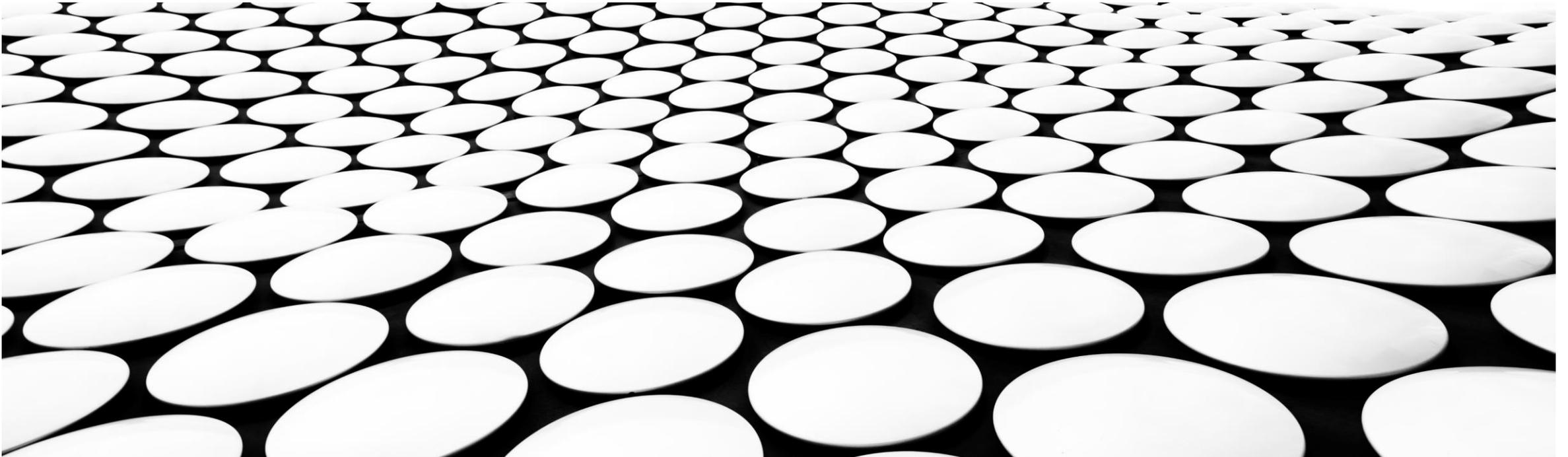


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# **DIVINE GLORY UTILITARIANISM: MAXIMIZING GOD'S GLORY**

ALEX STRASSER



# DIVINE GLORY UTILITARIANISM (DGU): THE MAIN IDEA

- Slogans
  - Greatest amount of divine glory (from the greatest number)
  - Soli Deo Gloria
  - The chief end of man is to glorify God ~~and to enjoy him forever~~
- Bring the most positive attention to God
- God is glorified by obedience, prayer, worship, reflection, etc.
- Ethical framework available to all theists
  - Not a new idea, but now put in terms of an ethical framework
- Guiding principle for decision making



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## WHY DGU?

- For a Christian: it is biblical
- For a theist: it combines ethical theories that solves problems in both
- It responds to the “Problem of Evil”
- It challenges conventional notions of the comfortable American life

# WHAT IS DIVINE GLORY?

- Our working shorthand will be “positive attention”
- Honor, praise, respect, lift up, sanctify, revere as holy, etc.
- Descriptions of God’s glory we can’t affect:
  - Visible and can be revealed
  - Can be radiant

A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF GLORY

Paul Silva Jr.



Image Source: <https://livelyscribes14.wordpress.com/2015/03/11/the-shekinah-glory-of-god/>

# BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK: OLD TESTAMENT

- God's glory is foundational to His plan
  - Divine Glory is why we were created (**Isaiah 43:7**)
  - It is bringing attention to the One who deserves it (Leviticus 10:3)
  - God longs for it to fill the earth (Habakkuk 2:14)
  - It is why God brought the Israelites out of Egypt (Psalm 106:8)
  - It is why God withholds his wrath (**Isaiah 48:9,11**)
  - It is why God guides us (Psalm 23:3)
  - It is why God restored Israel (**Ezekiel 36:20-23**)

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## BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK: NEW TESTAMENT

- It is the end goal of our salvation (Ephesians 1:12,14)
- God's glory should be foundational to our decision making
  - It is the result of bearing fruit (John 15:8)
  - It should be our motivation in everything we do (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- Wrongdoing can lead to (non-maximal) glorification (Romans 3:7-8; Philippians 1:15-18)
  - Disobedience is a sufficient condition for wrongness
  - Improper motive is an example of disobedience



## **THEME VERSE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 10:31 “SO WHETHER YOU EAT OR DRINK OR  
WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD”**



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## **HOW CAN WE GLORIFY GOD?**

1. Giving credit where credit is due (John 9:24, Acts 12:23)
2. Accepting one another (Romans 15:7)
3. Becoming more like God (2 Corinthians 3:18)
4. Being perfect/not sinning, aka obeying (Romans 3:23, Ephesians 5:27)
5. Doing what God commands us (same as 4) (Leviticus 9:6)
6. Bearing fruit (John 15:8)



# **ETHICAL FRAMEWORK**



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# OUTLINE OF ETHICS

- Metaethics (what are morals, and what grounds them?)
  - Objective morality vs relativism
  - Moral epistemology
- Normative ethics (how do we decide what is moral?)
  - Consequence-driven vs rule-driven
  - Utilitarianism, virtue ethics, ethical egoism
- Applied ethics (what specific action is moral?)
  - Bioethics, environmental, business ethics
  - Euthanasia, abortion, death penalty, pollution





**DGU  $\approx$  UTILITARIANISM + DIVINE COMMAND THEORY**

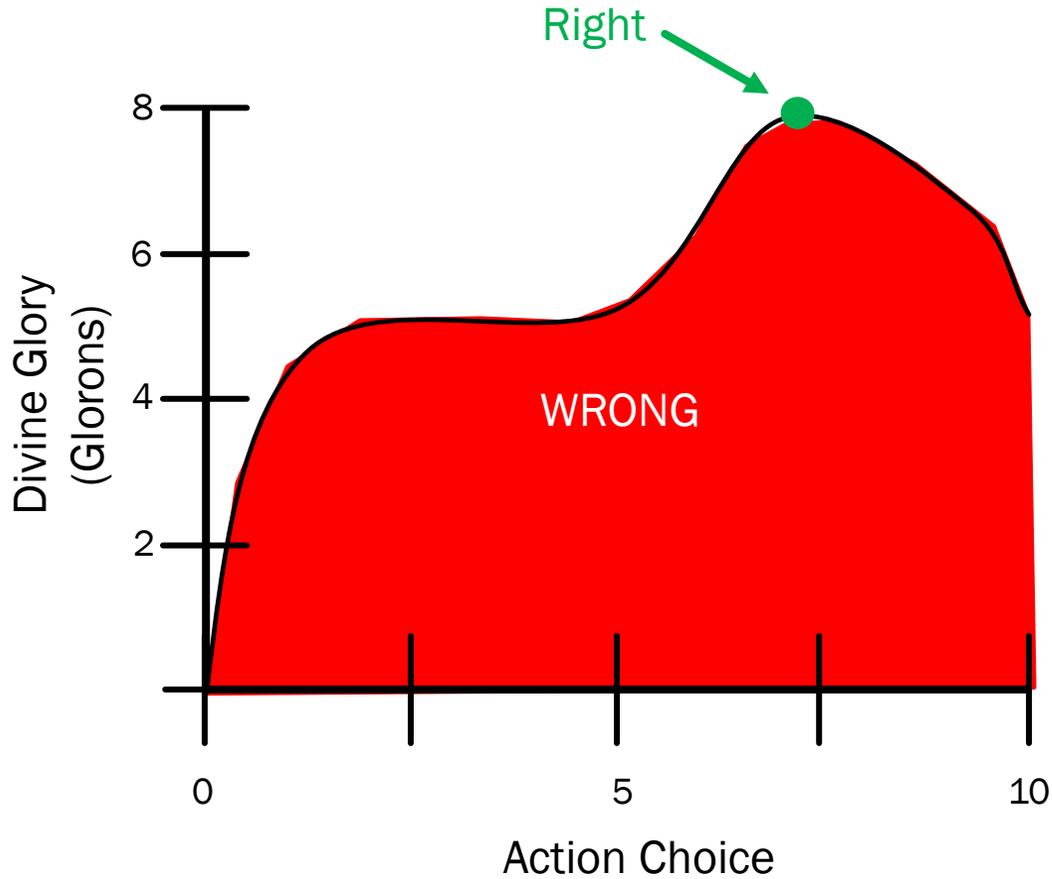


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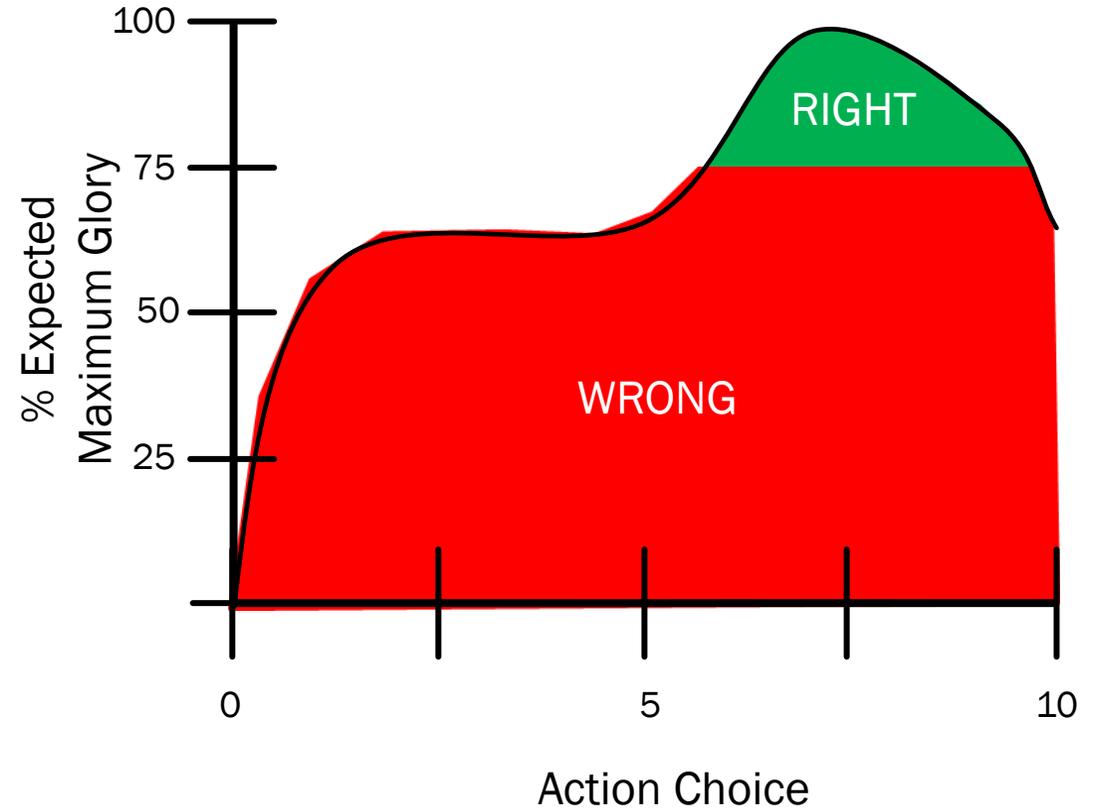
## FORMS OF UTILITARIANISM

- Hedonistic utilitarianism (Bentham, Mill) – maximize pleasure
  - Christian hedonism (John Piper) – maximize pleasure in God
- Preference utilitarianism (Peter Singer) – maximize preference fulfillment
- Motive utilitarianism (Robert Adams) – maximize motives leading to utility
- **Divine Glory Utilitarianism** – maximize God's glory
  - Bring the most positive attention to God with the least amount of time, energy, money
  - Free time, energy, and money should be directed toward things that (directly) glorify God

# THRESHOLD AND EXPECTATION TYPES OF UTILITARIANISM



Maximizing, Objective Utilitarianism



Threshold, Subjective Utilitarianism  
Threshold = 75%

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## OBJECTIONS TO UTILITARIANISM

- Cost of calculation – more time calculating than doing
- No rest – no time to rest
- Supererogation – beyond the call of duty
- Paradox of hedonism – worrying about pleasure isn't pleasing
- Differentiating persons – different obligations for family
- Reduction of goodness to base desires



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# FORMS OF DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

- Divine command theory – if God commands it, it is obligatory
- Divine will theory – if God wills it, it is obligatory
- Divine motivation theory (Linda Z)
- Uniting feature: they are all rule-based

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## OBJECTIONS TO DCT

- Arbitrariness (Plato's Euthyphro Dilemma)
- Moral Epistemology – how to know divine commands?
- Underdetermination – do they apply to all areas of life?
  - Intuitionism and situational ethics
  - Out of scope



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## HOW DGU SOLVES THESE OBJECTIONS

- Paradox of hedonism
  - The pursuit of God's glory is pleasing (Psalm 1:2), is obedience (1 Cor 10:31), and increases God's glory
- Differentiating persons
  - Special obligations for intimate persons is commanded (1 Tim 5:8)
- Reduction of goodness
  - God's glory is supreme and worthy
- Divine Command Epistemology
  - Knowledge of commands aren't necessary for divine glorification

## OVERVIEW OF OLD OBJECTIONS

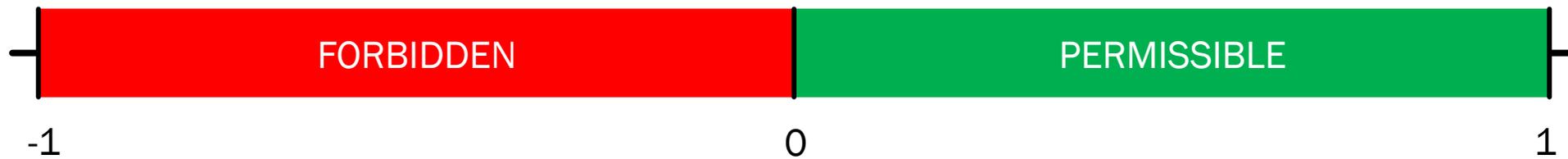
- Cost of calculation
- No rest
- Paradox of hedonism
- Differentiating persons
- Reduction of goodness to base desires
- Arbitrariness (Plato's Euthyphro Dilemma)
- Epistemology
- Underdetermination
- Supererogation



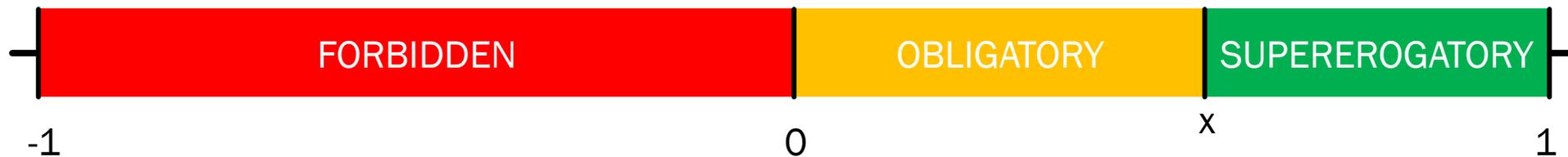
# SUPEREROGATION: AN INTRODUCTION

- Supererogation = beyond the call of duty (i.e. morally good but not obligatory)
- All theories distinguish between the morally 1) forbidden, 2) permissible, and 3) obligatory
- An action  $<0$  is morally bad and thus forbidden. An action  $>0$  is good and thus permissible

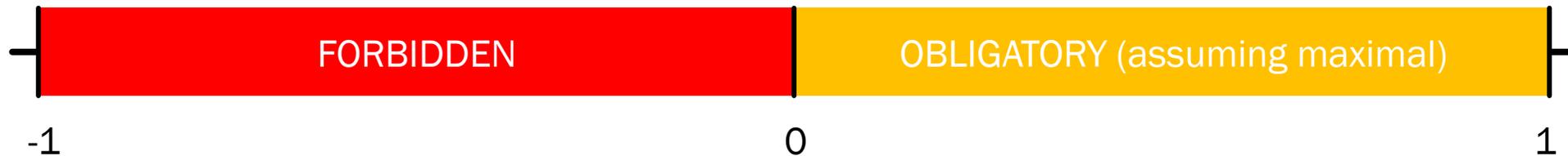
General Case



Case with Supererogation



Utilitarianism



Moral Goodness Scale

# FOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT SUPEREROGATION

1. Does supererogation exist? (Moral experience)
  - Out of scope
2. Can utilitarianism account for it?
  - Conventionally conceived of as a serious problem for utilitarianism
  - Common response: reject the supererogatory (e.g. Singer). See Further Reading for other responses
3. Can DGU account for it?
  - Out of scope
4. **Does the Bible support or deny supererogation?** ←

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# THE PROBLEM OF SUPEREROGATION

- Biblical examples?
  - Good Samaritan (abortion arguments – Good Samaritan thesis)
  - Christian liberty (see next slide)
- Catholic theology (based on Matthew 19:21)
  - Celibacy, poverty, and monasticism
- Protestant theology (no supererogation)
  - Luther and Bonhoeffer critique the Catholic position
  - James 4:17, Matthew 5:48
  - (See PhD thesis)

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## **SUPEREROGATION AND CHRISTIAN LIBERTY**

- Macro vs micro decisions and “ties at the top”
- A range of careers are permissible
- Need conscious thought about God’s glory

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## NEW QUESTIONS FOR DGU

- Why does obeying divine commands glorify God?
  - It is intrinsically respectful and honoring
  - Biblical support
- Is DGU consequentialist or deontological (rule-based)?
  - Technically, consequentialist
  - Practically, both: combines motives, commands, and consequences

# OVERVIEW OF ALL OBJECTIONS

- Cost of calculation
- No rest
- Paradox of hedonism
- Differentiating persons
- Reduction of goodness to base desires
- Arbitrariness (Plato's Euthyphro Dilemma)
- Epistemology
- Underdetermination
- Supererogation
- Glorification via commands
- Consequence- or rule-based





# **APPLICATION TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL**



# BEST POSSIBLE WORLD

- Problem of Evil (PoE) assumes consequentialism
- Greater-goods theodicies (e.g. free will defense) assume (divine) consequentialism
- Rules-based ethics offer a defeater to current forms of PoE
- Issue of best possible worlds
  - No evil (logical problem of evil)
  - Less evil (evidential problem of evil)
  - No best world (Aquinas)
  - Most good (Leibniz)
  - Most saved people (Craig)
  - **Most divine glory (DGU)**
- God works everything for His glory (a potential inconsistency?)

DOES THE ARGUMENT FROM EVIL ASSUME A  
CONSEQUENTIALIST MORALITY?

Eric Reitan

**Why God is Not a Consequentialist**

T. D. J. Chappell <sup>[a1]</sup> ⊕



# **APPLICATION TO ALTRUISM AND THEOLOGY OF POSSESSIONS**



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## QUESTIONS WE SHOULD ASK

- Which glorifies God more?
  - \$300,000 house or \$250,000 house + \$50,000 to charity
  - \$50,000 car or \$25,000 car + \$25,000 to charity
  - \$4 Starbucks coffee or feeding a starving family of 4 for a day



**GUIDING QUESTION:  
HOW CAN I BEST GLORIFY GOD WITH MY TIME,  
ENERGY, AND MONEY?**



# FURTHER READING

- General Ethics
  - *Metaethics: An Introduction* (Andrew Fisher)
  - *Normative Ethics* (Shelly Kagan)
- Utilitarianism
  - *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Smart, Williams)
  - *Taking Utilitarianism Seriously* (Christopher Woodard)
- Divine Command Theory (or variations thereof)
  - Historical: Augustine, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Kirkegaard
  - Modern: Phillip Quinn, Robert Adams, Linda Zagzebski, Paul Copan, William Lane Craig
- Supererogation
  - Condrey, B. J. "Possibility and role of supererogation in Protestant ethics." (PhD Thesis, 2020).
  - Vessel, Jean-Paul. "Supererogation for utilitarianism." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 47.4 (2010): 299-319.
  - Dorsey, Dale. "The supererogatory, and how to accommodate it." *Utilitas* 25.3 (2013): 355-382.
  - Zimmerman, Michael J. "Supererogation and doing the best one can." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30.4 (1993): 373-380.
- DGU: <https://gospeldemands.com/> (my website)



**THANK YOU**





# **SUPPLEMENTARY SLIDES**



# FURTHER OBJECTIONS

- Not discussed for the sake of time and theological focus
- Utilitarianism
  - Utility monster
  - Mere addition paradox (Repugnant Conclusion)
  - Wrong answers (violating human rights for marginal gain)
  - Alternatives/unconsidered issues
    - Prioritarianism and egalitarianism
    - Act vs rule utilitarianism
    - Two-level utilitarianism
    - Predicting consequences problem
- Divine Command Theory
  - Psychopathy

# CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF GLORY

A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF GLORY

Paul Silva Jr.

- Glory  $\approx$  praise, respect, and admiration
- Being glorious
  - Something is glorious if and only if its actual characteristics make it worthy of much praise, respect, and admiration.
- Being glorified
  - Something is glorified by some person at a time if and only if at that time they praise, respect, and admire it.
- Creation-based account of obligation to glorify God

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## OBLIGATION TO GLORIFY GOD (CREATION-BASED ACCOUNT)

1. Each person created by God has a life of value: that is, a life that is of enormous value and worth living.
2. God is worthy of much respect because he has given us lives of value, and disrespect and indifference would be inappropriate responses to someone who has given us, and continues to sustain, our lives of value.
3. Therefore, we have an obligation to glorify God because he has given us lives of value.

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## SUPPORT FROM CHURCH FATHERS

- "In all of our deeds God looks at the intention, whether we do it for His sake, or for the sake of some other intention." - St. Maximus the Confessor