



Consider, in particular, his suggestion that we might select our situations in order to improve our character. Here, he approvingly cites John Doris's famous example of being invited to a secluded dinner party with a flirtatious colleague while one's spouse is away. Obviously, going to the dinner and trusting your virtue to rescue you from cheating is not the smart thing to do; the smart thing is to decline the invitation (*Lack of Character* [Cambridge University Press, 2002], 147). Miller agrees. And, of course, so should we. Avoiding the dinner may well help us avoid acting badly.

But Miller is making the further claim—a claim for which Doris himself was not arguing—that avoiding the dinner may also help us to become better people. And it is not obvious to me how that is supposed to work. The alcoholic who avoids bars is surely wise; he is almost just as surely still an alcoholic. Merely avoiding the “near occasion of sin” hasn't cured him of the desire to drink alcohol. Likewise, the partnered person who avoids candlelit dinners with colleagues is surely wise; but she is not thereby made a more virtuous person—at least not if virtue is a disposition of the heart, as Miller thinks that it is. Perhaps the hope is that simply avoiding adultery eventually makes it less attractive. But it isn't as if avoiding forbidden fruit always makes the fruit less attractive. Quite to the contrary. So I think we need to hear more about how this strategy would work.

Of course, none of the three questions I have raised are intended as decisive objections to Miller's project; they are instead invitations to further elaboration. It is a mark of a good book to raise more questions than it can itself answer. And this is a very good book indeed. A final note on audience: while this book is not written for professional philosophers or psychologists, it would nonetheless be appropriate for use in certain academic contexts. My own university, for example, has recently begun offering interdisciplinary seminars to first year students with the aim of exemplifying how the methodologies typical of empirical science and ethical thought, for example, can fruitfully interact. *The Character Gap* could serve as an ideal text for such a course.

God's Own Ethics: Norms of Divine Agency and the Argument from Evil, by Mark C. Murphy. Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. 224. \$70.00 (hardcover).

KYLA EBELS-DUGGAN, Northwestern University

In *God's Own Ethics*, Mark Murphy argues that traditional formulations of the problem of evil rely on unwarranted presumptions about the ethics of the God whose existence they purport to disprove. The argument has two



major parts. The first aims to establish the ethics of a perfect being as such: which considerations would a perfect being *necessarily* treat as reasons for action? After developing and defending an answer, Murphy argues that the evils that we observe provide no significant evidence against the existence of such a being. The second part aims to establish the more ambitious conclusion that these evils also fail to provide evidence against the existence of a perfect being worthy of our worship and allegiance, and so the God to whom the Abrahamic religions attest.

Murphy's argument, exemplary in clarity and attention to detail, centers on the relationships among the concept of a perfect being—which Murphy calls the Anselmian Being—the demands of what he calls *familiar welfare-oriented goodness*, and the evils that we observe. Along the intricate and tightly woven course of the book, Murphy also touches on other important themes, including the proper methodology for reasoning about God's perfection, the relationships among love, practical reasons, and morality, and the conditions for rational allegiance.

In Part I, Murphy advances three claims about the ethics of the Anselmian Being: The Anselmian Being would *not* necessarily be motivated by familiar welfare-oriented goodness, but *would* necessarily refrain from intending setbacks to rational creatures' welfare, and would take that welfare to provide justifying, though not requiring, reasons to advance it. Familiar welfare-oriented goodness is a normative ethical view that takes the welfare of rational creatures to be among the values to which a morally good agent responds. And it demands a certain kind of response, namely treating setbacks to well-being as to-be-prevented. The morally good agent fails to prevent such setbacks only when she has good reason to do so. Standard formulations of the problem of evil presume this conception of moral goodness when they argue that a perfect being would not allow the sorts of suffering that are manifestly part of our world. But Murphy argues that perfection does not entail this regard for welfare, but only the more limited responses articulated in the second and third theses.

He begins by arguing that the Anselmian Being is not necessarily loving in any sense that outstrips what is needed to count as perfectly morally good. Like familiar welfare-oriented goodness, love responds to the welfare of its object. But any rationally necessitated response to this value is already included in moral goodness. The Anselmian Being acts necessarily only on necessary reasons. So the perfection of being loving can add nothing to the necessary ethics of the Anselmian Being, beyond whatever ethics moral goodness entails.

Next, Murphy turns to the more ambitious thesis that the Anselmian Being is not necessarily morally good in the familiar welfare-oriented sense. Establishing the authority of that normative view requires a move from *X is good (bad) for some A* to *X provides reasons for anyone to promote (prevent) X*. But all plausible attempts to defend the move in the case where X is the welfare of some creature and "anyone" ranges over human beings appeal to features of human beings that the Anselmian Being does

not necessarily share. So these arguments provide no reason to believe that the Anselmian Being has these reasons.

Nevertheless, Murphy affirms that the Anselmian Being is perfectly good and responsive to well-being at a higher level of abstraction. The Anselmian Being's perfection entails that it must be the source of the value of all other valuable things. So creatures can be valuable only extrinsically, in virtue of our relationship to the Anselmian Being. This, he argues, affects the kind of reasons that our value can give the Anselmian Being. Just as the Anselmian Being has discretion about whether to create beings who have a good, so it has discretion about whether to add an extra measure of well-being to our lives. The Anselmian Being needs no reason not to do so, but the value of the beings and of their welfare provides justifying reasons on which the Anselmian Being could choose to act.

Moreover, the Anselmian Being has decisive, requiring reasons not to *intend* setbacks to well-being. Such setbacks are an evil. The Anselmian Being would not intend evil as an end; if such a being could intend evil at all, it would only be as a means to some good. But, without justifying reasons, making the achievement of evil the success condition of one's act makes that act worse than it would otherwise be. Moreover, there could be no such reasons, because no good that could be so realized could justify the marring of the Anselmian Being's agency through the intending of evil. So the Anselmian Being has decisive requiring reasons not to intend evil.

While the Anselmian Being thus never aims to set back creaturely well-being, neither does it necessarily aim to advance or to prevent setbacks to it. We have no reason to suppose that the existence of such a being would entail or predict a world with fewer or different evils than we observe. So the argument from evil fails to undermine the thesis that a perfect being exists.

In the second half of the book, Murphy turns to the worry that the conclusions of Part I amount to cold comfort for adherents of the Abrahamic traditions. For, one might think, there is a yawning gap between the Anselmian Being imagined here and the loving God revealed in the scriptures. Even if the argument from evil fails to establish that no perfect being exists, it may yet succeed in establishing that observed suffering provides good reason to think that there is no God worthy of our worship and allegiance.

Murphy dispenses quickly with worries about worship-worthiness, claiming that this feature follows from the Anselmian Being's perfection. He takes more seriously the challenge that suffering poses to the possibility that God is worthy of allegiance. As he puts it, the worry is that "What precludes the argument from evil from getting purchase against the Anselmian Being—that the Anselmian Being's ethics is not necessarily the ethics of rational creatures—also precludes the Anselmian Being from being necessarily worthy of allegiance" (147).

To deserve allegiance, Murphy holds, God must have an ethics sufficiently like our own. That is, God must treat as reasons certain

considerations that we treat as reasons. Part I has shown that God will not *necessarily* do so just in virtue of being perfect. But a perfect being could choose to take on these reasons contingently. Murphy contends that the Abrahamic scriptures and traditions attest to a God who has done just that. Human beings can choose to take on commitments that change the normative status of certain considerations, rendering them reasons. God shares this normative power. Like us, God may take on reasons by adopting discretionary ends or—most significantly, given the scriptural narratives—making promises or covenants with creatures.

But to turn back the problem of evil, Murphy must go further, establishing that God's chosen ethics can make God worthy of our allegiance, while yet remaining consistent with the evils that we observe. If, for example, only a being motivated by familiar welfare-oriented goodness could be worthy of allegiance, then the original version of the argument from evil returns. But Murphy denies the antecedent. He holds that familiar welfare-oriented goodness governs human beings, and also that in order to be worthy of our allegiance God needs to share in our reasons to a sufficient extent. But God need not have exactly the same ethics as human creatures to be worthy of allegiance. Instead, he argues, we would have reason to ally ourselves with and subordinate our wills to God if: (1) God will never direct us to act in ways that come into conflict with our first-order obligations, including those given by familiar welfare-oriented goodness, and (2) We would do better in securing our reasonable ends by subordinating our wills than by acting on our own judgment or in some other way. Murphy offers three models of this possibility, each a possible political authority that, he claims, we would have reason to empower and accept. The models make clear that God could make and keep promises that the two conditions will be met, without being motivated to maximize the welfare of creatures. So the existence of evils that God could have prevented provides no evidence against God's allegiance-worthiness.

Murphy concludes by arguing that the scriptures represent God as making the relevant sort of covenants with us, promising us great goods—and in particular that all will be well for us in the end—if we subordinate our wills to God's will. But they do not represent God as taking on familiar welfare-oriented goodness. The book ends with an argument that Murphy's account of God's ethics makes better sense than any of its competitors can of the central Christian doctrine that God loves us even though God doesn't have to.

In at least one important way I make an unhelpfully sympathetic audience for Murphy's claims about God's ethics. No doubt some will resist his argument on the grounds that God couldn't depart so far from the moral ideals that govern us, yet still count as perfectly good. Such readers might seek an account that makes God more beholden to look out for our well-being. But I have doubts about the extent to which we bear this sort of responsibility even to one another. Murphy treats it as uncontroversial that familiar welfare-oriented goodness governs human beings. If correct,

this makes his claims that the Anselmian Being is not necessarily morally good in this sense, and that God need not be even contingently so, more interesting. But, while I find these conclusions about God's ethics plausible, I take them to be insights into the right way to understand *moral goodness*, rather than revealing the distance between our ethics and God's.

Murphy may not like this characterization, but I find it helpful to understand him as suggesting that God is less consequentialist than we might have thought, and instead more like a Kantian. God needn't look to maximize creaturely well-being, nor even take the advancement of well-being as a reason to act, at each possible moment. As I would put it, God need not take responsibility for our well-being in the way that consequentialism requires. Instead, the ethics that Murphy ascribes to God combines a certain requirement of respect, the limiting condition of not aiming to set back well-being, with something much like the Kantian wide duty to advance the happiness of others, regarding advancement of human flourishing as providing justifying reasons. The further thought that God may choose to convert some justifying reasons to requiring reasons by making promises also fits comfortably within a Kantian scheme. So if Kantian normative ethics is close to the truth about the reasons governing human beings, the gulf between God's ethics and ours is plausibly much narrower than Murphy suggests.

Murphy's general conception of moral goodness, appropriate responsiveness to value (23), is initially neutral with respect to both which values and which responses are in question. He then specifies the notion, holding that creaturely welfare must be among the relevant values, and that, at least for human beings, the required responses are those comprising familiar welfare-oriented goodness. But Murphy offers little defense of these specifications, and one might doubt that goodness requires treating the *welfare* of human or sentient beings as valuable, at least as intrinsically so. One might, for example, hold that the value of the beings themselves, not that of their welfare, immediately guides morally good responses. In a slightly later formulation (29), Murphy adds *persons* to the values response to which is included in moral goodness. But a stretch of argument is required to move from the idea of valuing a person to valuing her welfare. I have elsewhere argued against this way of thinking of our reasons, not just with respect to other persons generally, but even concerning those we love (Kyla Ebels-Duggan, "Against Beneficence: A Normative Account of Love," *Ethics* 119 [2008]: 142–170).

Murphy drives the wedge between his conceptions of human and divine goodness in chapter 3, where he argues for the apparently shocking thesis that the Anselmian Being is not necessarily morally good. But his argument might be taken to cast doubt on the claim that familiar welfare-oriented goodness is the best conception of moral goodness, rather than supporting his narrower stated thesis that this conception doesn't apply to the Anselmian Being. How shocking the thesis of chapter 3, and so of the

book as a whole, is depends on how satisfactory this “familiar” conception of moral goodness turns out to be.

I concur with Murphy’s claim that the move from *X is good (bad) for A* to *there is a reason for anyone to promote (prevent) X* needs defense. But note that such defense is needed as the claim ranges over all agents, including human ones. Murphy briefly surveys Hobbesian, Humean, Aristotelian and Kantian attempts to bridge the argumentative gap. We can ask both whether these arguments succeed in establishing that familiar welfare-oriented goodness governs human beings and, if so, whether they do so in a way that extends to the Anselmian Being. Murphy is focused on the second of these questions, but the first deserves some attention.

I do not think that the Hobbesian or Humean strategies succeed in the former task, so I will set them aside. The Aristotelian approach probably has the best chance of yielding the conclusion Murphy endorses about the difference between our ethics and God’s; it might deserve more detailed development. My worry emerges in consideration of the Kantian argument. Murphy interprets the Kantian as claiming that there are no relevant, non-arbitrary differences among rational agents such that we could value ourselves, taking our own ends to be reason-giving, yet fail to value others. His response is that there are very important differences between human agents and the Anselmian Being. The latter is perfect and not just “one person among others.” But the best version of the Kantian argument has it that valuing ourselves qua rational agent is entailed by the activities of choice and action, and these also fix the description under which we must value ourselves. If this strategy works, then it isn’t clear why the admittedly vast differences between our agency and perfect divine agency would make the kind of difference that Murphy suggests. So long as we both choose and act—and this does not seem to be something that Murphy wants to deny—the Kantian conclusion will apply to us both.

The content of this conclusion is another matter. In 3.4 Murphy argues that even having established that creaturely well-being grounds reasons, we must still ask what these reasons are. They are not necessarily reasons to promote, but perhaps only to respect, well-being, and might be merely justifying rather than requiring. But why treat these questions as arising only with respect to the Anselmian Being’s ethics, ignoring the human case? Above I suggested that Kantians will endorse conclusions about human ethics similar to those Murphy ascribes to the Anselmian Being. The normative upshots of the other three strategies with respect to human ethics deserve further consideration as well.

Murphy’s arguments toward the end of the book provide further reason to suspect greater similarity between human and divine ethics than he suggests. Concerned to demonstrate the possible existence of the God of the Abrahamic scriptures, he looks for models on which it would be sensible to trust an authority not motivated by familiar welfare-oriented goodness. But the models that he presents are possible *human* political authorities. The power of these models does not depend on anything

distinctive of divine agency. If convincing, they show that we could have reason to ally ourselves with, even subordinate our wills to, other human persons who do not subscribe to familiar welfare-oriented goodness.

Moreover, his culminating case that his view outdoes competitors in accounting for the central Christian orthodoxy that *God loves us, though God doesn't have to* would be more persuasive if tied to familiar models of human love. I think that this route is open to him. In my view, just as human *ethics* is probably more like the divine ethics that Murphy defends, so ideals of human *love* share more with his conception of divine love. Alongside analogs to political authority, Murphy might have considered comparisons with models of parental love.

To put my central point in a friendlier way, Murphy has more resources than he uses to display the possibility of a compelling God—worthy of worship, allegiance and even love—who nevertheless departs from familiar welfare-oriented goodness. Murphy's God can seem an unpleasant character, who demands obedience in a way that looks arbitrary, or uses a superior position to extract allegiance through a kind of bribery. Murphy works to tamp down this impression, rightly emphasizing appealing aspects of God's character that the view accommodates and makes salient. But there is more that he can say along these lines, and the closer that we can come to understanding God as sharing, rather than departing from, motivations we recognize as good in human beings, the less trouble this sort worry will cause.

I have focused on just one of many possible lines of response to Murphy's rich and intricate argument. Like any good philosophical work, *God's Own Ethics* raises many questions even as it provides important insights. The book is a true achievement worthy of careful study and much discussion.

Exemplarist Moral Theory, by Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski. Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. vi + 288. \$57.35 (hardcover).

RICHARD KIM, Loyola University Chicago

In every area of philosophy, novel theories are rare. In normative ethics, for instance, the theoretical terrain seems well mapped out by deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics. While fine-tuning and adjustments of each theory continue, it is not easy to find a theory of morality that doesn't fall within these three categories. For this reason alone Linda Zagzebski's proposal of a new moral theory, "exemplarist moral theory" (EMT), is an extraordinary achievement. (Note: in earlier works she takes exemplarism

