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Being Good and Loving God

Questions about the relationship between religion and morality have been of perennial interest to philosophers of religion. Perhaps the dominant questions have concerned whether salient features of the moral life, such as the existence of moral obligations (e.g., Evans 2013) or the appropriateness of moral motivation (e.g., Adams 1979), are best justified by the existence of a religious reality. If they are, or if it is reasonable for a person to think that they are, then this would provide for one way in which a person's moral commitments could justifiably generate or sustain their religious commitments. Their justified commitments to the moral life having the relevant features, together with their justified commitment to a religious reality providing the best justification for the existence of these features, could justifiably lead them to cognitively commit to a religious reality.

In this paper, I will explore a different and less well-trodden way in which a person's moral commitments might justifiably generate or sustain their cognitive religious commitments. My focus isn't on cases in which a person has certain views about the nature of the moral life and is persuaded by an argument that these views evidentially support the existence of a religious entity. Rather, my focus is on cases in which a person's commitment to trying to live a morally good life leads them to adopt cognitive religious commitments. More specifically, I am interested in cases in which a person embraces these religious commitments as a *manifestation* of their trying to be a good person—cases where taking on these religious commitments is just part of what being a good person is justifiably taken to demand.

I am especially interested in cases where the explanatory role of moral commitment makes a determinative difference. Roughly, these are cases in which the religious commitments either wouldn't have arisen or would have been lost had it not been for the explanatory influence of the relevant moral commitment. Because I think it is most plausible that moral commitments of the relevant sort would justifiably make this kind of determinative difference in cases where a person's evidence is otherwise roughly counterbalanced with respect to the religious commitments in question, I will concentrate on such cases where the person's evidence is roughly counterbalanced. I wish to examine whether a person's commitment to being a good person might move them off such an evidential fence, so-to-speak, to embrace cognitive religious commitments, and whether it might do so in a way that renders these commitments justified in a moral, epistemic, or all-things-considered sense.

I will focus specifically on the case of embracing commitment to the existence of a God of the sort envisioned in the major monotheisms. So my focus is on cases in which a person's evidence is roughly counterbalanced regarding the existence of such a God. I will argue that there is a suite of character traits that a person might reasonably take to be partially constitutive of being a good person, where living in accordance with these character traits requires that in

such evidential situations one cognitively commits oneself to God's existence. Given the existence of such character traits, a person might justifiably commit themselves to God's existence in these evidential circumstances as a manifestation of their pursuit of living in accordance with a morally good character. Moreover, given the nature of the relevant commitments to God's existence as spelled out below, this will be appropriately described as a case in which a person's attempt to be good will have led them to love God. Indeed, it will be a case where loving God was just part of what it was to be good, or at least where this was a justifiable view.

Section 1 introduces the suite of difference-making character traits that are at center stage in this story about the justification of religious commitment. It explains the nature of these traits, and illustrates how possessing or pursuing them can make a difference for a person's cognitive commitments not just to God's existence but to a broad range of claims, concentrating on cases involving rough evidential symmetry in which these traits can make a determinative difference. Section 2 defends the moral value of the relevant character traits. Section 3 turns to the question of the justificatory status of commitments that arise out of the pursuit or possession and exercise of these traits. I argue that such commitments, including commitment to God's existence, are typically morally justified and all-thing-considered justified, and they may even be epistemically justified.

1. Praisefulness, Thankfulness, and Contrition

There are various ways that the character traits I have in mind might be conceptualized as following a unified pattern or contributing to a unified ideal. All of them can be thought of as tendencies to err in one way rather than another. And, as I will discuss in more detail in Section 2, the direction toward which they tend to err is a direction that tends to be conducive toward cultivating valuable interpersonal relationships. So, we might think of them as pro-relationship character traits. Moreover, while the examples of these pro-relationship character traits I will focus on in this section may at first strike some readers as rather narrow features of character, I will explain in Section 2 how they are related to broader features of character equally concerned with promoting valuable interpersonal relationships. As I will argue there, these narrow features of character have a fitting place within a broad, virtuously other-oriented character.

While there are many candidates for such traits, I will focus my attention here on three that I call, respectively, "praisefulness," "thankfulness," and "contrition". I use these labels stipulatively rather than in an effort to analyze some pre-theoretic phenomena already generally recognized using these terms. In speaking of "thankfulness," for example, I should not be understood as offering a rival conception of the trait of gratitude which has received extensive attention from philosophers and psychologists, though thankfulness as I will conceive of it is closely related to gratitude as it is commonly conceived as I spell out further below.

Praisefulness is stipulatively defined as a tendency to err on the side of giving credit to others for their accomplishments, rather than refraining from giving such credit. The praiseful person would rather give credit when credit isn't deserved than refrain from giving credit when credit is deserved. They are more tolerant of erring by offering credit when it isn't due than they are of erring by failing to offer credit when it is due. The credit the praiseful person tends toward giving they tend toward giving sincerely. Theirs isn't a tendency to feign giving others' credit for their accomplishments, but a tendency to sincerely give credit. Nor is theirs a tendency to give others more praise than their accomplishments would merit, but a tendency to err on the side of giving others the praise their accomplishments would merit—if indeed they are accomplishments. The praiseful person therefore tends to err on the side of sincerely giving others credit commensurate with their accomplishments, rather than the side of refraining from giving others credit commensurate with their accomplishments.

In the contemporary philosophical literature, the construct that is most closely related to praisefulness so conceived is appreciation. The kind of appreciation most commonly discussed by philosophers is aesthetic appreciation—the appreciation of beauty (e.g., Budd 2002). But aesthetic appreciation is just one kind of appreciation. Tony Manela (2016), for example, notes that there are also cognitive, ethical, and prudential kinds of appreciation. While noting that “there is no consensus philosophical account of what appreciation is,” Manela suggests that what is common to all these forms of appreciation is that they are each “a mode of valuing, that is, a certain kind of response to something good” (289). Accordingly, Manela proposes that appreciation includes both cognitive elements and affective elements. Focusing on the case of prudential appreciation—appreciation for the good things in one's life—he proposes that “when I appreciate [such things], I do more than just get right certain facts about the value of those things; in addition I *enjoy* them as well” (ibid). Similarly, I propose that the praiseful person errs on the side of adopting a stance toward others' achievements that includes both positive cognitive and positive affective elements. The stance includes both a positive cognitive stance toward the achievements as achievements and an appropriate positive valuing of those achievements as such. Without adopting such a stance their praise of others' achievements would not be sincere, as it would not express the attitude of appreciation that sincere praise expresses.¹ The praiseful person thus errs on the side of adopting a positive cognitive and affective orientation toward others' achievements rather than refraining from adopting such an orientation. They err on the side of offering others sincere praise for their achievements as an expression of appreciation of those achievements.

Thankfulness is structurally very similar to praisefulness. It is a tendency to err on the side of giving thanks to others for the valuable things others have done for one, rather than

¹ Here I follow the “orthodox” philosophical approach to sincere speech acts according to which a speech act is sincere just in case it expresses the appropriately related mental state. On this conception, for example, sincere assertion expresses belief, while sincere thanksgiving expresses gratitude. For discussion and references regarding this orthodox conception of sincerity, see (Eriksson 2011).

refraining from giving such thanks. The thankful person would rather give thanks when thanks isn't deserved than refrain from giving thanks when thanks is deserved. They are more tolerant of erring by offering thanks when it isn't due than they are of erring by failing to offer thanks when it is due. The thanks the thankful person tends toward giving they tend toward giving sincerely. There isn't a tendency to feign giving others' thanks for their help, but a tendency to sincerely give thanks. Nor is there a tendency to give others more thanks than their help would merit, but a tendency to err on the side of giving others the thanks their help would merit—if indeed they have given such help. The thankful person therefore tends to err on the side of sincerely giving others thanks commensurate with the benefits they have given, rather than the side of refraining from sincerely giving others thanks commensurate with the benefits they have given.

While thankfulness is structurally similar to praisefulness, it is not the same trait, nor is thankfulness a subordinate species of praisefulness. To recognize and value the excellence of someone's performance in the way characteristic of praisefulness is a different thing from thanking them for the contribution this performance made to one's own well-being. Giving thanks is not just what someone who has benefited from another's excellent performance does when they recognize the excellence of that performance; it is its own distinctive sort of activity. Giving thanks involves adopting an orientation toward another as one's benefactor and not just an orientation toward an achievement of another.

There is a large philosophical literature on gratitude that is directly relevant for informing our conception of thankfulness. Where the attitude expressed by sincere praise for others' accomplishments is appreciation of those accomplishments, the attitude expressed by sincere thanks for the benefits others have given to one is gratitude. According to a growing consensus, such gratitude is understood by philosophers to have a "to-for" structure (see Manela 2015, Section 1). The grateful person is grateful *to* their benefactor *for* the benefit they have received from them. As with appreciation, philosophers generally agree that gratefulness includes both positive cognitive (e.g., Berger 1975, Walker 1980) and positive affective (e.g., Fitzgerald 1998; Bruton 2003) elements. Likewise, I propose that the thankful person tends to err on the side of adopting a stance toward benefactors that includes positive cognitive and positive affective elements—chiefly, the positive cognitive recognition of benefits these benefactors have given them and positive valuing of their benefactors as sources of these benefits. The thankful person would rather offer sincere thanks that expresses such a stance when such a stance is not merited than fail to offer sincere thanks expressing such a stance when such a stance is merited.

Whereas praisefulness and thankfulness so conceived govern how a person approaches certain positive behaviors of others, contrition governs how a person approaches their own negative behaviors. The contrite person errs on the side of apologizing for wrongs done to others. They would rather apologize when an apology is not warranted than fail to apologize when an apology is warranted. They are more tolerant of erring by offering an apology when it is not warranted than they are of erring by failing to offer an apology when it is warranted. The

apologies they tend toward giving are sincere apologies, and apologies commensurate with the wrongs done. Thus, there is a tendency to err on the side of giving sincere apologies commensurate with the wrongs they've done rather than the side of refraining from giving sincere apologies commensurate with the wrongs they've done.

The philosophical literature most relevant to contrition so conceived is the limited literature on apology. As with gratitude, apology has a "to-for" structure; a person apologizes to someone they have wronged for the wrong they've done. Sincere apologies are typically regarded as including both cognitive and affective elements. Radzik and Murphy write that "a well-formed apology requires at least acknowledgement of both the fact of wrongdoing and responsibility by the wrongdoer, as well as an expression of regret or remorse" (2015, Section 3.1). Here the cognitive element is positive while the affective element is negative. Accordingly, I propose that the contrite person errs on the side of adopting a stance toward their wrongdoing that involves a positive cognitive recognition of this wrongdoing as such and a negative affective evaluation of this wrongdoing as such. The contrite person would rather offer a sincere apology expressing such a stance when none is called for than fail to offer such an apology when it is called for.

Let the foregoing suffice for a brief account of the nature of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition. I will concentrate my discussion on these three candidates for character traits that can fulfill the role of justifying commitment to God's existence in cases of roughly counterbalanced evidence regarding God's existence. But, as I have indicated above, there may be other good candidate traits for fulfilling this role as well. For example, we might imagine tendencies to err on the side of seeking the council of those who love one prior to acting, or tendencies to err on the side of sharing one's joys and sorrows with those who love one, or tendencies to trust the promises of those who love one. While I will concentrate on the traits of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition, I invite readers to consider how such other traits might play a similar role in the story of the justification of religious commitment.

My task in the remainder of this section is to illustrate how the possession or pursuit of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition can make a difference to the commitments a person holds, including commitment to God's existence, especially in cases of rough evidential symmetry. Let us begin with a more mundane case. Imagine you are watching the final seconds of a basketball game with a tie score. An offensive player gets the inbounds pass and dribbles down the middle of the lane. They're swarmed by the defence, so much so that you can hardly tell what's happening. The crowd stands to its feet, further obscuring your view. What you are able to see clearly, though, is the ball popping up out of the crowded lane toward the basket, bouncing about, and falling in.

Details about the case could be fleshed out in various ways. Let's suppose, though, that the offensive players had spread the floor and so there was no other offensive player in the lane. And let's stipulate that your ability to see the events was affected in just such a way that your

evidence was exactly counterbalanced regarding whether the player who drove into the lane deserved credit for having made a winning shot. You have exactly as much reason for thinking the player does deserve credit for making a winning shot as for not thinking this.

Our question is whether characterological features of the sort in view in this section might make a difference for your cognitive commitments in this case. Here it is the first character trait of praisefulness that is relevant. Suppose that you have a tendency to err on the side of giving others credit for their accomplishments. You'd prefer to give credit when it isn't deserved than fail to give credit when it is deserved. Since you're otherwise on the fence in this case regarding whether or not credit is deserved, this trait of praisefulness could indeed make a determinative difference for what you do. If you are praiseful, you will tend to offer sincere praise to the player for their having made the winning shot. Moreover, as we saw above, offering sincere praise in this case will require adopting a positive cognitive and affective stance toward the player's achievement. It requires a positive cognitive stance toward the player's deserving credit for having made the winning shot, and a positive evaluative stance toward this achievement as an achievement.²

Now, this isn't yet to have specified the exact nature of the cognitive commitment you must have. And here we may wish to take a liberal attitude—somewhat more liberal than is reflected in the literature on appreciation cited above. Specifically, we may not want to insist that any particular positive cognitive attitude is required for the praise to be sincere, as there may be multiple distinct positive cognitive attitudes that are sufficient. On this point, Daniel Howard-Snyder's (2013; 2019a,b) recent work on propositional faith is relevant and helpful. Howard-Snyder maintains that faith that *p* requires a positive cognitive stance toward *p*, but he demurs from the suggestion that this positive cognitive stance must involve some particular positive cognitive attitude such as belief, instead proposing that any positive cognitive attitude can stand in for belief. Regarding the variety of positive cognitive attitudes that might prove serviceable, he writes:

Notice the plethora of folk psychological terms for positive cognitive stances: 'acceptance,' 'acknowledgement,' 'affirmation,' 'assent,' 'assumption,' 'belief,' 'confidence,' 'conviction,' 'credence,' etc. Although it would be hasty to suppose that each term stands for a different stance, it would be equally hasty to suppose that every term stands for the same stance. Interestingly, many philosophers think some of them stand for different stances. (2013: 361)

Indeed, preceding Howard-Snyder's article, Alston (1996) and Audi (2008) had proposed to distinguish between belief and acceptance. Howard-Snyder himself goes on to distinguish assuming from each of these, and John Schellenberg (2005) has proposed to distinguish assent from all of the above. In accordance with this sort of openness to the plurality of positive

² Some readers may question whether adopting the cognitive commitment here is psychologically possible. I discuss this topic in Section 3 when considering the epistemic justification of such commitments.

cognitive attitudes, we might allow that adopting the positive cognitive stance required by sincere praise needn't require adopting any particular positive cognitive attitude, but rather that it requires adopting some positive cognitive attitude or other. More specifically, it requires adopting a more positive cognitive stance toward the relevant claim than toward its negation. In the basketball case, sincerely praising the player requires adopting a more positive cognitive stance toward the player's deserving credit for having made the winning shot than toward the player's not deserving such credit. It requires, if you will, a cognitive leaning toward the player's deserving credit. You might sincerely praise the player by assuming that they made the shot, or by accepting that they did, or by affirming or assenting to this, rather than by believing it.³ Acting in accordance with the character trait of praisefulness in the basketball case will push you toward adopting some such cognitive commitment toward the player's achievement.

It is notable that the praisefulness tendency needn't be particularly strong to make this difference. We can contrast people who very strongly prefer offering sincere praise when it is not deserved to failing to offer sincere praise when it is deserved, on the one hand, with people who have much more slight preferences of this kind, on the other. The stronger preference is apt to make a difference in cases unlike the present one where the evidence is less friendly toward the player's deserving credit for making the shot. A person who is strongly averse to failing to give praise when it is due may prefer taking on a greater risk in getting it wrong in offering sincere praise, for example praising the player for making the shot when their evidence is not so close to counterbalanced that the player made the shot. A weaker tendency toward praising would not push a person to offer praise in such a case, though it is sufficient to do so in cases approaching, including, or exceeding evidential symmetry.

Structurally similar cases illustrate how even weak varieties of thankfulness and contrition can make a parallel difference for a person's commitments in cases of rough evidential symmetry. A thankful person whose evidence is roughly counterbalanced regarding whether someone else has benefitted them will tend toward sincerely thanking them for the benefit. Perhaps the supposed benefactor was aiming to give the benefit undetected, but couldn't avoid leaving just enough evidence for the beneficiary's evidence to be counterbalanced regarding whether they had given the benefit. Here the thankful person would rather err on the side of offering sincere thanks to the supposed benefactor. Yet, sincerely thanking them requires adopting a positive cognitive orientation toward this other's having benefitted them. So, their thankfulness can here make a difference to which cognitive commitments they take on.

Similarly, the contrite person whose evidence is roughly counterbalanced regarding whether they have wronged another person will tend to sincerely apologize to this other, preferring to sincerely apologize when no apology is necessary than to fail to apologize when an apology is necessary. Here we might imagine that you've been hashing over the details of

³ In partial defense of this idea, consider that describing the basketball case as one of beliefless assuming seems about as coherent as the descriptions of focal cases that Howard-Snyder gives when illustrating and arguing for the phenomenon of beliefless assumption, such as his cases of the defensive captain and the army general (2019b: 9).

whether you have wronged your partner for some time, and you've reached the point that your evidence that you've wronged them is roughly counterbalanced. Acting in accordance with contrition will push you toward offering a sincere apology. Yet in sincerely apologizing you will need to take on a positive cognitive attitude toward your having wronged your partner.

Additionally, we might imagine that even those who possess only weak general preferences in favor of praising, thanking, or apologizing will more strongly prefer praising, thanking, or apologizing when that which is prompting the praise, thanks, or apology is of greater absolute value. For example, a person with a weak general preference for praising may have a stronger preference for praising greater accomplishments than lesser accomplishments. They might, for example, be more strongly disposed to give sincere praise for the game-winning shot than for a shot made in the second quarter. Likewise, a person might have a stronger preference in favor of apologizing if the wrong at issue is more egregious. In this way, tendencies of the kind in view here that are generically weak may alter a person's commitments in cases further away from an evidential symmetry if these are cases where what prompts the praise, thanks, or apology is of sufficient absolute value.

We're now in a position to explain how a person's possession or pursuit of character traits such as praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition could manifest in their adopting or maintaining commitments to God's existence in cases where their evidence is roughly counterbalanced regarding God's existence. For, we must note that a person whose evidence is roughly counterbalanced regarding God's existence is also a person whose evidence is roughly counterbalanced concerning whether God has achieved praiseworthy accomplishments, has benefitted them in ways deserving thanks, and has been wronged by them. For a God of the sort envisioned in the major monotheisms is one who by definition has created the cosmos and ordered it to benefit human beings, all of whom this God loves. If God has created the cosmos and ordered it to benefit human beings, then God deserves praise and thanks from these human beings; and if God loves all human beings then any mature human being will have wronged God if in no other way than by wronging those God loves. Thus, for any mature human being, to have counterbalanced evidence that God exists is to have counterbalanced evidence that God deserves their sincere praise, thanks, and apology.

For a person with roughly counterbalanced evidence that God deserves praise, thanks, and apology, possessing or pursuing the traits of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition can make a determinative difference for their commitments regarding God's existence. For, if they are to act in accordance with these traits in this evidential situation, they will offer sincere praise, thanks, and apology to God. But to offer sincere praise, thanks, and apology to God requires taking a positive cognitive stance toward God's having created and benevolently ordered the world, and toward one's having wronged God. Taking such a positive cognitive stance, moreover, requires taking a positive cognitive stance toward God's existence.

Nor, as we've seen, need the traits of praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition be particularly strong in order to generate this result. Weak preferences for praising, thanking, or offering apology can generate this result in cases of rough evidential symmetry. Yet, in this particular case we might expect the force of these traits to be even greater than in other cases in which they make a difference. For, first, the traits operate in concert here whereas they can operate independently in other cases. For example, whereas only praisefulness pushes you toward committing to the player's having made the shot, all three of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition will push you toward committing to God's existence if your evidence regarding God's existence is roughly counterbalanced. Second, in this particular case, we might imagine that even those with weak general preferences for praising, thanking, or apologizing may have a stronger preference for praising, thanking, or apologizing to God, as that for which praise, thanks, and apology is being offered is arguably of immense absolute value. If God exists, then more or less all that we have and are is creditable to God insofar as it is creditable to anyone, and most any wrong we do also wrongs God. Thus, if a person is more strongly inclined in favor of offering praise, thanks, or apology for that with greater absolute value, they may be particularly inclined toward adopting a positive cognitive stance toward God's existence in a case of rough evidential symmetry.

The case of God is of course a somewhat unique case for the operation of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition, and this should be acknowledged. In this case, a person's evidence for thinking that another person has done something worthy of praise or thanks or has been wronged by them is about as strong as their evidence for thinking this person exists. Insofar as they have evidence for thinking this person, God, exists at all they also have evidence regarding God's praiseworthiness, thankworthiness, and apologyworthiness. This is not typical of our evidential situation with fellow human beings. Typically with our fellow human beings our evidence that they exist is much stronger than our evidence that they are praiseworthy, thankworthy, or apologyworthy. Yet, this difference should not make a difference to the operation of the traits of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition as specified here. What matters for the operation of these traits is just their possessor's evidence regarding whether another person is praiseworthy, thankworthy, or apologyworthy. If a possessor of one of these traits possesses roughly counterbalanced evidence that another person is praiseworthy, thankworthy, or apologyworthy, then these traits may make a difference for whether they offer praise, thanks, or apology. Thus, while the case of God differs from typical cases involving fellow human beings, it does not differ in a way that makes a difference for the operation of praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition.

Moreover, while the God case differs from typical cases involving our fellow human beings, it is worth noting that there are atypical cases involving our fellow human beings that are closer to the God case, which illustrate how praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition may operate in this kind of case. For example, imagine a child attending to a parent on their deathbed. In some such cases, depending upon the child's beliefs about an afterlife, the medical facts about

the parent, and the parent's treatment of the child during their life, the child's evidence for thinking their parent exists may be about as good as their evidence for thinking this parent is praiseworthy, thankworthy, or apologyworthy. Insofar as they have evidence for thinking their parent is still with them, they likewise have evidence for thinking that someone is with them who is praiseworthy, thankworthy, or apologyworthy. If we imagine their evidence for thinking their parent is still with them is roughly counterbalanced, then this is a sort of case, a bit closer to the God case, where the operation of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition can make a determinative difference. Tending to err on the side of offering sincere praise, thanks, or apology may lead the child to adopt a cognitive commitment to their parent's continued existence as part of their offering sincere praise, thanks, or apology to them. Indeed, in some cases these mechanisms may operate long after the death of the parent. They may help to explain the extraordinary commonality of continued communication with the deceased relatives (Steffen and Class 2018).⁴

The aim of the foregoing discussion has been to illustrate how the character traits of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition *can* make a determinative difference for the commitments one holds, including one's commitments to God's existence, in cases of rough evidential symmetry. But it is important to note that these character traits needn't make the sorts of differences cited in every such case. In particular, sometimes there will simply be something more important to do than offer the relevant praise, thanks, or apology. For example, we might imagine in the basketball case that at the moment the shot goes through you receive a phone call notifying you that your child has just been injured and is at the hospital. Given the relative significance of this turn of events and the time-sensitive nature of it, you may quickly exit the stadium without so much as a sincere cheer in order to quickly make your way to the hospital—and this remains the case even if you are a praiseful person. Your praisefulness leads you to err on the side of offering sincere praise rather than refraining from doing so, but only other things being equal; and here other things are not equal.

Similarly, the praiseful person whose evidence regarding God's existence is roughly counterbalanced may not always incessantly give sincere praise, thanks, and apology to God. Sometimes other cares of life may take precedence. Yet it is doubtful that a mature adult human being whose evidence regarding God's existence remains roughly counterbalanced for much of an extended length of time and who is also either in possession or pursuit of praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition during that time will endure very long without these traits leading them to offer sincere praise, thanks, or apology to God. For, first, as we have just noted, the absolute value of that for which praise, thanks, and apology is here offered is very large. And, second, as has been emphasized in recent psychological literature on expressing gratitude and

⁴ We can imagine further cases even closer to the God case. For example, imagine that a late adolescent who has spent most of their life in the foster system has recently discovered ambiguous evidence of the existence of someone who showed them great love and care when they were very young. Their evidence for thinking this person exists may be about as good as their evidence for thinking this person is thankworthy. Thanks to two anonymous referees for pushing me to locate mundane cases more similar to the God case.

appreciation to other human beings, expressing sincere thanks, praise, and apology are relatively low-cost activities (see Kumar and Epley 2018). Not only, then, can the possession or pursuit of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition manifest in a person's adopting positive cognitive commitments to God's existence in cases of rough evidential symmetry, but it is likely to yield this result in the lives of mature human beings whose evidence remains roughly symmetrical for any extended period of time.

In this way, pursuing or possessing pro-relationship character traits such as praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition can manifest in cognitive commitment to God's existence, making a particularly determinative difference in cases of rough evidential symmetry. My task in the remainder of this paper is to address the value of religious commitments held in this way. I begin this task in the next section by defending the moral value of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition.

2. The Moral Value of Praisefulness, Thankfulness, and Contrition

Two central questions animate this paper. One is the question of whether attempting to be a good person can manifest itself in making a determinative difference for whether a person cognitively commits to God's existence. In the previous section we saw that pursuing or possessing the tendencies of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition can make a determinative difference for whether one cognitively commits to God's existence. I now aim to defend the thesis that the tendencies of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition are morally valuable—that they are traits that a person might reasonably aim to cultivate and maintain as part of their pursuit of being good. If they are, then a positive answer to our first animating question follows: a person's commitment to being good may manifest in making a determinative difference for whether they cognitively commit to God's existence.

It is worth starting with the observation that for some readers little argument may be needed for the conclusion that the traits of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition are morally valuable. Some readers may simply, upon understanding the nature of the traits, be inclined to think that possessing them is morally preferable to not possessing them. They might be inclined to judge that these are traits they wished their colleagues had, or that their children will come to possess one day. Such intuitions regarding the value of these traits may be as persuasive as any rational argument could be for leading readers to the conclusion that these traits are morally valuable.

A more demanding argument in favor of the value of these traits that remains in the neighborhood of such intuitions is one that appeals to the recently fashionable thesis of moral exemplarism. According to moral exemplarists such as Linda Zagzebski (2017), the emotion of admiration is a fallible guide to moral value. More specifically, the existence of widespread conscientious admiration for a character trait T is strong evidence that T is a virtue. Thus, if there

is widespread conscientious admiration for praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition and moral exemplarism is true, then these traits are likely virtues. I am in possession of no direct evidence regarding whether there is such widespread admiration, and so I will not concentrate on developing this line of argument further. A psychological study testing the existence of such admiration more directly would be philosophically-informative.

A different approach to defending the value of these traits, which will help us to uncover a deep account of their value, involves attending to other traits that have been regarded as virtues, and arguing that if these latter traits are morally valuable then so are praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition. For example, several philosophers have been attracted to the idea that it is morally excellent to give others a certain kind of benefit of the doubt—to err, we might say, on the side of viewing others more positively or charitably. Susan Wolf, for example, in her classic essay on moral saints, proposes that a moral saint “should try to look for the best in people” and “give them the benefit of the doubt as long as possible” (1982: 422). Similarly, Ryan Preston-Roedder defends the value of a virtue he calls “faith in humanity” at length, where this virtue involves both a cognitive element and a volitional element. Of the cognitive element, he writes that “when someone who has faith in humanity morally evaluates other people’s actions, motives, or characters, she tends to give them the benefit of the doubt.” Moreover, she tends to “believe in people, trust in them, make presumptions in their favor, or see them in a favorable light, morally speaking” (2013: 666). This cognitive element is complemented by a volitional element which requires of the person with faith that it “be important for her, in itself, that [other] people act rightly” (667). Michael Pace likewise writes that “thinking charitably of others, may in fact be a *prima facie* moral obligation regarding evidential standards that one has to everyone. . . Other things being equal, adjusting one’s standards to give people the benefit of the doubt seems to be a moral good that flows from the good of treating others with respect” (2011: 258-9; cf. Roberts and Wood 2007: 73-75, Adams 1987: 155).

In each of these cases, we find a proposal that a tendency to err on the side of viewing others favorably is a central component (or perhaps the whole) of some virtue or other—whether that virtue is the virtue of giving the benefit of the doubt, the virtue of faith, or the virtue of respect. What is important to note for our context is that if any of these traits is indeed a virtue and centrally includes the disposition to err on the side of viewing others favorably, then this provides reason for thinking that the traits of praisefulness and thankfulness are morally valuable. For these traits too are centrally constituted by dispositions to err on the side of viewing others favorably. It is just that these other-favoring dispositions are restricted to particular domains—namely, domains in which it is others’ achievements or acts of beneficence that are up for consideration—and they are accompanied by fitting favorable *evaluative* stances, where not all of the virtues identified above require such evaluative stances in addition to favorable *cognitive* stances. We might say, then, following Daniel Russell (2009: ch.7), that praisefulness and thankfulness as defined here are “unique specifications,” or central components

of unique specifications, of more cardinal virtues such as faith or giving the benefit of the doubt or respect, in much the way that magnificence is a unique specification of generosity.

Moreover, we can locate a plausible deep story about the moral value of not only praisefulness and thankfulness but contrition as well by attending to why it is that these traits involving erring on the side of viewing others favorably are indeed valuable. A key idea appealed to by several authors who have written in favor of giving others the benefit of the doubt in one way or another has been the following. When we err on the side of giving someone the benefit of the doubt, we thereby enhance the expected value of personal relationship goods we will enjoy with this other over what we would enjoy if we instead erred on the side of refraining from giving them the benefit of the doubt. Which particular personal relationship goods are at issue may vary depending upon what sort of favorable views of which others one errs toward. But in any case in which one errs on the side of adopting certain more favorable views of certain others, one will thereby enhance the estimated value of some personal relationship goods with these others. These traits involving giving others the benefit of the doubt are in this way what we might call pro-relationship character traits. They are traits that, to borrow a metaphor from another recent author on faith, involve “leaning in” (Page 2017) toward relationship with others.

Preston-Roedder implicitly relies upon this kind of point in his defense of the value of having faith in humanity. He writes that faith in humanity “partly constitutes a certain morally important relation, namely, a kind of harmony or solidarity, between the virtuous person and other members of the moral community” (2013: 676). “Having faith in people’s decency,” he continues, “despite reasons for doubt, is a way of standing by them.” By putting her faith in others, the faithful person “ties her own flourishing, in certain respects, to the quality of these people’s characters and actions” (683). This tying of one’s flourishing to others is a significant personal relationship good, and it is one that is promoted in greater measure when one errs on the side of adopting the positive cognitive and volitional stances toward others that Preston-Roedder has in view than when one errs on the side of not adopting such stances. Having faith in humanity, Preston-Roedder emphasizes, is one way in which “a morally virtuous person escapes her solitude and enters into [a valuable] form of community” (684).

A similar instance of this pattern of argument can be found in the growing literature on epistemic partiality in friendship (see, e.g., Stroud 2006, Keller 2004). The driving thought behind the central problem in this literature is the thought that the value of a maintained friendship is better advanced by erring on the side of viewing one’s friends favorably than by not doing so. Writing about cases in which one friend, S, tells another, A, that p, thereby inviting A to trust S, Goldberg says that “A risks jeopardizing the friendship in any case in which it is true *both* that S is worthy of A’s trust *and* that A fails to trust S.” By contrast “the case in which S is not worthy of A’s trust but A trusts anyway is not one in which A damages the friendship” (forthcoming: 8). Other things being equal, it will follow from this observation that erring on the side of trusting rather than not trusting one’s friends better promotes a maintained friendship

with them, and it is this fact which has seemed to some authors to provide moral reason for friends to err on the side of trusting one another—even if this involves epistemic irrationality.

I propose here a similar deep defense of the moral value of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition. By erring on the side of giving others credit commensurate with their achievements, thanks commensurate with the benefits they have given us, and apologies commensurate with wrongs we have done to them, we enhance the expected value of personal relationship goods with these others over what we would achieve if we erred on the side of refraining from praising, thanking, or apologizing to them. For, just as in trusting a trustworthy friend one cultivates this friendship but in trusting an untrustworthy friend one does not comparably harm the friendship, likewise in praising a praiseworthy person and thanking a thankworthy person and apologizing to one's victims one cultivates significant personal relationship goods but in praising an unpraiseworthy person and thanking an unthankworthy person or apologizing to someone one has not wronged one does not comparably damage these personal relationship goods. Similarly, just as one does greater harm to a friendship by failing to trust a trustworthy friend than by trusting an untrustworthy friend, likewise one does more harm to a relationship by failing to praise, thank, or apologize to one who deserves it than by offering praise, thanks, or apology to one who doesn't deserve it. To put the point slightly differently, accurate praise, thanks, and apology is more likely to build up a relationship than is accurate refraining from these, and misplaced praise, thanks, and apology is less likely to damage a relationship than is their misplaced absence—particularly where evidence regarding whether these are warranted is roughly symmetrical. Erring on the side of praising, thanking, and apologizing therefore enhances the expected value of personal relationship goods. And as such there is available a powerful defense of the moral value of being a praiseful, thankful, contrite person that parallels existing defenses of various ways of giving others the benefit of the doubt.

At this point it will be helpful to stress the significant value of the personal relationship goods promoted by praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition. The importance of personal relationship goods for human well-being is stressed in growing bodies of both philosophical and psychological literature. In philosophy, several growing strands of research in recent decades have focused on personal relationship goods, including research in care ethics and research on associative duties. Where relationship goods in general are conceived as “those goods of constitutive (as well as, often, instrumental) value that accrue to individuals in virtue of them being in relationships with other people,” personal relationship goods are such goods that “accrue to individuals in virtue of them being in relationships that involve some kind of direct, personalized interaction” (Gheaus 2018: Sect. 1). Examples include “companionship, affection, intimacy, attachment, love, friendship, empathy, social respect, solidarity, trust . . . attention, sympathy, encouragement, [and] acceptance” (ibid) among others. Philosophers have been in broad agreement that such goods “generate weighty *reasons* for action” (ibid) and “represent a significant and non-substitutable component of individuals' well-being, are a significant kind of

personal resource as well as a major determinant of individuals' opportunities" (ibid, Introduction).

It is commonly affirmed that these personal relationship goods are non-instrumentally valuable (e.g., Seglow 2013) and are constitutive of good lives (e.g., Lynch et al 2009). They are, in addition, indispensable to subjective life satisfaction (Vaillant 2012), and are instrumentally valuable as sources of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (Honneth 1995), as well as even mental, emotional, and physical health (Brownlee 2016). The value of having at least some minimal level of such goods is dramatically illustrated by the devastation which ensues when people are bereft of such goods for extended periods. Brownlee argues that there is a right against social deprivation on the basis that chronic lack of adequate social contact "generates the same threat response as pain, thirst, hunger, or fear by setting off a chain of anxiety-inducing physiological reactions known as the 'fight or flight' response" (2013: 211). She writes, further, that "when we are deprived of adequate social connections . . . we tend to break down mentally, emotionally, and physically" (2016: 55). The value of personal relationship goods is such that justice in the distribution of these resources has recently become a major topic of philosophical debate, with several philosophers defending the existence of various rights to personal relationship goods such as adequate social contact or even love (Liao 2015), and others defending the existence of duties to cultivate personal relationship goods such as friendship (Collins 2013).

Recent psychological literature, some of which is relied upon in the philosophical research just surveyed, also provides confirmation of both the value of personal relationship goods and the way in which a concern for these goods unifies the dispositions of gratitude, appreciation, and apology. Even two decades ago at a time when it was relatively unfashionable for psychologists to argue in favor of the existence of basic psychological needs, Baumeister and Leary (1995) nonetheless found the evidence in favor of a basic need to belong so widespread and powerful that they published a seminal article on the topic. Now the need to belong, or for belongingness, is commonly recognized in psychological research. The need to belong is a "pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" in which "frequent, affectively pleasant interactions" take place in a context of a "temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare" (497). Given the existence of such a need, it is hypothesized and confirmed that "real, potential, or imagined changes in one's belongingness status will produce emotional responses, with positive affect linked to increases in belongingness and negative affect linked to decreases in it". Moreover, as reflected above in recent philosophical literature, the absence of adequate relationships will be detrimental toward mental, emotional, and physical health while their presence will predict such health as well as life satisfaction. While not every person will be equally motivated to cultivate a positive personal relationship with every other person, "rejecting social attachment goes against some deeply rooted aspect of human nature" (520), and when one experiences such rejection, "as in unrequited love, the result is typically distress and

disappointment” (505). Personal relationship goods are here seen to serve an indispensable role in fulfilling a basic psychological need.

Moreover, there is evidence that tendencies to give thanks (i.e., gratitude), credit (i.e., appreciation), and apology (i.e., disposition to apologize) are closely interrelated aspects of a unified character distinctly sensitive to these personal relationship goods. These constructs are themselves significantly correlated; existing evidence suggests that they tend to come as a package deal. The psychological literature has in fact at some points blended research on gratitude and appreciation together (Wood et al 2008), while gratitude has also been found to be positively correlated with humility (Uher, Watkins, and Hammamoto 2010), to which the disposition to apologize is closely related. All three of appreciation (Martinez-Marti, Hernandez-Lloreda, and Avia 2016), gratitude (McComb, Watkins, and Kolts 2004), and the disposition to apologize (Howell et al 2011) are correlated with the basic personality construct of agreeableness. Indeed, the turn of psychological attention to these facets of personality is likely representative of a broader development within positive psychology that confirms the unifying elements of these traits. Regarding the rapid growth of psychological research on humility, Worthington, Davis and Hook (2017) write that “a number of researchers appear to have realized the limitation of focusing on individualistic virtues without also attending to the quality of social bonds that tie us together in relationships and communities” (16). Accordingly, there has been a dramatic “increase in [attention given to] other-oriented rather than self-focused virtues” (ibid) in recent psychological research. Traits such as dispositional appreciation, dispositional gratitude, and the disposition to apologize are plausibly united in being other-oriented in the sense that they each promote personal relationship goods that fulfill basic psychological needs. In a similar way, we may see praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition as part of a unified character, distinctively concerned with personal relationship goods, that may reasonably be viewed by aspirants as desirable.

Let me conclude this section by briefly restating the basic case here offered in favor of the moral value of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition. These traits, I have proposed, are attractively viewed as unique specifications (or central components thereof) of more cardinal virtues such as faith, giving the benefit of the doubt, or respect (as in the case of praisefulness and thankfulness) or humility (as in the case of contrition). Insofar as these latter traits are morally valuable, so are the former. Moreover, a deep defense of their value is available that parallels the deep defense of the value of these latter traits: namely, their possession promotes extremely valuable personal relationship goods better than its absence, and thereby enhances human well-being. To err on the side of praising, thanking, and apologizing is to err on the side of promoting valuable personal relationship goods. These dispositions to err on the side of personal relationship goods are likely only part of the story of a virtuously other-oriented character that is increasingly attracting the attention of psychologists. As such, it may indeed be reasonable to seek to cultivate and maintain them as part of one’s project of aiming to be a good person. And since acting in accordance with these traits can, as argued in Section 1, manifest in

making a determinative difference in favor of committing to God's existence, we have a positive answer to our first animating question. Committing oneself to God's existence can be a manifestation of one's reasonable pursuit of being a good person. Aiming to be good can lead one to commit to God.

3. The Justification of Committing to God's Existence out of Praisefulness, Thankfulness, or Contrition

The second animating question of this paper focuses on the justificatory status of cognitive commitments to God's existence that arise out of the pursuit or possession and exercise of morally valuable traits such as praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition. The question is whether commitments that arise in this way are morally, epistemically, or all-things-considered justified. In this section, I discuss the moral justification, all-things-considered justification, and epistemic justification of such commitments in turn, identifying reasons for thinking that all three forms of justification may indeed be present in cases of rough evidential symmetry. That is, in those cases which, according to Section 1, are cases where the pursuit of being good is likely to make the most determinative difference in favor of committing to God, there is also reason to think that it will do so in a way the results in commitments to God that are morally, epistemically, and all-things-considered justified.

The moral justification of the relevant commitments is the easiest case. Whether the relevant commitments are morally justified will co-vary with whether the balance of moral reason favors adopting them. We saw in the previous section that there are significant moral reasons for adopting the commitments. Adopting a commitment to God's existence in a case of rough evidential symmetry regarding God's existence is valuable as a manifestation of the pursuit or possession of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition. For the possession and exercise of these traits is itself morally valuable. So there is moral reason for a person whose evidence regarding God's existence is roughly symmetric to adopt such commitments out of aiming to acquire or maintain such traits. The only way in which the balance of moral reason would not then favor such a person's adopting these commitments is if the person in question also had comparably strong moral reasons to *not* adopt these commitments. Yet, such reasons are not easy to come by.

We did note in Section 1 that even a praiseful, thankful, and contrite person whose evidence regarding God's existence is roughly symmetric or better may at times fail to give praise, thanks, and apology to God, because they may be preoccupied with more important matters. Yet we noted there also that this state of affairs is unlikely to persist very long in the life of a mature adult whose evidence regarding God's existence remains roughly symmetric, given the likely strength of the disposition in favor of giving praise, thanks, and apology in this particular case and given the relatively low cost of these activities. Similarly, it seems unlikely

that a person with roughly symmetric evidence regarding God's existence will possess moral reasons against giving praise, thanks, and apology to God that outweigh their reasons for doing so that persist for very long.

The best hope for identifying outweighing moral reasons against offering praise, thanks, or apology to God in such a case rests with finding something inherently morally problematic with erring on the side of offering praise, thanks or apology in general, or with doing so in this particular case. However the prospects for identifying such reasons are not very appealing. One somewhat tempting proposal for a reason against tending to err on the side of praising, thanking, or apologizing in general appeals to the idea of norms of assertion.⁵ Numerous authors have proposed that assertions are governed by norms such as the knowledge norm (assert only what you know), the belief norm (assert only what you believe), or the justification norm (assert only what you have justifying reason to believe). One might worry that the person who offers sincere praise, thanks, or apology under circumstances of rough evidential symmetry will violate these norms, thereby providing a moral reason against doing this. However, while this idea may be somewhat tempting initially, it is plausible that the kinds of cases we have in mind in this paper are not ones in which the praising, thanking, or apologizing engaged in amounts to an act of assertion. Assertions have typically been identified by philosophers in terms of their communicative intentions, especially the intention of bringing it about that others believe what is asserted or the intention of supplying others with evidence for target propositions of inquiry (see Pagin 2014, Sect. 3.1 for an overview). But the praising, thanking, and apologizing that is in view in this paper is not engaged in out of an effort to guide collective deliberation about whether that for which praise, thanks, or apology is offered in fact occurred. It is instead offered as a response based on the assumption or assent or belief, etc., that this did occur. It is done after inquiry, so to speak, rather than as part of it.

Or one might propose that there are particular moral reasons that favor erring on the side of skepticism regarding God's existence. An especially interesting case of this kind, given the structure of this paper, would be a proposal according to which erring on the side of skepticism regarding God's existence is just a manifestation of the pursuit of good moral character. In this vein, one might argue that if one errs on the side of thinking that no one else will act to help others, this may lead one to take more initiative in helping others. This sort of trait might attenuate the effects of the bystander effect, for instance. But, we might think it would also lead one toward skepticism regarding God's existence. Erring on the side of thinking that no one else will act to help others will lead one to err on the side of thinking God will not act.⁶ In response, I would propose that assuming that God will not act to help others (in the relevant way) is not inconsistent with thinking that God exists. This sort of tendency might lead to a certain kind of (perhaps healthy) skepticism about special divine intervention, but it needn't lead to a general skepticism about God's existence.

⁵ Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this possibility.

⁶ Thanks to another anonymous referee for suggesting this possibility.

I of course can't hope to rule out each and every possible countervalue that might tell against erring on the side of offering sincere praise, thanks, or apology to God. I must rest content with suggesting that finding a countervalue that plays the role needed here appears to be no easy task. In further support of this conclusion, it is illuminating to consider that in parallel discussions of the moral value of erring on the side of trusting or believing one's friends, it is difficult to find philosophers arguing that there are *moral* reasons against such erring. Instead, it is argued at most that there may be epistemic reasons against such erring (see Faulkner 2018 for a recent overview). The same seems the most likely outcome in this case: if there is something problematic about erring on the side of giving praise, thanks, and apology to God it isn't something morally problematic but something epistemically problematic. Thus, if we treat moral and epistemic reasons separately, there is reason to presume that commitments to God's existence that arise out of the pursuit or possession and exercise of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition in cases of evidential symmetry will typically be morally justified.

The possibility to which we have just alluded regarding a potential conflict between moral reasons and epistemic reasons leads us directly into the territory of considering the all-things-considered justification of the relevant commitments. If we suppose that the balance of moral reasons typically supports adopting such commitments but allow that non-moral reasons may on balance favor not adopting such commitments, then we may wonder what—if anything—we are to conclude about whether adopting such commitments is all-things-considered justified. Here I will assume that there is such a thing as all-things-considered justification⁷, and I will identify reasons for thinking that if moral and non-moral reasons conflict in this case, with moral reasons favoring commitment to God's existence, then committing to God's existence will be all-things-considered justified.

One prominent and appealing strategy available here is to appeal to the nature of moral reasons, *qua* moral, as trumping or outweighing non-moral reasons. Preston-Roedder appeals to this sort of strategy in his defense of the all-things-considered value of behaving in accordance with faith in humanity. He is willing to grant the possibility of some conflict between faith and epistemic rationality, writing that in some cases “someone who has faith can, without any failure of [this] virtue, form beliefs about people . . . that are to some degree irrational, given the evidence” (2013: 685-6). Yet, he continues, “unless we assume that the moral importance of epistemic rationality is implausibly great, or the importance of [the moral aims of faith] implausibly slight, we should conclude that a virtuous person may sacrifice some degree of epistemic rationality, in certain respects and in certain cases, in her pursuit of these other aims” (687). Preston-Roedder concludes that having faith is constitutive of a “practical ideal, concerned with the sort of life one should live” (686). Epistemically disvaluable features of faith can only prevent faith from contributing to this all-things-considered ideal, according to Preston-Roedder, if they are of comparable moral importance to the moral values toward which such faith is conducive. Similarly, in the literature on epistemic partiality in friendship, it has been maintained

⁷ For an influential account of the nature of all-things-considered justification, see (Chang 2004).

that if there is conflict between the norms of friendship and the norms of rationality, it is the norms of rationality that must give way, as the epistemic values in play are not of comparable moral importance to friendship (cf. Stroud 2006).

This same strategy applies straightforwardly to our focal case. The moral values better secured by erring on the side of giving praise, thanks, and apology to God outweigh epistemic values that might be better secured by not so erring. The enhanced expected value of personal relationship goods better secured through such erring is all-things-considered more important than the enhanced epistemic value one might expect to secure through not so erring. As such, if we suppose that committing to God's existence in cases of rough evidential symmetry out of an aim to acquire or exercise praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition is morally justified, we likewise have reason to think doing so is all-things-considered justified.

It is worth pausing to note here something else about praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition that parallels Preston-Roedder's remarks about faith. Having faith, he writes, "does not typically dispose one to make irrational judgments" (2013: 685). This is because in the great majority of evidential contexts, a slight disposition to err on the side of viewing others favorably will not make a determinative difference for which cognitive attitudes a person adopts; instead, it is only in particularly contexts of roughly symmetrical evidence that it will. Thus, "concerns about the irrationality of faith in humanity apply to a narrower range of cases than they initially appear to" (ibid). Likewise, praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition will not typically lead one to adopt epistemically irrational attitudes. The kind of case in which they are apt to do so is the kind of case on which we are focusing in this paper—a case in which a person's evidence regarding the fittingness of praise, thanks, or apology is roughly symmetric. Here, and only here, are we to expect that these dispositions will typically lead one to adopt epistemically irrational commitments. This point should help us to see that any epistemic values that are sacrificed via the attempt to acquire or retain praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition are relatively slight.

While I think that the foregoing defense of the all-things-considered justification of the target commitments to God's existence is forceful—just as forceful as parallel defenses of faith and epistemic partiality in friendship—it is worth noting that the defense makes an unnecessarily strong assumption. For, in order to maintain a defense of the all-things-considered justification of giving praise, thanks, or apology in the relevant cases it isn't necessary to insist as suggested above that moral values, *qua* moral values, trump just any non-moral values. It isn't necessary to insist that non-moral values can never trump moral values. It is only necessary that the moral values at issue in this particular case trump the non-moral values at issue in this case. And it is indeed plausible that this is true regarding the epistemic values at issue in this case given what we have seen regarding the relative insignificance of the epistemic values that are sacrificed as compared with the relative significance of the moral value of personal relationship goods. So long as any epistemic values sacrificed by erring on the side of praising, thanking, or apologizing to God in these cases are not as all-things-considered important as the moral values better

attained through this erring, the status of this erring as all-things-considered justified will not be impugned by these sacrificed epistemic values.

A similar approach is appealing when we consider other non-moral values that might be sacrificed in this case. One example of such a non-moral value is proposed by Susan Wolf (1982). Despite her affirmation that a moral saint will err on the side of giving others the benefit of the doubt, she suggests that this moral excellence may conflict with the non-moral excellence of a certain kind of humorous personality. “A cynical or sarcastic wit,” she writes, “or a sense of humor that appreciates this kind of wit in others, requires that one take an attitude of resignation and pessimism toward the flaws and vices to be found in the world” (422)—and a tendency to adopt such an attitude is in “substantial tension” (421) with the disposition to give the benefit of the doubt. To put it slightly differently, a tendency to err on the side of viewing others positively, while perhaps morally virtuous, may prevent one from just as quickly identifying more negative interpretations of others in a way characteristic of non-morally excellent cynicism.

Now, one might attempt to challenge Wolf’s idea that excellence in cynicism or sarcasm requires a tendency to adopt attitudes of pessimism or resignation, thereby conflicting with giving the benefit of the doubt. As it happens, existing psychological evidence does not support the claim that people who exhibit the sort of humor Wolf seems to have in mind—called “aggressive humor” by psychologists—are more depressive or pessimistic than people who do not excel in this sort of humor (Martin 2006: ch.7). Moreover we might, a priori, think that having a cynical or sarcastic wit needn’t require that one tend to err on the side of *adopting* more negative views of others (or oneself), but only that it requires an aptitude for identifying such views and an appreciation of them. We might imagine, for example, that a person who is simply very quick to see all angles on a performance might be prepared to engage in excellent sarcasm, even if they also err on the side of adopting more positive evaluations of these performances.

Still, let us suppose that there is conflict between tending to give the benefit of the doubt and excellent cynicism/sarcasm. Much as in the case of apparently conflicting epistemic values, here too we might judge that the non-moral cynicism-relevant value lost by erring on the side of giving others the benefit of the doubt isn’t of comparable all-things-considered importance to the moral value to be gained by erring in this way. It may be that there is little to say in defense of this judgment other than to appeal to readers’ intuition—a fact Wolf herself seems to acknowledge insofar as she opts for a kind of intuitionism regarding when moral or non-moral values win out. Still, recent psychological research on aggressive humor again may prove illuminating in this case. This research has found that “Greater use of aggressive humor is related to more frequent negative interactions with others, less giving and receiving of empathy, reduced ability to manage conflict and provide empathy in social relationships, and lower satisfaction with dating relationships and friendships, both for oneself and one’s partner” (Martin 2006: 303). In other words, just as we might suspect if it is in tension with orientations that tend to promote personal relationship goods, aggressive humor tends toward the destruction of personal relationship goods. Now this of course isn’t to say that such humor doesn’t have any (non-moral)

value. But, given the importance of personal relationship goods for human well-being as highlighted above, it may indeed seem more reasonable to judge that this cynicism-relevant value is not worth its price all-things-considered. More generally, the all-things-considered justification of committing to God's existence out of the aim to acquire or exemplify praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition can be forcefully defended on the basis of the plausibly superior all-things-considered importance of personal relationship goods over non-moral goods that might be sacrificed by adopting these commitments.

I turn finally to the epistemic justification of commitments to God's existence held as a manifestation of one's pursuit or possession of praisefulness, thankfulness, and contrition. While in discussing the all-things-considered justification of these commitments, I allowed for the sake of argument that these commitments may be irrational and so epistemically unjustified, I now wish to bring this claim into question. There are two broad strategies that can be used for this purpose.

The first strategy involves leaning heavily on the suggestion put forward in Section 1 that the kinds of cognitive commitments necessary for offering sincere praise, thanks, or apology may be quite varied and may be weaker than commitments such as outright belief that are typically taken to be subject to stronger standards for epistemic justification. If the suggestion offered there is correct, and sincere praise, thanks, and apology can be given when the subject only assumes or assents or accepts, etc., that something praiseworthy, thankworthy, or apologyworthy has occurred, then this provides one way for resisting the conclusion that offering such praise, thanks, or apology involves adopting epistemically unjustified cognitive attitudes. For in this case it is plausible that the cognitive attitudes such praise, thanks, or apology involve adopting are either not subject to epistemic standards at all or are subject to much weaker epistemic standards than outright belief or other stronger cognitive attitudes. Whereas it may be more tempting to judge that adopting the latter cognitive attitudes is epistemically unjustified in the target cases of praising, thanking, or apologizing to God, it is less tempting to judge that adopting the former cognitive attitudes would be.⁸

Still, I only offered these comments about the plurality of positive cognitive attitudes that may suffice for giving sincere praise, thanks, or apology as a suggestion and I do not want to insist on it. So, let us assume here that offering sincere praise, thanks, or apology in our target cases involves adopting cognitive attitudes of a sort that are subject to the kinds of epistemic standards typically thought to apply to belief. There remains a strategy that can be used to resist the conclusion that offering such praise involves adopting epistemically unjustified cognitive attitudes. For, there are three recent approaches to thinking about epistemic justification that would each make room for allowing that the commitments in question would not be epistemically unjustified.

⁸ Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to highlight this strategy.

The first of these approaches has been developed by Susanna Rinard (2017, forthcoming). Rinard defends a view she calls “Equal Treatment” for belief. On this view, there is no special guidance-giving normativity that applies only to beliefs; questions about what one should believe or is permitted to believe are to be answered in the same way as questions about what one should do or is permitted to do more generally. As a consequence, if having a belief is all-things-considered justified, it cannot be unjustified according to some standard of justification that applies only to beliefs. The implication for our focal case is straightforward: if believing that God exists in our focal case is all-things-considered justified, then it cannot be *epistemically* unjustified—it cannot be justified according to some standard of justification that applies only to beliefs.

It is instructive to note the kind of case which plays a central role in Rinard’s defense of Equal Treatment. She asks us to imagine a case in which taking a pill will cause you to have a certain belief you would not otherwise have without taking the pill, and you know this. Moreover, as the case is described it is supposed to be one in which you all-things-considered should take the pill, but your all-things-considered reasons favor this only slightly. Denying Equal Treatment and maintaining that there is a special guidance-giving normativity that applies only to beliefs allows it to be the case that you should not hold the belief that is caused by taking the pill, despite it being the case that you should take the pill. For there could be distinctively epistemic reasons against holding the belief that do not apply to taking the pill, and which are such that they are sufficient to shift the balance of all-things-considered reasons pertaining to holding the belief but not to taking the pill. Rinard finds this consequence implausible because it violates the principle of agglomeration: that if you should x and you should y then you should (x and y). Denying Equal Treatment violates this principle because it allows that you should take the pill and should not hold the belief, whereas surely it is not the case that you should (take the pill and not hold the belief), as the latter is not an option for you.

Our own focal case significantly parallels this example of the belief-inducing pill. Let us suppose, as argued above, that offering praise, thanks, or apology to God is all-things-considered justified. If we suppose that there is a guidance-governing normativity distinctive to belief, then it could be that while offering praise, thanks, and apology is justified, believing that God has done something warranting praise or thanks or believing that one has wronged God is not all-things-considered justified. This possibility runs afoul of agglomeration, if we suppose that you cannot offer praise, thanks, or apology to God without holding such beliefs. Thus, if we, with Rinard, are unwilling to give up agglomeration, we have a way of resisting the conclusion that offering sincere praise, thanks, or apology to God in our focal cases involves adopting epistemically unjustified beliefs.

Two other approaches to epistemic justification maintain that there is a distinctive guidance-governing normativity that applies only to cognitive attitudes such as belief, but allow that cognitively committing to God’s existence in our focal case may be epistemically justified. The first of these is a moral encroachment approach to epistemic justification. On such a view,

moral reasons for or against adopting a cognitive attitude can affect the level of evidential support needed in order for that attitude to be epistemically justified. Moral encroachment is in this way a species of the broader and more well-known thesis of pragmatic encroachment, which allows that pragmatic facts about cognitive attitudes can make a difference for the epistemic status of those attitudes (see Kim and McGrath 2018).

Not just any version of moral encroachment will allow us to maintain that in our focal case cognitively committing to God's existence is epistemically justified. In fact, pragmatic encroachment views generally have tended to maintain that pragmatic factors can only raise the level of evidential support needed for a positive cognitive attitude to be justified. Yet what is needed in our focal case is a view according to which moral reasons for holding an attitude can lower the level of support needed for that attitude to be epistemically justified. For, presumably, absent such moral reasons, if a person's evidence is roughly symmetric in that it supports a claim *p* at most just as much as it supports not-*p*, then adopting a strong positive cognitive attitude such as belief toward *p* will not be epistemically justified. What is needed, then, is a version of moral encroachment where moral reasons in favor of adopting a positive cognitive commitment toward *p* can make adopting such a commitment epistemically justified despite evidence for *p* otherwise being roughly symmetric.

Michael Pace (2011) has recently defended a version of moral encroachment that comes close to offering what is needed. Crucially, on Pace's view, the fact that greater moral value is attainable via belief than via its absence can lower the evidential standards necessary for belief to be epistemically justified. As he puts it, "When there are significant positive benefits to be gained by having a true belief and relatively little practical cost of error, the evidential standards sufficient for justification dip below what they would be in contexts in which nothing much is at stake" (257). Yet, Pace stops just short of offering what is needed, because he stipulates that in order for belief that *p* to be justified, one's evidence must make *p* at least more likely than not. It is only in cases where one's evidence for *p* already makes *p* more likely than not that moral considerations can kick in to make a difference for how strongly this evidence must support *p* in order for believing *p* to be epistemically justified.

Pace claims that there are principled reasons for imposing this "more likely than not" requirement. First, he worries that "when one recognizes that one's evidence does not make a proposition more likely than not, to believe on the basis of pragmatic reasoning . . . may be psychologically impossible" (252). Second, he worries that even if not psychologically impossible, believing on the basis of such reasoning "may require deceiving oneself about the quality of one's evidence" (ibid). These claims, however, are quite contentious⁹, and they seem all the more contentious given Pace's own approach to thinking about moral encroachment. On Pace's approach, the best way to understand how moral encroachment works is that moral factors affect one's "evidential standards" (254) for the extent to which evidence must support a

⁹ For a review of recent debate which assesses it as largely standing at an impasse, see (Rinard 2018).

claim *p* in order for belief that *p* to be epistemically justified. Pragmatic factors matter, in other words, for whether the extent to which a claim is supported by evidence is *adequate* for belief (cf. here Schoenfield 2014). Yet, there doesn't seem to be anything self-deceptive involved in a person recognizing that their evidence only supports a claim *p* just as much as its denial, and yet reflectively taking this degree of support as adequate for believing *p* given the moral gains to be had through such belief. Nor, indeed, does there appear to be anything psychologically impossible about a person who judges their evidence's support for *p* to be adequate in this way adopting the belief that *p* (cf. Comesaña 2015). A moral encroachment view like Pace's but without its "more likely than not" requirement therefore seems not much less well-motivated than Pace's own stated view.

If such a moral encroachment view is correct, then it will support the judgment that our target commitments to God's existence may be epistemically justified, rather than epistemically unjustified. Since the moral value to be gained via these commitments is significantly greater than that to be gained by their absence, the standards for the degree of evidential support necessary for these commitments to be adequately supported may be lowered—even lowered to the point that the evidence needn't make God's existence more likely than not. A person might self-reflectively assess their evidence regarding God's existence as being roughly counterbalanced, and yet take this level of evidential support to be adequate for cognitively committing to God's having achieved great feats, God's having benefitted them in important ways, and their owing God apology for their wrongdoing. On the present moral encroachment view, these commitments would be epistemically justified.

One final view about epistemic justification differs from the previous moral encroachment view in that it will not straightforwardly support the view that committing to God's existence in our focal cases is epistemically justified while not doing so is not. Instead, this view more straightforwardly allows that committing to God's existence and not doing so may each be epistemically permissible options. The view in question is typically called "epistemic optionalism" or "epistemic permissivism".¹⁰

In recent literature, epistemic permissivism is defined by reference to the thesis it must deny—namely, the uniqueness thesis. This thesis holds, roughly, that there is at most one unique justified attitude for a person to take toward any proposition given any body of evidence. Denials of this thesis can come in various forms and as such can be more or less permissive. For example, one version of permissivism might hold that multiple distinct credences in a proposition *p* can each be justified given the same body of evidence as long as these credences fall within a certain narrow range. Another might hold that cognitive attitudes that are further apart, such as confident belief and confident disbelief, can each be justified given the same body of evidence.

¹⁰ For a recent overview of permissivism in epistemology, see (Kopec and Titelbaum 2016).

Just as we needed a certain version of moral encroachment in order to defend the justification of our target commitments to God's existence, we will need a certain version of permissivism to do this. One important requirement is that the version allows for cases in which it is epistemically permissible (and so justified) for a person to take a positive cognitive attitude toward a proposition *p* despite the fact that her evidence regarding *p* is at most symmetric. Presumably, in such cases, the view in question would allow that both neutral and positive, or negative, neutral, and positive cognitive attitudes are all permissible.

Not all versions of permissivism will meet this requirement, but some will. A common but not universal idea that motivates permissivist views is the Jamesian idea that there are two cognitive goals that are in tension with one another: namely, believing the truth (or, more broadly, adopting positive cognitive attitudes toward true claims) and avoiding false belief (or, more broadly, avoiding adopting positive cognitive attitudes toward untrue claims). Because the goals are in tension, how one weighs the goals can make a difference for which attitudes one adopts. As Kelly (2014) expresses the idea, "the more weight one gives to not believing something false, the more it makes sense to hold out until there is a great deal of evidence that *p* is true before taking up the belief that *p*. On the other hand, the more one values not missing out on believing the truth, the more it makes sense to take a somewhat more liberal attitude about how much evidence one expects before taking up the relevant belief" (104). Similar things are true for adopting more subtle positive or negative cognitive attitudes—a point Kelly in fact emphasizes.

Wayne Riggs (2008) likewise notes that epistemic risk is ineliminable: "every single instance of belief or withholding represents an *epistemic risk* of one kind or another" (2)—either we risk failing to take positive cognitive attitudes toward true claims or we risk taking positive cognitive attitudes toward false claims. How these risks are managed, Riggs suggests, is largely down to individual personality. "Our proclivities to act or believe in certain ways," he writes, "tend to embody the values that we have, and the strengths with which we have them" (5). The more we value having positive cognitive attitudes toward true claims in a domain, the more we'll risk adopting positive cognitive attitudes toward false claims in this domain. It coheres well with permissivist views of this sort to affirm that where a person's evidence regarding *p* is roughly symmetric, it may be epistemically permissible both for them to adopt a positive cognitive attitude toward *p*, or a neutral cognitive attitude toward *p*, or a negative attitude toward *p*, depending in significant part on the extent to which they prefer to err on the side of gaining truth or to err on the side of avoiding error.

Permissivist views of this sort apply straightforwardly to our focal case. In this case, we have a person whose character is such that they prefer erring on the side of giving praise, thanks, or apology; or at least they aim for their character to be this way. As such, they value adopting positive cognitive attitudes regarding the appropriateness of such praise, thanks, or apology when these attitudes are warranted more highly than they value not adopting these attitudes when they are not warranted. They would rather risk error in the matters of giving praise, thanks, or apology

for the sake of gaining truth in these matters. As such, their personality is ripe to make a difference for which cognitive attitudes they adopt in the way suggested by Riggs. It will incline them to take positive cognitive attitudes that they might not otherwise have taken. Moreover, and importantly for our purposes here, the attitudes they in this way adopt will be epistemically permissible on the versions of permissivism here in view.

We have now surveyed three views about epistemic justification that render defensible the judgment that the target cognitive commitments to God's existence are not epistemically unjustified. To the extent that a disjunction of these views is preferable to its denial, we have reason to think that the target cognitive commitments in view in this paper not only have moral and all-things-considered justification, but they do not lack epistemic justification. Indeed, on two of the views surveyed, these commitments will possess epistemic justification.

Moreover, it bears emphasizing here that the two strategies outlined above for resisting the epistemic irrationality of offering praise, thanks, or apology in our focal cases are not mutually exclusive. The views of epistemic justification surveyed toward the end of this section may be even more plausible when applied to cognitive attitudes weaker than belief, such as acceptance, assumption, or assent. In this way, the strategies for resisting the epistemic irrationality of offering sincere praise, thanks, or apology in our focal cases may work in tandem.

It may be that neither of these two strategies, nor even their combination, convinces readers that it is more likely than not that the target cognitive commitments would not be epistemically unjustified. Still, it bears observing that whatever likelihood there is for thinking that these commitments would not be epistemically unjustified is relevant for computing the all-things-considered justification of our target cognitive commitments. For in computing this all-things-considered justification we must rely on an assessment of the expected epistemic disvalue of these commitments. Whatever positive likelihood there is that these commitments are not epistemically unjustified will lower this expected disvalue somewhat. In this way, even if the availability of the views surveyed here does not convince readers that our target cognitive commitments to God's existence are not epistemically unjustified, it may bolster the case given above for concluding that these commitments are all-things-considered justified.

4. Conclusion

I conclude by briefly connecting the preceding discussion with the topic of loving God. Praising, thanking, and apologizing to God are, I propose, all partly constitutive of what it is to engage with God in loving relationship. Indeed, more generally, sincere praising, thanking, and apologizing all require attitudes of appreciation or valuing of the one toward whom they are directed, where this appreciating or valuing is constitutive of relating lovingly to this other. As Roberts writes with respect to gratitude—indeed, gratitude to God specifically—“Gratitude is a kind of love . . . Thanksgiving is a practice of love” (2014: 68). Similar things could be said

about appreciation and praise, as well as remorse or repudiation and apology. In this way, pursuing or possessing and exercising praisefulness, thankfulness, or contrition not only inclines one more strongly toward adopting cognitive commitments to God's existence, but inclines one more strongly toward engaging with God in loving relationship. In this story of the justification of religious commitment, relationship takes center stage. Aiming to be good not only leads one to adopt cognitive commitment to God, but to adopt such commitments as an expression of love.

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