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A cross-cultural perspective on God's personhood

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Abstract

Debates about God's personhood, or lack thereof, are central to philosophy of religion. This article aims to advance these debates by presenting the 'greatness of personhood argument' for God's personhood and a dilemma for those who deny God's personhood. I also consider various objections to this argument and this dilemma and argue that they fail. Notably, my reasoning in defence of personal theism is cross-cultural insofar as personal theists across various religious traditions can use it. Thus, this article defends personal theism in a manner that can bring Western and non-Western theists into closer dialogue regarding the topic of God's personhood.

Keywords: Personal Theism; Non-Personal Theism; Philosophy of Religion; Indian Philosophy; Vedānta

Introduction

Whether God is ultimately personal, non-personal,¹ or both, is a hotly debated question within both Eastern and Western thought (Legenhausen 1986; Davies 2006; Bartley 2015; Stenmark 2015; Wildman 2017; Page 2019; Gasser and Kettle 2021; Kvanvig 2021a; Wood 2021; Lebens 2022; Bishop and Perszyk 2023). Recent literature on this topic has focused largely on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam when examining specific religious traditions. However, the debate about God's personhood is active within Eastern thought as well. In this article, I aim to advance the debate about God's personhood by defending personal theism. Notably, my reasoning in defence of personal theism is cross-cultural insofar as it pertains to the types of personal theism and non-personal theism found within both Eastern and Western thought.

Since the particularities of personal theism and non-personal theism in the East are nuanced and likely to be unfamiliar to many readers, I will briefly elaborate on the most prominent forms of Eastern personal theism and non-personal theism, which are found within a Vedāntic context.² Certain Vedāntic traditions believe in the existence of a personal divine reality 'with properties' (typically referred to as *saguṇa brahman*). The Mādhva Vaiṣṇava tradition, based on the life and the teachings of Madhva (c. thirteenth century CE), is one such tradition. Other Vedāntic traditions uphold the existence of both a non-personal 'propertyless' divine reality (typically referred to as *nirguṇa brahman*) and *saguṇa brahman*.³ For example, this view is found within theologies influenced by Śaṅkara (ninth century CE), Caitanya (1486–1534 CE), and Ramakrishna (1836–1886 CE) (Maharaj 2018, ch. 2). In such contexts, the central point of contention is about which

of these divine realities is superior to the other, or if one can be shown to be superior to the other at all (Maharaj 2018, ch. 2).

The term I translate above as 'divine reality' is *brahman*. *Brahman* is often translated as God, as this is the closest English equivalent for this term. However, I should note that there are some differences between Western concepts of God and the Vedāntic notion of *brahman*. For example, in certain Vedāntic traditions, both non-personal *brahman* and personal *brahman* can exist simultaneously. This is because both are considered distinct divine realities, though one may be the foundation for the other. However, in Western thought, God is generally considered personal or non-personal, but not both, and there is generally no acceptance of the simultaneous coexistence between a non-personal divine reality and a personal divine reality.⁴

Bearing these points in mind, I will henceforth translate *brahman* as God. I will also clarify my usage of this term. When I say God, I refer to the entity that a theistic tradition takes to be its highest divine reality. In the case of personal theists (to be elaborated on shortly), this will be a personal God. In the case of non-personal theists (also to be elaborated on shortly), this will be a non-personal God. In the case of Vedāntic traditions that only uphold one conception of *brahman*, such as personal *brahman*, God will refer to whatever conception they take this to be. For example, Mādhva Vaiṣṇava practitioners maintain that God refers to personal *brahman*.

Moreover, in the case of the Vedāntic traditions that accept the existence of both non-personal *brahman* and personal *brahman*, God refers to the conception of *brahman* that is viewed as superior to the other. For instance, in the context of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition (a theistic tradition based on the teachings of Caitanya), which states that personal *brahman* is superior to non-personal *brahman*, God refers to personal *brahman*. In the case of the Vedāntic traditions that acknowledge the existence of both non-personal *brahman* and personal *brahman* and state that neither is superior to the other, God can refer to either non-personal *brahman* or personal *brahman* unless I explicitly refer to one of these.

Having clarified my usage of 'God', I will now argue for personal theism over non-personal theism. Before doing so, I will briefly define these two terms. I understand personal theism as the view that God is a person. Or, when a Vedāntic tradition states that personal *brahman* and non-personal *brahman* both exist, I take personal theism to be the view that personal *brahman* is superior to non-personal *brahman*.

To better understand personal theism, it is important to define what it means to be a person. There are various proposed definitions of personhood. What these definitions have in common is that a person has consciousness, self-consciousness, and rationality (Page 2019, 302). It has also been suggested that 'persons essentially display rationality; they have beliefs; they are loci of moral respect; they show respect for others; they are sentient; they are conscious; they are self-conscious; they have a psychic unity; they act; they communicate to others' (Mawson 2018, 16). Drawing on these definitions, I take a 'person' to be a rational agent with beliefs, desires, thoughts, emotions, consciousness, self-consciousness, and other components of an active mental life.

Non-personal theism stands in contrast to personal theism. The non-personal theist believes that God is not a person. When the existence of both personal *brahman* and non-personal *brahman* is acknowledged, I take non-personal theism to be the view that non-personal *brahman* is superior to personal *brahman*. A Christian non-personal theist is David Bentley Hart, who argues that God is not a personal being but is instead the very ground of being and the foundation upon which everything depends (Hart 2013). A Vedāntic thinker whose views are associated with non-personal theism is Śaṅkara. A common interpretation of Śaṅkara's views is that while non-personal *brahman* and personal *brahman* both exist, non-personal *brahman* is superior to and the foundation of the personal *brahman*. Non-personal theists also tend to speak of God as the ground of

being, and many of them, if not all, emphasize that the nature of God is difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend with the human intellect.⁵

With these terms in place, I now put forth an argument for personal theism. Call this the ‘greatness of personhood’ argument.

- (1) God is the greatest (premise 1).
- (2) The greatest possesses the greatest combination of great-making properties, namely, a combination of great-making properties such that there is no other combination of great-making properties that anyone or anything could possess to be greater (premise 2).
Therefore,
Conclusion 1: God possesses the greatest combination of great-making properties, namely, a combination of great-making properties such that there is no other combination of great-making properties that anyone or anything could possess to be greater (from premises 1–2).
- (3) The greatest combination of great-making properties is such that it includes personhood (premise 3).
Therefore,
Conclusion 2: God possesses personhood (i.e. God is a person) (from conclusion 1 and premise 3).

This argument, if sound, straightforwardly establishes personal theism for the religious traditions that state that God is either personal or non-personal. This argument can also be used to establish personal theism for the Vedāntic traditions that affirm the existence of both non-personal *brahman* and personal *brahman*. This is because this argument implies that personal *brahman* is greater than non-personal *brahman* due to personal *brahman*’s personhood. In this case, the term God most appropriately refers to personal *brahman*, for only personal *brahman*, and not non-personal *brahman*, is the greatest.

Defending premises 1 and 2

Having put forth the greatness of personhood argument, I now turn my attention to defending its premises, beginning with premise 1. First, it is worth noting that in the context of perfect being theology, commonly (though not exclusively) associated with Christianity,⁶ God is either the greatest actual being, possible being, or conceivable being. Notably, a similar idea is found within Vedānta as well. *Brahman* has been interpreted to mean ‘the Great’ or ‘the Supreme’ (Chaudhuri 1954, 47).⁷ So, a denial of premise 1 is problematic for perfect being theists and Vedāntins⁸ since this denial goes against their core commitments. Granted, one may argue against some forms of perfect being theology, as Jeff Speaks has (Speaks 2018). It is beyond the scope of this article to address most of Speaks’s arguments (for a response to Speaks, see Leftow 2021).⁹ Nevertheless, I can note that there are additional reasons to uphold premise 1, apart from perfect being theology.

One such reason is that God (in a Christian context) or *brahman* (in a Vedāntic context) is regarded as being, in some sense, worthy of worship or the proper object of focus for one’s spiritual pursuits. It seems reasonable that in order for God or *brahman* to be worthy of this focus, it should be greater than other things that could receive our focus or worship. Notably, this is a point granted by those who hold that God is not a person (Mulgan 2021, 288). This is another reason to regard *brahman* or God as the greatest.

Another reason to uphold premise 1 is that many, if not most, people understand God as the greatest.¹⁰ Thus, when someone who denies premise 1 refers to God, their

understanding of God differs from a common understanding of God. This calls into question whether or not 'God' is an appropriate or useful term for them to use. Insofar as one thinks that using religious language requires a shared understanding of words and their meanings, this is problematic. One could abandon the concept of God and replace it with a term like 'ultimate reality'. While one's view of the ultimate reality could be defensible or at least worthy of consideration, this seems to disqualify one as a theist. This is because any form of theism, including non-personal theism, is typically understood to require belief in an entity termed 'God' and not in an entity that is only termed 'the ultimate reality'. Insofar as one is committed to be a theist, and insofar as theism is defined as a belief in an entity named 'God', this is a cost.

Moreover, certain objections to a personal God, like the idolatry objection, which implies that worship of a personal God is idolatrous, imply that it is best to devote oneself to the greatest conception of God (as such objections attempt to designate a personal conception of God as being inferior to a non-personal God) (for a discussion of this objection, see Stenmark 2015). Thus, non-personal theists who raise the idolatry objection also uphold premise 1. So, if these non-personal theists deny these premises, then they also undermine their own arguments.

Finally, if one thinks that ontological arguments for God's existence are sound, then one has a reason to uphold premise 1, for the conclusion of such arguments is that a perfect or maximally great God exists.

Thus far, I have defended premise 1. I will now turn my attention to defending premise 2. Some apophatic theologians may attempt to deny premise 2 by arguing that nothing can be predicated of God and hence, God has no properties. This entails that God has no great-making properties, making premise 2 false. Call this claim strong apophaticism. This view is problematic for several reasons.

First, the denial that God has any properties, including great-making properties, prompts the question: what is greater, a God with all-great making properties or a propertyless God? It seems that (especially in the light of the reasoning to come) the conception of God with all great-making properties is greater than the propertyless God. This being the case, it is hard to hold that God is the greatest while also holding to strong apophaticism. One might deny that God is the greatest. However, this amounts to a denial of premise 1, and as the above discussion illustrates, this is problematic.

Furthermore, if one maintains that God is great but also denies that God has great-making properties, this prompts the question: by virtue of what is God the greatest, if not due to the fact that God has great-making properties? One who maintains that God is the greatest and yet denies that God has great-making properties must identify some other reason why God is great apart from such properties, but it is difficult to see what such a reason could be.

Furthermore, even if one does reject premise 1, they incur an additional cost by rejecting premise 2 for the following reason. If one denies that God has any properties, then this seems to suggest that God has no causal powers. But if God lacks such powers, then one cannot say that God is the cause of anything. Yet, this claim stands in strong tension with what theists hold.

A more plausible apophatic claim is what can be termed weak apophaticism. This view does not state that God has no properties. Instead, it states that even though God has properties, we do not know what properties these are due to our finite cognitive capacities. To me, it seems the most plausible version of this view maintains that when properties are predicated of God, they are predicated analogically. Thus, on this view, when one claims that God is good or knowledgeable, one is not claiming that God is good or knowledgeable in the same way (univocally) as humans. Rather, God's goodness or knowledge is merely analogous or similar to the goodness or knowledge of humans.

One response to this view is that it opens up the possibility that God is analogous or similar enough to persons. This conclusion is acceptable to personal theists, such as Richard Swinburne, who argues for a personal God whose personhood is analogous to but not identical to human personhood (Swinburne 2021). Thus, since personal theists are willing to grant that God is a person whose personhood is analogous, but not the same as, human personhood, weak apophaticism need not undermine personal theism. For these various reasons, I uphold premise 2.

Defending premise 3: part I

Thus far, the remaining premise in need of defence is 3. I consider this premise to be the most controversial one in the greatness of personhood argument, so my defence of it will be lengthier than my defence of the previous premises. One justification for this premise is that personhood is a great-making property. This view implies that as long as an individual's other great-making properties are not diminished by being a person, the greatest combination of properties will include personhood. This is because any combination of properties that does not include personhood could be greater if it included personhood, meaning that the greatest combination of properties must include personhood in order for its greatness to be unexcelled. The following thought experiment supports the view that personhood is a great-making property.

Think of your best friend. Now, imagine that someone created a zombie version of your best friend that could replicate your best friend's behaviour. It would tell the same jokes, go surfing with you, talk about the latest Star Wars movie with you, and so on. The only difference between this zombie and your best friend is that your friend is a person because they have a rich mental life comprising beliefs, desires, emotions, phenomenal consciousness, etc., whereas the zombie, though exhibiting the same behaviour as your best friend, is not a person because they lack such a mental life. For instance, if this zombie and your best friend stub their toe, they would both cry out in pain. However, the zombie would not feel anything from this incident, whereas your best friend would. Or, suppose this zombie and your best friend both went to a concert. Your best friend would go to this concert because they thought about going and then voluntarily chose to do so, whereas this zombie would go because its brain activity led it to purchase tickets mindlessly and go to the concert.

Now you are given a choice. You can rewind a time machine, and instead of spending your life with your best friend, you can spend it with this zombie. Call this the zombie option. Crucially, your life would continue on a similar trajectory, meaning that the only differences in your life if you chose the zombie option are the differences caused by your reaction to your best friend being a zombie. So, if you did not have any reaction to your best friend being a zombie, you would continue to have precisely the same experiences and memories with your best friend, in which case, the only difference in your life if you were to choose the zombie option is that your best friend is now a zombie instead of a person. Let us even say that you would be given an extra one thousand dollars if you chose the zombie option. Would you choose this option? If you are like most people, then it is likely that you would not.

The intuition driving the refusal is that we value persons more than non-persons, all else being equal. There are two reasons why our valuation of persons over non-persons can support the view that personhood is a great-making property. One reason is that it seems plausible that if a property-bearer (such as a person) has a property that makes it improve the value of the world, then this property is a great-making property, all else being equal. For instance, being humorous seems to be a great-making property, and one reason for this is that someone who is humorous adds more value to others'

lives than someone who lacks such humour. Similarly, kindness seems to be a great-making property because kind people perform actions that benefit others and thus improve the lives of others more than unkind individuals. Thus, if a property that adds value is a great-making property, then the zombie option thought experiment suggests that personhood is a great-making property, for this thought experiment suggests that persons add more value to the world than non-persons (later in this article, I consider some objections to the view that properties that add value are great-making properties).

There is another reason why the valuation of persons over non-persons supports the view that personhood is a great-making property. This reason is that our preferences for persons over non-persons require an explanation, and it seems that the most plausible explanation of these preferences is that we prefer things that are greater than other things and that persons are greater than non-persons. If this explanation is correct, then personhood is a great-making property. Someone might challenge this explanation and instead argue that what explains our preferences for persons over non-persons is that we prefer to be with people like ourselves. So, according to this explanation, since we are persons, we prefer to be with other persons.

The following thought experiment shows why it is problematic to claim that we prefer persons over non-persons only because we prefer to be with similar people. Call this thought experiment the modified zombie option thought experiment. Suppose that you are given a chance to rewind a time machine and spend your life with a zombie-like version of your best friend. However, this time, suppose that if you chose the zombie option, you would yourself be transformed into a zombie. This means that you would lack beliefs, desires, thoughts, and other components of an active mental life. However, you would experience the same amount of pain and pleasure as you would have experienced with an active mental life. So, if you experience a certain amount of distress by thinking about everything you have to do tomorrow, the zombie version of yourself would experience this same distress but without the thoughts. This also means that the zombie version of yourself has some degree of consciousness – because it can experience pain and pleasure. However, because this zombie version of yourself lacks other components of an active mental life, it is still considered zombie-like.¹¹

Suppose that your best friend would be as zombie-like as you are if you chose the zombie option. Suppose also that if you chose the zombie option, your life would continue on a similar trajectory and that you would be given an extra one thousand dollars. Would you still choose the zombie option? If you are similar to most people, then you would probably not. Unlike in the case of the previous zombie option thought experiment, our preferences for rejecting the zombie option in the modified zombie option thought experiment are not explained by the fact that we prefer to be with people like ourselves. In this case, our best friend will be like us regardless of whether or not we choose the zombie option. So, it seems that our preferences for rejecting the zombie option are explained by the fact that we prefer things that are greater than other things and that persons are greater than non-persons. As mentioned previously, this means that personhood is a great-making property.

However, one might offer an alternative explanation for why we prefer persons to non-persons in the modified zombie option thought experiment. This explanation is that we prefer not to become zombies ourselves because this is unfamiliar to us, and we prefer to choose options with which we are familiar. This response is problematic because it seems implausible that this is the *only* reason we prefer to reject the zombie option. It instead seems that we prefer for ourselves and our best friend to remain persons because persons are greater than non-persons. Yet, this means that personhood is a great-making property.

Still, one might argue that we prefer persons over non-persons only because of subjective preferences based on human psychology. However, one might further argue that our subjective human preferences do not indicate what is objectively great. One response to this objection is that even if we value personhood because of our subjective preferences and not because it is objectively great in and of itself, personhood still adds value. In this case, personhood is still a great-making property, according to my earlier reasoning that stated that properties that add value are great-making properties.

One objection to this reasoning is that according to it, a wide variety of properties, including very strange properties, could be great-making properties. For instance, if enough people liked triangle-shaped things, then having a triangle-shaped body would be a great-making property. Yet, this seems absurd. Call this the 'strange great-making property objection'. My response to this objection begins by distinguishing between contingent, necessary*, and impossible great-making properties. A contingent great-making property is a great-making property that may not have been a great-making property. For instance, being a professional basketball player can be a contingent great-making property in a possible world where people derive satisfaction from watching professional basketball since this property makes its property-bearer greater. However, in a possible world where people consider professional basketball boring and pointless, this property adds no value, so it would not be a great-making property.

In contrast, a necessary* great-making property could not fail to be a great-making property in a possible world with individuals. For instance, being benevolent seems to be a plausible candidate for a necessary* great-making property because it would enable its property-bearer to add value in every possible world with individuals, at least on the assumption that benevolence is an objectively good thing that people value in every possible world with individuals. There might also be necessary great-making properties, which could not fail to be great-making properties in all possible worlds, including possible worlds with no individuals, if such worlds exist. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss whether or not such worlds exist (certain Vedāntic traditions state that individuals are not created, which might support the view that individuals exist in every possible world – in this case, there is no difference between necessary and necessary* great-making properties). To keep the following discussion relatively simple, I will focus my attention on necessary* great-making properties instead of necessary great-making properties.

Moreover, an impossible great-making property is a property that would never add enough value to the point where this property adds more value on the whole than not. So, an impossible great-making property can never be a great-making property. For instance, the property of having a triangle-shaped body seems to fit into this category. While it might be conceivable that the property of having a triangle-shaped body might add value for some individuals, it seems that it would never be the case that this property would, on the whole, add more value than not, as many individuals would not value this property.

So, having distinguished between contingent, necessary*, and impossible great-making properties, I can respond to the strange great-making property objection. I first note that this objection is forceful because it seems to entail that certain strange properties can be great-making properties, which seems absurd. However, just because a strange property might conceivably add value (such as the property of having a triangle-shaped body), this does not make it a contingent or a necessary* great-making property. It could be an impossible great-making property, in which case, it is not a great-making property, which is a point that aligns with our intuitions.

Yet, one might argue that there are more plausible cases of strange properties that could be great-making properties. For instance, suppose that there is a possible world

in which most people value those over six feet tall. According to my reasoning, in this world, the property of being over six feet tall would be a great-making property. However, one might think that it is strange that this property would be a great-making property.¹²

In response, I argue that what is absurd is if such strange properties are considered necessary* great-making properties. For instance, it does seem absurd that being over six feet tall is a necessary* great-making property, for there seems to be no good reason why this property would add to someone's greatness in every possible world with individuals. However, I argue that it is less absurd if such properties are contingent great-making properties. For instance, in a world where people value those who are over six feet tall, it does not seem particularly strange that this property is a great-making property in *this* world. What would be strange is if this property is also a great-making property in a possible world where people have no strong preferences for bodily height. However, someone who holds that being six feet tall is a contingent great-making property can acknowledge that this property would not be a great-making property in many possible worlds. So, I argue that the apparent absurdity of taking certain strange properties to be great-making properties vanishes once one acknowledges that various strange properties are only contingent great-making properties in certain possible worlds.

So, I maintain that, at the least, the property of personhood is a great-making property for God in our world since this property adds value given our preferences for persons. If one objects to this reasoning by arguing that it is not plausible that our subjective human preferences should make personhood a great-making property, my reply is that even if it is implausible that our subjective human preferences should make personhood a necessary* great-making property, it is still plausible for personhood to be a contingent great-making property. This is significant for the following reasons. If God's greatness is understood to mean that God is the greatest actual entity, then all that is required to defend this claim is that the combination of properties that God possesses is the greatest combination that anyone has in our world. If personhood is included in the greatest combination of great-making properties in our world (meaning that it is, at the very least, a contingent great-making property), then God has personhood.

Moreover, I argue that personhood, unlike other properties such as being over six feet tall, can be plausibly seen as a necessary* great-making property even if one claims that personhood is valuable only because of our subjective human preferences (I deny that personhood is valuable only because of these preferences, but I will grant this point for example's sake). This is because it seems more plausible that personhood is the type of property that most people would value across all possible worlds with individuals (making this property a necessary* great-making property). For instance, it is hard to think of possible worlds where most people would choose the zombie in the zombie option thought experiment. In contrast, it does not seem that being over six feet tall would be a property that most people value across all possible worlds with individuals. For instance, it seems easy to think of a possible world where people don't have any strong preferences for someone's height. So, while it is implausible for the property of being over six feet tall to be a necessary* great-making property, it is arguably plausible for personhood to be a necessary* great-making property.

So far, I have responded to the strange great-making property objection by distinguishing between different types of great-making properties and offering one diagnosis of why this objection is forceful – it seems to entail that certain strange properties could be necessary* great-making properties. However, I argued that this is not true, for certain strange properties might only be contingent great-making properties. I also argued that it is more plausible for personhood to be a necessary* great-making property, even if it is less plausible for other properties to be necessary* great-making properties.

At this point, one might raise a similar objection. According to my reasoning (which states that properties that add value can be great-making properties), whether or not a property is a great-making property for a property-bearer depends on other individuals. However, someone might object that it is counterintuitive to think that someone's greatness (especially God's) depends on others.

In reply, I argue that it is plausible that the greatness of certain great-making properties depends on individuals apart from the property-bearer. Consider the following example. Suppose that there are two possible worlds. In one possible world, wealth is distributed fairly, so there is no need for any individual to give charity to another individual. Moreover, in this world, individuals like to be self-sufficient and become insulted if other individuals offer them charity. In another possible world, wealth is not distributed fairly, so there is a need for individuals to give charity. Suppose that there's a charitably disposed person in the first world. In this world, this person cannot give charity, and in fact, the value in the world would be reduced if they attempted to do so (because individuals would become insulted if someone tried to give them charity). Suppose that there's also a charitably disposed person in the second world. This person wants to give charity and indeed does so. Hence, they have the property of being charitable.

It is plausible that being charitable is a great-making property, at least to us. However, as the above example shows, this property is not a great making property in all circumstances. In certain instances, the greatness of this property depends on other individuals. Yet, I argue that this fact about the property of being charitable should not deter us from thinking that being charitable is, at the least, a contingent great-making property, given the plausibility of this property being a great-making property. I thus argue that it is plausible that certain great-making properties can depend on other individuals. So, I argue that the above objection fails.

Still, one might think that it is implausible that God's greatness depends on others since this seems to undermine God's sovereignty. In reply, I note that if certain great-making properties are great in and of themselves and God has these properties, then the greatness that God has because of these properties does not depend on other individuals. So, according to the view that properties that add value are great-making properties, God's greatness might be partly decided by the value that God adds to the lives of others. However, this view does not entail that God's greatness is wholly decided by this value that God adds. I further add that even if God's greatness is partly decided by the value that God adds to others, God's greatness is so immense that God is the greatest (by a large margin), even without the greatness that comes from God adding value to others. For this reason, I maintain that God remains sovereign, even in cases where God's greatness partly derives from the value God adds to others' lives.

Another related objection is that my reasoning is anthropocentric because it suggests that human preferences matter the most in deciding what a great-making property for God is. However, one might argue that it is strange that humans should be given a privileged status that gives their preferences the most weight in deciding whether or not a property is a great-making property for God. My first response to this objection is that there is a good reason to give the most weight to human preferences. This is because humans are the only individuals on earth¹³ that can develop a relationship with God. So, among all the types of living beings on earth, humans would have the most value added to their lives through God's personhood. Thus, it is reasonable that we should give weight to human preferences when considering the zombie option thought experiment.

So far, I have responded to the view that our preferences for persons are explained by our subjective human preferences and not because personhood is a great-making property in and of itself. I have thus far taken a conciliatory stance by arguing that even if

this view is true, then personhood is still a great-making property. I will now argue that there are significant problems with this view.

Regarding our subjective human preferences in general, we can ask: do these subjective human preferences point to any mind-independent, objective truths? Someone who argues that we value personhood only because of our subjective human preferences (meaning that personhood is not a mind-independent, objective great-making property) answers no to this question. In contrast, if someone argues that we value personhood because our intuitions grasp that personhood is a mind-independent objective great-making property, then they answer yes to the above question.

I argue that there are severe sceptical consequences if someone answers the above question with 'no'. In defending this claim, I first note that our subjective human preferences are closely tied to our intuitions. For instance, in the case of the zombie option thought experiment, I imagine that most people reject the zombie option because they intuitively find persons to be greater than non-persons. Importantly, intuitions are treated as evidence and are crucial for justifying our beliefs (Climenhaga 2018; Bergmann 2021). For instance, most people believe that the external world is real and that they are not brains-in-a-vat because this former view (known as external world realism) seems intuitively true to them. Or, many people believe that there are objective moral truths (a view known as moral realism) because certain statements like 'killing innocent babies for fun is objectively wrong' seem intuitively true.

So, if one claims that our subjective human preferences are mere preferences and do not point to any mind-independent, objective truths, then this casts doubt on the reliability of our intuitions. This is because, according to this view, there seems to be no reason to consider our intuitions reliable. Rather, our subjective human preferences and intuitions seem right to us only because we subjectively feel that they are right. However, this subjective feeling that they are right is not based on grasping any objective truth. Rather, this subjective feeling is just a feeling, and one has no good reason to think that it is oriented around the truth. This means that if we believe that views such as external world realism or moral realism are true because of our intuitions, then we should be doubtful of these views. While this is not an entirely fatal consequence (because some individuals might defend external world realism through reasoning or might be moral anti-realists), this will probably be a significant cost for many. Thus, I maintain that the best explanation for why we prefer persons over non-persons is that we prefer things that are greater than other things and can grasp that persons are greater than non-persons through our intuitions.

So, I maintain that there are at least two reasons why the zombie option thought experiment suggests that personhood is a great-making property: (1) a being's possession of personhood makes it add value to the world, and when a property makes its property-bearer add value to the world, this property is a great-making property. Moreover, (2) the most plausible explanation for why we prefer persons over non-persons in both above zombie option thought experiments is that we prefer things that are greater than other things and that persons are greater than non-persons (a point that we can grasp with our intuitions).

Nevertheless, one could object to this reasoning. First, one might argue that the reason we reject the zombie option is not that we prefer persons over non-persons. Rather, the reason we reject the zombie option is that the zombie version of our best friend lacks other great-making properties that our best friend possesses, and it is the absence of these properties that makes us prefer our best friend over a zombie version of them. However, the difficulty in maintaining this objection is that the zombie version of our best friend is as close to our best friend as a being can be without having an active mental life. So, the objector needs to (a) identify the great-making properties that the zombie

version of our best friend lacks in virtue of not being a person and (b) demonstrate that the relationship between these great-making properties and personhood is such that God could have these properties without possessing personhood. I doubt that this can convincingly be done.

Defending premise 3: part 2

Another objection is that even if the zombie option thought experiment establishes that personhood is a great-making property for humans, this does not entail that personhood is a great-making property for God. For instance, having a strong digestive system can be a great-making property for humans, whereas it would not be a great-making property for God (who is immaterial and does not have a digestive system).¹⁴ Similarly, Jonathan Kvanvig notes that personhood is not a great-making property in the case of certain things, such as garages (for a garage would not be a better garage if it were a person) (Kvanvig 2021b, 148). So, the fact that a property X is a great-making property for humans does not entail that X is a great-making property for God. Call this objection the ‘not great-making for God objection’.

I have various responses to this objection. My first response begins by offering one diagnosis of why some property is a great-making property for one property-bearer and not for another. As an example, I will consider the above-mentioned property of having a strong digestive system. I argue that one reason why having a strong digestive system is a great-making property for humans but not God is that value is produced when humans have this property, whereas no value is produced when God has this property. For instance, health, which is valuable, is produced when humans have this property. Moreover, being healthy is itself plausibly a great-making property, and a human’s health is magnified when they have a strong digestive system. So, having a strong digestive system can also be viewed as an indirect great-making property for humans. It is not a great-making property in and of itself. Still, because it magnifies another great-making property that is great in and of itself (namely, healthiness), the property of having a strong digestive system indirectly contributes toward a human’s greatness.

In contrast, no value is produced when God has the property of having a strong digestive system.¹⁵ This is because God does not have a physical body and is already as healthy as anyone can be. So, having a strong digestive system would be impossible for God. Moreover, even if God could possess a strong digestive system, it would not produce any new healthiness, for God is maximally healthy even without a strong digestive system. Thus, having a strong digestive system is not even an indirect great-making property for God.

In light of the above points, my first diagnosis of why some property is a great-making property for one property-bearer and not another is this. When a property-bearer has a property that produces value or indirectly magnifies another great-making property, then this property is a great-making property for this property-bearer. Otherwise, this property is not a great-making property for this property-bearer. So, if this diagnosis is correct, then in order for non-personal theists to argue that personhood is not a great-making property for God even though it is for humans, they must explain why God’s personhood would not produce value or magnify another great-making property that God possesses.

Moreover, even if non-personal theists can provide reasons for thinking that God’s personhood does not produce value or magnify God’s greatness, there is another problem for them. This problem is that we do seem to be able to identify how God’s possession of personhood produces value. This is because God’s personhood produces more love than what would be produced if God lacked personhood. Insofar as love is viewed as a valuable thing, then we have reasons to believe that God’s personhood adds value, in which case, personhood is a great-making property for God.

One counter-response to the above reasoning is that it seems to suggest that personhood could be a great-making property for garages, for if garages were persons, they could produce more love and hence more value. I have two responses to this counter-response. One response is that someone can hold that personhood would be a great-making property for garages, as counterintuitive as it may initially seem. Granted, this response will likely not be plausible for many, so I will give a second response. This second response is that a garage has various features that make it so that personhood is not a great-making property for it.

For instance, a garage is just not the right type of thing for humans or anyone else to have a loving relationship with. This is because a loving relationship seems to require two parties that can relate intimately to one another. However, it does not seem that a garage could intimately relate to humans or other living beings. For instance, a garage lacks knowledge of what it is like to be a human or any other living being, so it could not understand humans or other living beings very well. Granted, if garages were persons, then they might be able to relate intimately with other garages and thus produce value through their loving relationships. However, since garages are immobile, they cannot have loving relationships with other garages. So, even if they could be persons, their personhood would never produce love.

Thus, if garages were persons, it does not seem that their personhood would produce any value or magnify any other great-making property that they have. In contrast, if garages are not persons, they do, at the least, add value to humans' lives since humans can use garages for various purposes. Yet, it is questionable whether or not this value would be added if garages were persons (for instance, it might be rather strange to keep one's car in a garage that is a person, and so one would not do it). Hence, as the above discussion indicates, there are good reasons to think that God's personhood adds value (through producing more love) and that this point does not have any particularly strange consequences (as we can avoid the counterintuitive conclusion that personhood is a great-making property for garages).

So, in order for the not great-making for God objection to succeed, one must (a) identify why God's personhood would not add value or magnify God's greatness when the zombie option thought experiment suggests that personhood is a great-making property. One must also (b) account for the fact that God's personhood does indeed produce a valuable thing, namely, love. However, I do not think (a) and (b) can be done convincingly, so I argue that the not great-making for God objection fails.

An additional objection to the zombie-option thought experiment that one might raise is that someone's intuitions are mistaken if they choose their best friend over the zombie. For instance, one might argue that the correct conclusion to draw in this thought experiment is to choose the zombie option because persons have problems, so they are less great than non-persons. As one example, one might point out that certain individuals have chosen to marry a robot wife instead of a human wife.¹⁶ In this case, there are various reasons why one might prefer a robot instead of a human. One reason is that someone is controlling and prefers to be with a robot because they can control it. However, while there might be certain instances where individuals are highly controlling to the point where they prefer relationships with non-persons over relationships with persons, this is not the norm. What this suggests is that in certain cases, someone's abnormal desire to be controlling might overpower their ability to value persons properly. However, the correct conclusion to draw from this is not that personhood is less valuable than non-personhood. Instead, the correct conclusion is that there is something abnormal about someone who prefers non-persons to persons. Furthermore, someone's desire for control could stem from their insecurity, which might come from their lack of a loving relationship with other persons. If this is the case, then this suggests that individuals lack something when they do not have loving relationships with other persons, reinforcing the view that there is something valuable and great about other persons.

Another reason someone might prefer a robot wife over a human wife is that these individuals are frustrated with their experiences with other humans. However, plausibly, these frustrations are not due to personhood itself. Instead, they are due to the character imperfections that persons often exhibit. So, such a preference does not indicate that personhood in itself is less great than non-personhood. Rather, this preference reflects the fact that humans' imperfections diminish their greatness. However, God lacks such imperfections.¹⁷ So, if a personal God is less great than a non-personal God, it cannot be due to any character imperfections in God. Rather, it must be because a lack of personhood is greater than personhood. However, as I have argued, the zombie option thought experiment suggests the opposite (namely, that personhood is greater than a lack of personhood).

Alternatively, a non-personal theist might accept that their best friend is better than the zombie but still prefer a non-personal God because a relationship with a personal God comes with expectations, which they want to avoid. In such a case, I argue that the non-personal theist's preference for a non-personal God does not indicate that a lack of personhood is greater than personhood. Rather, this preference shows that individuals do not want to meet the expectations of a loving relationship. This preference also does not indicate that personal relationships produce no value. It mainly indicates that people choose not to pursue valuable things because of their personal reservations. But when individuals choose not to pursue these things, we still consider them valuable. For instance, we generally consider exercise valuable because it promotes health. Yet, despite the value of exercise, individuals often do not want to do it. In such cases, we still consider exercise valuable because it would benefit the individual if they did it. So, one's personal reservations about pursuing a valuable thing do not diminish the value or greatness of this thing. Thus, when evaluating whether or not personhood is greater than a lack of personhood, we should primarily evaluate the value that personhood adds and its intrinsic greatness, and we should place less weight on how willing or unwilling individuals are to pursue a relationship with a personal God. In the light of the zombie option thought experiment, I argue that we should indeed view personhood as a great-making property, despite the unwillingness of some to establish a relationship with a personal God.

So far, I have responded to the objection that our intuitions about the greatness of personhood could be mistaken. A related objection is that our intuitions concerning the greatness of a personal or non-personal God are unreliable, even if our intuitions about the greatness of ordinary non-personhood are reliable. Someone who raises this objection might argue that God is so far beyond our understanding that we cannot infer God's nature and character from ordinary reasoning about human persons. However, denying the reliability of God-centred intuitions and claiming that these intuitions do not grasp truths about God is problematic. For instance, if a non-personal theist has intuitions that a non-personal God is greater than a personal God, and their belief in a non-personal God is to a certain extent based on such intuitions, then the justification for this belief is undercut by the fact that such intuitions should not be given much justificatory weight.

Non-personal theists can respond by arguing that they have reasons to trust their own intuitions while maintaining that personal theists do not have reasons to trust their intuitions. For example, non-personal theists can maintain that they have correct intuitions about God because they are not affected by cognitive biases such as wishful thinking, a lack of proper judgement, or even sin. They can add that personal theists do have such cognitive biases and unreliable intuitions.

One problem with this response is that it is a move that personal theists can make. They too can claim that non-personal theists have cognitive biases that undercut the reliability of their intuitions. If there is a debate between a personal theist and a non-personal theist, and if each party makes the move to shed doubt on the reliability of the other party's intuitions, then the intuitions of each respective party are called into question – unless a party can

demonstrate that their view is true. Crucially, however, this demonstration of the truth of one's own view has to be done without appealing to one's intuitions (as the reliability of these intuitions is called into question in this context). However, as I mentioned previously, intuitions are crucial in justifying our beliefs, so attempting to argue without them is problematic. Hence, I argue that the above objection fails.

One final objection to the zombie-option thought experiment is to draw attention to another example or thought experiment whose conclusion contradicts the notion that personhood is a great-making property. For instance, Kvanvig challenges the idea that personhood is a great-making property by stating that his evaluative sensibilities make the Milky Way greater than many people he knows (Kvanvig 2021b, 148). The core idea here is that there are non-persons (i.e. the Milky Way) that are greater than certain persons (i.e. humans), which challenges the idea that personhood is a great-making property. I have several points to make in response to this statement.

First, one can deny the intuition that the Milky Way is better than humans – at least to me, it is not immediately clear that this is the case. Second, even if we grant that the Milky Way is greater than humans, then the greatness of the Milky Way seems to be because it possesses great-making properties that humans lack and not because it lacks personhood. For instance, the Milky Way is beautiful and awe-inspiring, whereas humans do not have these properties to the same extent. However, this does not indicate that personhood is not a great-making property – it only indicates that in certain cases, a person might lack other great-making properties, making it the case that a non-person with these great-making properties can be greater despite lacking personhood.

Yet, Kvanvig's line of reasoning does illustrate an important point about God's personhood – if God's personhood comes at the expense of other great-making properties, then even if personhood is a great-making property, a non-personal God might be greater due to having certain great-making properties that a person could not possess. However, the objector to personal theism must identify such great-making properties and explain why a personal God cannot possess them. In the case of the Milky Way, the properties of the Milky Way, such as being beautiful and being awe-inspiring – are properties that God can possess (for instance, certain Vedāntic traditions, such as the Caitanya tradition, maintain that God is beautiful because God has a supramundane body). So, non-personal theists require additional reasoning in order to press this objection.

Kvanvig also notes that one potential implication of the view that personhood is a great-making property is that '[one is] going to end up with the view that what we really want is a universe just of people' (Kvanvig 2021b, 148), which is a counterintuitive conclusion. However, I deny that this conclusion follows from personhood being a great-making property. This is because we can maintain that persons are greater than non-persons and yet still desire the existence of non-persons insofar as these non-personal things promote the happiness and flourishing of persons. Moreover, one can maintain that persons are greater than non-persons while still maintaining that non-persons have value, in which case, it can be desirable to have a world with non-personal things as long as the existence of non-personal things does not decrease the happiness or number of persons (and there seems to be no compelling reasons why non-personal things would decrease the happiness or number of persons). For these various reasons, I uphold that personhood is a great-making property, in which case premise 3 of the greatness of personhood is true.

A dilemma for non-personal theists

Thus far, I have focused extensively on the greatness of personhood argument. In addition to this argument, I raise the following dilemma for non-personalist theists: either God has a will, an intellect, cognitive capacities, etc., or God does not. If God has a will, intellect,

cognitive capacities, etc., that are sufficiently similar to ours, then it seems that God should be a person, for these are things that we possess, and we are persons. Moreover, it seems that we are persons precisely because we have a will, intellect, cognitive capacities, etc. Hence, it seems that these things are essentially connected with personhood. Thus, if God does possess these things, it is difficult to answer the question: in what sense is God not a person? All the persons that we observe have a will, intellect, cognitive capacities, etc., so the natural conclusion to draw is that if God has these, then God is a person too. This is the first horn of the dilemma.

One might respond to this horn of the dilemma by arguing that other living beings have a will, intellect, cognitive capacities, etc., and are not persons. For instance, someone might consider cats to be non-persons, and yet they seem to have a will, intellect, cognitive capacities, etc. There are various problems with this response. First, non-persons with wills, intellects, cognitive capacities, etc., are less cognitively developed than humans. Moreover, one reason these non-persons are not considered persons is that they are less cognitively developed than humans – which seems to indicate that individuals possess personhood to the extent that they are cognitively developed. This means that if God is highly cognitively developed (which is the most plausible way to understand God if one chooses this first horn of the dilemma), then God is a person. So, it is difficult to avoid personal theism if one chooses the first horn of this dilemma.

Given the problems with the first horn of this dilemma, one might choose the second horn instead. This horn states God lacks a will, intellect, cognitive capacities, etc. Choosing this horn presents various difficulties. First, choosing this horn makes it difficult to explain how God can make the world. Choosing this horn makes it even more difficult to explain other features of this world that are commonly drawn on to formulate theistic arguments, such as the universe's regularities (Hildebrand and Metcalf 2022) or its dimensionless parameters or 'constants' that are finely tuned for life (Collins 2009; Lewis and Barnes 2016). This is because an agent (such as a personal God) who brings about such features (arguably) best explains them. However, suppose that there is a non-personal God who lacks cognitive abilities, a will, an intellect, etc., that are sufficiently similar to (but much greater than) human cognitive abilities, wills, intellects, etc. In that case, the non-personal theist seems to lack the explanatory resources (i.e. an agent who brings about the abovementioned features) that the personal theist has, thus (arguably) putting the non-personal theist at an explanatory disadvantage.¹⁸

To better illustrate this point, I will briefly draw attention to a standard theory of agency, which states that 'a being has the capacity to exercise agency just in case it has the capacity to act intentionally, and the exercise of agency consists in the performance of intentional actions and, in many cases, in the performance of unintentional actions (that derive from the performance of intentional actions)' (Schlosser 2019). I will also draw attention to a standard theory of intentional action, which states that 'a being has the capacity to act intentionally just in case it has the right functional organization: just in case the instantiation of certain mental states and events (such as desires, beliefs, and intentions) would cause the right events (such as certain movements) in the right way' (Schlosser 2019). Given these theories of agency and action, it is difficult to see how a non-personal God, who lacks the properties possessed by persons, such as having beliefs, desires, rationality, and so on,¹⁹ could possess agency.²⁰ Thus, it is difficult to see how God could make the world or its other features.

Yet, there is another problem if God lacks agency or the ability to act intentionally. This problem is that agency and the ability to act intentionally seem to add to a being's greatness by giving it greater power. So, if a non-personal God lacks these properties, then this non-personal God is less powerful than a personal God. However, it seems that having power is a great-making property. So, all else being equal, if a non-personal God has less power than a personal God, then a non-personal God is less great than a personal God.

This conclusion is problematic for non-personal theists, for it means that a personal God, and not a non-personal God, is the greatest. According to premise 1 of the greatness of personhood argument, this means that the term ‘God’ can only refer to a personal God and not a non-personal God.

So, both horns of the above dilemma are problematic. One response to this dilemma is available to non-personal theists (such as followers of Śāṅkara) who acknowledge the existence of both personal *brahman* and non-personal *brahman*. This response is that personal *brahman* makes the world, while non-personal *brahman* is the foundation of personal *brahman*. In this way, a non-personal theist can explain the world’s existence in terms of an agent who can act intentionally (personal *brahman*) while still holding that a non-personal God (namely, non-personal *brahman*) is the ultimate foundation of everything.

However, there are two problems with this response. The first problem is that such a non-personal theist must still address the greatness of personhood argument even if they successfully avoid the above dilemma. The second problem is that because personal *brahman* has agency and the ability to act intentionally, whereas non-personal *brahman* does not, this seems to suggest that personal *brahman* is more powerful than non-personal *brahman*. Since possessing power is a plausible great-making property, then this suggests that personal *brahman* is greater than non-personal *brahman*. In this case, personal *brahman* is still the greatest and hence rightly deserves to be called ‘God’. This above reasoning also problematizes views (such as those of Ramakrishna) that state that neither personal *brahman* nor non-personal *brahman* are superior to one another. This is because if personal *brahman* is greater than non-personal *brahman*, then one cannot maintain that both are equal.

Conclusion

In this article, I have defended personal theism by presenting the greatness of personhood argument and a dilemma for non-personal theists. The greatness of personhood argument states that God has the greatest combination of properties and that personhood is part of the greatest combination of properties, therefore entailing that God is a person. I supported this argument with the zombie option thought experiment, which suggests that we prefer persons over non-persons. I also argued that this preference supports the view that personhood is a great-making property for two reasons. The first reason is that personhood adds value, and I argue that properties that add value are great-making properties. The second reason is that our preferences for personhood are explained by the fact that we prefer things greater than other things and that persons are greater than non-persons, which is a fact that we can grasp with our intuitions. I also considered objections to these views. Finally, I briefly presented a dilemma for non-personal theists. In short, if God has a will, intellect, and cognitive capacities, then it seems that God is a person. Alternatively, if God lacks a will, intellect, and cognitive capacities, then God seems to lack agency and the ability to perform actions intentionally, which diminishes God’s power (another great-making property) and makes it difficult to explain how God makes our world. One notable point about this argument and this dilemma is that it pertains to formulations of personal and non-personal theism across cultural boundaries. Thus, this article can bring Western and non-Western theists into closer dialogue regarding the topic of God’s personhood.

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Notes

1. Following Page (2019), I will use the term 'non-personal' although I recognize some individuals may prefer other terms.
2. Vedānta is style of philosophical theology that began to develop within India around 800 CE.
3. One might also encounter the view that personal *saguṇa brahman* is 'propertyless' (*nirguṇa*) in the sense that it has no physical properties. So, in certain contexts, *nirguṇa* can be predicated of personal *brahman*. Partly for this reason, I henceforth use the term personal *brahman* instead of *saguṇa brahman* and the term non-personal *brahman* instead of *nirguṇa*. I also use such terms to make it easier for non-specialists of Indian philosophy to follow the discussion.
4. There are some exceptions, however (Lebens 2022).
5. A personal theist might also affirm that God cannot be comprehended completely by the human intellect, so this is not a unique claim to the non-personal theist *per se*. Nevertheless, there is a tendency among many non-personal theists to emphasize the ineffability of God to a higher degree than many personal theists.
6. For instance, perfect being theology is also found in the context of the Caitanya tradition (Gupta 2020).
7. For instance, the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theologian Jīva Gosvāmin interprets *brahman* to mean the greatest (*bṛhattamaṃ*) in his commentary on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.88.9-10 (Śaṣṭrī 1965–1975, book 10, vol. 5, 1487).
8. I do not mean to suggest that perfect being theists and Vedāntins are two separate groups. I hold that certain Vedāntins can also call themselves perfect being theists. Nevertheless, I refer to both groups separately here in case there are Vedāntins who do not normally self-identify as perfect being theists.
9. One might also argue that perfect *being* theology is not applicable in the context of Vedānta, as it is problematic to designate *brahman* as a being like other beings. One might argue that *brahman* is the very source of being, meaning that God is hyperbeing (for an argument along these lines, see Ram-Prasad 2013, 46–55). However, my arguments do not require that *brahman* be conceived of as a being *per se*. It only requires that *brahman* is, in some sense, the greatest.
10. For instance, Christians and Muslims constitute over half of the world's population, and one is hard-pressed to find those who would deny premise 1 in these traditions. Moreover, there are other religious traditions that would endorse premise 1 such as Vaiṣṇavism (see Gupta 2020).
11. If you do not consider this zombie version of yourself to be a true zombie, then you can consider this zombie version of yourself to be a zombie-like version of yourself.
12. One might not think that this property is strange *per se*. However, one will probably think that this is a strange property to be a great-making property. So, if my usage of 'strange property' does not refer to a property the reader finds strange, they can mentally substitute it for 'a property that is a strange candidate for being a great-making property'.
13. Certain Hindu traditions hold that there are other universes and realms with other types of individuals capable of having a relationship with God. According to these traditions, these individuals are also persons like humans, though they may have more developed cognitive capacities. I find it reasonable that such individuals would also prefer persons, given how these individuals are described within Hindu scriptural texts. In this case, my argument is unaffected by the existence of such individuals.
14. This example is inspired by Speaks (2018).
15. Many Vedāntic traditions (such as the Caitanya tradition) state that God can accept the offerings of food by his devotees. In this case, one might argue that God does have a strong digestive system (because he can accept all these offerings) and that this digestive system produces value. If this is the case, then as it turns out, having a strong digestive system can be a great-making property for God, thus challenging the not great-making for God objection. However, in this forthcoming discussion, I will assume that the property of having a strong digestive system is a distinctly human property pertaining to an ordinary physical body and does not also refer to God's ability to accept the numerous offerings of good by his devotees.
16. For instance, the Chinese engineer Zheng Jiajia married a robot wife that he built in 2017. An individual who refers to himself as Davecat has a robot wife and mistress.
17. Thus, God can be seen as a perfect person – someone who has both the property of personhood and the property of having perfect character.
18. One might argue that the non-personal theist has an explanatory advantage with respect to the problem of evil because they do not have to hold that God is a moral agent with an obligation to prevent evil. It is beyond the scope of this article to assess which of these two views fares better in terms of explaining all the relevant data we have; however, it is worth noting that if one finds the fine-tuning argument, nomological argument, or other related arguments convincing, then this at least puts pressure on them to affirm personal theism over non-personal theism.
19. At the least, God does not possess these properties in the same way that humans possess these properties.

20. Indeed, the non-personal theist Brian Davies is explicit about rejecting the idea that God is a moral agent or that God acts on the basis of reasons (Davies 2006).

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