seemed to have the same desires, habits, etc. as that other person, choose differently, even though they were in exactly the same situation of choice?) God is not nudged or constrained by brute desires; divine action is to be explained by the excellence of divine agency and the reasons for action that God has. So why did God act lovingly toward us? *Because God freely and rationally chose to.* Is this "brute contingency"? It is not something that happens to God, or random; God is the author of the choice, and God makes the choice for a good reason.

Yadav could grant this while pressing his second line of criticism. He is skeptical that any such action of this sort will count as loving. I do not ascribe to God some dispositional character trait of lovingness with respect to creatures from which such action proceeds, and I do not think that such divine action is (as analogous action might be in the case of us) that from which a habit of lovingness might develop. God is not the sort of agent that develops character traits. But if that is right, in what sense can divine action toward us be loving, if it neither proceeds from, nor habituates God toward, lovingness (Yadav 2023, 467)?

⁷ Cuneo & Strabbing also speak as if I think those reasons are contingent (Cuneo & Strabbing 2023, 414).

⁸ But see (Pruss 2006, 148-156), which offers a challenge to this.

This challenge requires me to say that we can offer sufficient conditions for an action to be loving that do not appeal to a character trait of the agent who acts. I say we can do that: an act is loving if it is for the patient's good for the patient's sake. We had better have some such notion, or we will be unable to say things like "it was amazing that this person did that loving thing, which was so out of character" or "that act of love came out of the blue" or whatever. While I see the attraction of holding that a loving act must proceed from a character trait, I think it is false (indeed, the theory of habituation requires that it be false), and it is also very implausible that whether an act is a loving act depends on whether it will, or is of the kind that will, develop habits of love in the agent (rather, its being of that kind is what *explains* why the habits it can develop are habits *of love*).

I don't believe that it is right to think of God's internal states as developing and changing, except perhaps on some very weak analogy, and on an analogy that is probably more misleading than it's worth. But I do think that we can ascribe, *consequentially*, a broad and contingent evaluative outlook to God — one that is ascribed to God in virtue of the pattern of free actions, some of them promises and commitments, that God has made with respect to creatures. These promises include eternal blessed life for those who are in friendship with God, and the actions include having gone to humiliating and nearly unthinkable lengths to bring us into that friendship. On that basis I think that we can, correctly, say that God is a being who has displayed an astonishing love for us.

Yadav does not care for the contingency of this (Yadav 2023, 468), and even appeals to that contingency to deny that the God I describe could really be the God of the oppressed (Yadav 2023, 467). I don't see why this would be. To be pedantic, it is really rare that being not necessarily *P* entails not being *P*, and when one makes this move, one needs to provide the argument for it. God, as I describe God, has firmly and unequivocally and irrevocably sided with the oppressed. It is true that God did not have to do this (though, as I noted earlier, I would deny that God could side with oppression, and I would deny that there are resources in *DHDA* to justify the view that God could side with oppression); but I do acknowledge that God could have been more aloof, creating and maybe conserving and concurring indifferently, letting the creaturely scene play out with little engagement with what goes on there. But this is not, has never been, and never will be God's stance toward the world.

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