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## Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization (in the Philosophy of Religion)

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### Introduction

Popular objections to the existence of God appeal to the idea that God would create the best possible world or the idea that God wouldn't allow the sort of evils that we see around us. Three prominent theistic replies to such objections assume that God can knowingly reject better worlds for ones that are good enough. Consequently, it is becoming popular to hold that these replies are committed to the claim that God can satisfice (e.g., Slote 1984: 152, nt 10; and Langtry 2008: 74-8; Kraay 2013, 2014; and Dragos 2013). Since God is perfect, if God can satisfice, then satisficing can be appropriate (i.e. both rational and moral). I argue, however, that these replies are not committed to the appropriateness of satisficing but only to the appropriateness of what we can call *motivated submaximization*. In motivated submaximization, one aims at as much of the good as one can get but then chooses a suboptimal option because one has a countervailing consideration. In satisficing, one chooses the good enough because one aims at the (mere) good enough.

It's good news for these replies that they are committed to the appropriateness of motivated submaximization rather than the appropriateness of satisficing. Kraay (2013; 2014) contends that, until some more promising defense of satisficing is offered, it is a liability to be committed to the claim that satisficing can be appropriate. I'm inclined to agree. Arguments that satisficing can be appropriate tend to be better suited as arguments that motivated submaximization can be appropriate. And it's very controversial, even by the standards of philosophy, that satisficing can be appropriate. Kraay is mistaken, however, when he contends that the relevant theistic replies suffer from this liability. These replies appeal, not to divine satisficing, but to divine motivated submaximization. While it is controversial that motivated submaximization can be appropriate, there are few substantive philosophical positions that enjoy better support.

Philosophers tend to mistakenly attribute assumptions about satisficing to defenses of theism because the mainstream literature fails to provide an adequate characterization of satisficing. In section 1, I explain how satisficing is ordinarily characterized and why that characterization fails to capture what is distinctive and especially controversial about satisficing. In section 2, I define motivated submaximization and provide a better account of satisficing, one that treats satisficing as a type of what Pettit calls "*unmotivated submaximization*" (1984: 174, emphasis mine).

Once we've clearly distinguished satisficing and motivated submaximization, we will consider how they are related (or not related) to the philosophy of religion. In section 3, I show that Robert Adams' and Bruce Langtry's replies to the "God-must-create-the-best-world objection" are committed, not to the appropriateness of satisficing, but only to the appropriateness of *motivated submaximization*. In section 4, I show that Peter van Inwagen's "no minimum response" to a certain problem of evil is likewise committed to the appropriateness of only motivated submaximization. In

section 5, I consider a worry that arises from the distinction between appropriate and *perfectly* appropriate.

### 1. First Pass Satisficing

Satisficing involves rejecting the better for the good enough (Slote 1989: 15).<sup>1,2</sup> It is most controversial in what we can call a *transparent situation*. A's situation is *transparent* iff (i) A knows precisely what A's options are, and (ii) A knows the ranking of all A's options. Transparent situations ensure that, if the agent chooses an option that is suboptimal, one that isn't as good as one of his/her other options, then she does so with full knowledge. In transparent situations, a choice for less than the best is never made in ignorance.

A standard definition of satisficing in both mainstream philosophy and the philosophy of religion is this:

**(First Pass) Satisficing:** an agent *satisfices* in a transparent situation iff the agent chooses a suboptimal option that is good enough. (cf. Swanton 1993: 33; Schmitz 1995: 28-9; Henden 2007: 339; Langtry 2008: 76, 78; Kraay 2013: 403)

When one satisfices in a transparent situation, one *knowingly* rejects the better for the good enough.

While the first pass is straightforward and clear, it has two problems. First, it fails to capture the sense in which satisficing involves choosing an option *because* it is good enough (cf. Henden 2007: 347; van Roojen 2004: 169-70; Weber 2004: 98). Suppose that I recognize A and B to be the only options available to me. A is the best of the two, but I choose B. I don't satisfice if I choose B for no reason at all or solely because it is the option most likely to irritate my mother. The first problem partially explains why the characterization has the second, and for our purposes, more important problem: it fails to capture what is distinctive and especially controversial about satisficing.

It is relatively uncontroversial that first-pass satisficing is appropriate whenever there is some countervailing consideration, cost, or trade-off that motivates it. Richardson (2004: 106) is especially adamant that satisficing motivated by such

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<sup>1</sup> I ignore another standard conception of satisficing, one that emerges from Herbert Simon's work in economics. On this conception, satisficing is a strategy for when to stop enumerating your options and make a choice. This stopping rule conception of satisficing isn't relevant to our present concerns, and the consensus is that it can be appropriate (Petit 1984: 166-7; Schmitz 1995: 29-30; Byron 1998: 71-4; Richardson 2004: 106).

<sup>2</sup> What is it to be *good enough*? There are at least three different ways of understanding this key concept. An absolute understanding holds that an option is good enough iff its value surpasses some threshold fixed by an absolute standard. For example, an option might be good enough iff the option has a value of at least 50. On this simple picture, satisficing requires choosing an option that has at least 50 units of goodness. On a relative understanding, what counts as good enough is to be understood in terms of the alternative available actions. The relative understanding might hold that an option is good enough iff the option is at least 90% as good as the optimal option(s). If the best option has 100 units of goodness, then the agent can satisfice by choosing an option with 92 units of goodness, but not one with 50. A third possibility is to take a hybrid view that requires both surpassing an absolute threshold and a relative one. Slote (1984: 156) has at least flirted with the hybrid view, but I don't know what his official view is. Hurka (1990) claims that the absolute threshold view is the best way to develop satisficing. In what follows, I operate with the absolute threshold version of good enough. This tendency is due to convenience, and I take no stand on whether it is better than relative or hybrid views.

considerations is “banal.” The banality consists in two things: rejecting the better for the good enough in such situations is clearly rational and to use the term ‘satisficing’ for such cases is to make the term ‘otiose’ (Richardson 2004: 126). For the purpose of this paper, we can focus on two different motivations for first pass satisficing.

The first motivation concerns Ever Better Situations. In these cases, one has no optimal option because, for every option one can choose, there is another better. Suppose that a genie offers to ensure that your life enjoys any degree of welfare you choose. Since there is no maximum degree of welfare that you can enjoy, for every degree of welfare you can have, you could have some degree higher. Sorenson (2006: 214) contends that the lack of an optimal option guarantees that your choice is irrational. While there is something to be said for Sorenson’s position, it has seemed intuitively obvious to many philosophers that, in Ever Better Situations, you can rationally choose some arbitrarily high degree of welfare for yourself (e.g., Pollock 1983: 417-8; Schmitz 1995: 42-45, 2004: 41-4; Slote 1989: 110-23; and Langtry 2008: 74-8).

Sorenson might persist: but isn’t it obvious that no matter how well you choose in such a situation, you could have chosen even better? Even those who think we must aim at the optimum have reason to reject, at least in this situation, a tight connection between the quality of the option and the quality of the choice. If you are aiming at making your life as good as it can get, the best way to pursue that aim in an Ever Better Situation is to choose, perhaps arbitrarily, some very high degree of welfare. It sure beats refusing to take the genie up on his offer. In this special situation, the existence of better options plausibly does not entail the existence of more appropriate choices. The lack of an optimal option counts as a countervailing consideration that makes it rational to choose some arbitrarily high, suboptimal degree of welfare.

The second kind of motivated first pass satisficing concerns your special connection or relationship with specific individuals (Cottingham 1986; Roojen 2004: 170; Scheffler 2010; Vallentyne 2006: 25; Hurka and Shubert 2012). Suppose you have two options, A and B. A best promotes the welfare of your family while also making everyone else better off than they otherwise would have been. B is good, though not as good, for your family; it does, however, best promote the welfare of everyone else. One might agree that B is the best option overall since it provides the greatest benefit to the greatest number but then deny that one must choose it: your special connection to your family makes it appropriate for you to choose A even though you recognize it is less than the best.<sup>3</sup>

This motivation, like the first, is compatible with aiming at as much good as one can get. The person who appropriately chooses suboptimal A might aim at doing the greatest good for the greatest number. Yet, when this aim conflicts with her aim of doing the greatest good for her family, she can appropriately choose less than the best.

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<sup>3</sup> *Objection:* the special connection with your family should be factored in when we evaluate options. Once it is factored in, A is better than B. *Reply:* the objection presupposes a particular axiology that isn’t always endorsed by those who think special connections matter (e.g., Vallentyne 2006: 30-2). Furthermore, we should avoid assuming that everything that makes a difference to the quality of our choice also makes a difference to the quality of our options (van Roojen 2004: 163-9, especially 163, 166-7).

Even critics of this position recognize that it is plausible enough to be part of “ordinary, commonsense morality” (e.g., Kagan 1989: xi, 2-3).

We focus on these two motivations because they will be the most relevant when we return to the philosophy of religion in sections 3 and 4. Yet they are hardly the only motivations for submaximization compatible with aiming at as much good as one can get. As we refine our conception of satisficing in section 2, we will briefly consider a third such motivation which involves submaximizing as an indirect way of optimizing. We will mostly ignore two other such motivations, incommensurability and deontological side constraints, because they don’t directly bear on the issues in this paper.<sup>4</sup> In short, there are multiple, widely endorsed motivations for first-pass satisficing. Each motivation is controversial, but any interesting theory in the philosophy of religion is going to appeal to some controversial idea or another. Better it be ones that are as popular and as well-defended in the mainstream literature as these motivations are.

## 2. Satisficing as it Should Be

Since there are several widely accepted motivations for first pass satisficing, first pass satisficing fails to capture what is distinctive and especially controversial about satisficing. Recall that each motivation for first pass satisficing is compatible with the agent’s aiming at getting as much of the good as she can. What made choosing a suboptimal option plausibly appropriate in those cases is that there were other considerations that conflicted with the agent’s aim for the best; there were countervailing considerations that made choosing less than the best appropriate. Let’s use the following term to capture this shared feature:

**Motivated Submaximization:** an agent A *submaximizes with motivation* in a transparent situation iff

- (i) A aims at getting as much of good G as A can, but
- (ii) A chooses a suboptimal option with respect to G because of some countervailing consideration.

Each of the above motivations for first pass satisficing counts a different kind of motivated submaximization that is widely thought to be appropriate. It’s popular, then, to hold that motivated submaximization can be appropriate.

Motivated submaximization is so popular in part because it’s in the spirit of optimizing. When one optimizes, one chooses an optimal option because it realizes one’s aim at as much of the good as one can get. When one submaximizes with motivation, one aims at as much of the good as one can get but chooses a suboptimal option because of a countervailing consideration.

Satisficing, as I define it, is a type of *unmotivated* submaximization (cf. Pettit 1984: 174). An agent satisfices only if she rejects the better for the good enough but *not* because she is motivated by some countervailing consideration, cost, or trade-off. To satisfice is to act with a certain aim, which distinguishes satisficing from both motivated submaximization and unmotivated submaximization more generally. One doesn’t

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<sup>4</sup> Those who appeal to incommensurability include Schmitz (1995: 45-50; 2004: 44-8), Richardson (2004); and Weber (2004). Schmitz and Richardson deserve special mention because they are self-pronounced critics of satisficing. Vallentyne (2006: 28-33) and van Roojen (2004: 170) are among those who allow submaximization so that some deontological side constraint can be satisfied.

satisfice insofar as one aims at the best or getting as much of the good as one can. One doesn't satisfice if she chooses the good enough for no reason whatsoever.

To satisfice is not merely to knowingly reject the better for the good enough; one must also choose the good enough because one is aiming at promoting the good to some degree D but not as much as one can. To *promote* some good to degree D is to take the necessary means of bringing about a degree at least as high as D. If an agent aims at promoting G1 to degree D when D is something like *as much as I can get* or is *the most possible*, let us say that the agent *aims at the optimum*. If an agent aims at promoting G1 to degree D when D is something short of the optimum, let us say that the agent *aims at the good enough*. Optimizers aim at the optimum and satisficers aim at the good enough. Their aims are common insofar as they aim at the promotion of value. Their aims are distinct insofar as they aim at differing degrees of value.

So far we've seen that satisficing involves choosing the good enough because it realizes one's aim at the good enough. Yet to capture what is distinctive and especially controversial about satisficing, we need to impose some conditions on the aim at the good enough. Suppose I'm only aiming at a good enough degree of momentary welfare because I know doing so will maximize my overall welfare. Aiming at the good enough with respect to one good only as a *means* to realizing my aim at the optimum for another good is not compatible with satisficing, properly understood. Even critics of satisficing allow choosing the suboptimal option *for the sake of* optimizing some other good to be appropriate (e.g., Byron 1998: 80-1; Richardson 2004). So our conception of satisficing must add that the aim is taken *for its own sake*.

Yet even this is not enough. Some ends are more final than others.<sup>5</sup> As Pettit and Brennan (1986) argue, I might aim at the good enough for its own sake as a way of aiming at the optimum for its own sake. My ultimate aim in life might be to get as much of the good as I can. I then might learn that I can achieve this aim only if I develop the habit of aiming at the good enough for its own sake. I might develop such a habit. I'm not satisficing if I then choose a suboptimal option because it realizes my aim at the good enough. Satisficing requires that one aim at the good enough *purely* for its own sake, that it not be a means to any further aim. In other words, one's end of the good enough must be an ultimate, or purely final, end (cf. Slote 2004: 17-18).<sup>6</sup>

I now present the official definition of satisficing:

- Satisficing** (with respect to good G1): an agent A *satisfices* with respect to G1 in a transparent situation iff:
- (a) A aims, purely for its own sake, at promoting G1 to degree D but not as much as A can, and
  - (b) A chooses a suboptimal option with respect to G1 that has a value greater than or equal to D because A knows it satisfies the aim in (a).

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<sup>5</sup> Richardson (2004: 119-23 and nt 40 on pg 129) provides some helpful discussion concerning how ends, or aims, can be arranged in a hierarchy, with some ends being more final than others.

<sup>6</sup> Critics tend to use the language of *global* ends as opposed to *purely* final ends (see, e.g., Schmitz 1995: 45-6; 2004: 44-5; Byron 1998: 76-80). I resist using the term 'global', because I tend to think of a global end as one that encompasses all my other ends. Yet Schmitz (1995: 46-50, 2004: 45-8) stresses that, as he uses the term *global*, one might have multiple global ends which compete with one another.

This notion of satisficing is relativized to good G1. If there is more than one (intrinsic) good—for example, if both welfare and beauty are intrinsic goods—the relativization allows that one can satisfice with respect to good G1 without satisficing with respect to good G2. A transparent situation, recall, is one in which an agent knows what her options are and how to rank them. The agent who satisfices in a transparent situation *knowingly* rejects the better for the good enough.

To accuse someone of satisficing is to accuse them not only of rejecting the better for the good enough, but also of having a certain motivational structure. The satisficer aims at promoting the good to some suboptimal degree purely for its own sake. She chooses the good enough because it realizes this aim. The motivated submaximizer has a different motivational structure. She aims at promoting the good as much as she can. She chooses an option that is suboptimal, because she has some special consideration or competing aim that motivates the choice to reject the better for the good enough. The distinctive, controversial element of satisficing is not merely choosing a suboptimal option; it is choosing such an option simply because one is aiming, purely for its own sake, at the good enough.

It's arguably a liability to be committed to the appropriateness of satisficing, so understood. Some of those who claim to defend the rationality (or morality) of satisficing in some interesting sense do not defend the appropriateness of this sort of satisficing (e.g., Dreier 2004, van Roojen 2004: 170-1; Weber 2004; and Greenspan 2009). Indeed, it's somewhat unclear whether classic defenses of satisficing, such as Slote 1989 and Swanton 1993, should count as defending the appropriateness of satisficing or only the appropriateness of motivated submaximization.<sup>7</sup> The arguments that have been offered on behalf of satisficing tend to be better suited as arguments for motivated submaximization (consider, for example, the motivations for first-pass satisficing mentioned in section 1). Unless some novel defense of satisficing is offered, it is arguably a liability to be committed to the appropriateness of satisficing.

The claim *motivated submaximization can be appropriate* is widely endorsed and well defended. The claim *satisficing can be appropriate* is rarely endorsed and poorly defended.<sup>8</sup> It matters, therefore, whether a theistic reply is committed to one rather than the other. Commitment to the latter is a liability; commitment to former is not.

### 3. God and Suboptimal Worlds

We now return to the philosophy of religion to consider whether certain defenses of theism are committed to the appropriateness of satisficing. In this section, we will consider two theistic responses to the idea that God must create the best possible world. In the next section, we will consider one theistic response to the idea that God can't allow evil to be gratuitous. Those who think these responses are committed to the appropriateness of satisficing are thinking of satisficing in the first pass sense, which fails to distinguish between satisficing, properly understood, and motivated submaximization. Once this distinction is appreciated, it's clear that each response is

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<sup>7</sup> My considered opinion is that Slote and Swanton do defend the appropriateness of satisficing, even though they sometimes talk as though they only have in mind motivated submaximization. Vallentyne (2006: 21, 27-8) and Rogers (2010) also defend the appropriateness of satisficing.

<sup>8</sup> See my manuscript for further clarification and defense of the distinction between satisficing and motivated submaximization and for further discussion of alleged motivations for satisficing.

committed only to the appropriateness of *motivated submaximization*. While such commitment is controversial, it is hardly troubling.

Some objections to the existence of God appeal to something like:

**Best World:** if God were to exist, God would bring about the best (or at least an optimal) possible world.

After defending Best World, these objections contend that the actual world is not the best and then conclude that theism is false.<sup>9</sup>

Theistic responses to such objections tend to concede that the actual world is not the best of all possible worlds. They then challenge Best World. The first such challenge is contained in Robert Adams' classic paper, "Must God Create the Best?" Adams assumes, for the sake of argument, that there is a best world. He then argues that God might nonetheless reject the best for the good enough. Roughly, he argues that God's perfection is compatible with creating a world that is less than the best *if* God has grace upon the creatures that exist in some less than optimal world. This response does *not* commit Adams to the appropriateness of satisficing, as Kraay and Slote (1984: 152, nt 10) claim; it commits him only to the appropriateness of motivated submaximization.

Indeed, there is textual evidence that Adams meant to defend motivated submaximization, not satisficing. When he defends the idea that God's perfect goodness is compatible with God's making a person less happy than He could have made that person, he says:

[E]ven a perfectly good moral agent may be led, *by other considerations of sufficient weight*, to qualify his kindness or beneficence toward some person....I would suggest that the desire to create and love all of a certain group of possible creatures (assuming that all of them have satisfying lives on the whole) might be an adequate ground for a perfectly good God to create them, even if His creating *all* of them must have the result that some of them are less happy than they might otherwise have been. (1972: 322, first emphasis added, second original)

Adams doesn't say that God aims only at a good enough degree of welfare for each person or that it would be appropriate for God to do so. If anything, Adams suggests that God aims at making each person as well off as He can. He chooses the good enough for some people because there is some countervailing consideration—his love for other people—that motivates his choice for less than the best for them. Here Adams has in mind motivated submaximization, not satisficing.

Regardless of whether Adams always has motivated submaximization in mind, that's all he needs. He can say that God must aim at making the world as good as it can be and at making every creature as well off as it can be. Given such aims, there must be some competing aim or countervailing consideration that makes it appropriate to choose less than the best. Agreeing with commonsense morality, Adams allows God's special connections with certain people to justify his choice of less than the best.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For recent objections along these lines, see Rowe (2004), Wielenberg (2004), and Kierland (pgs 670-82) in Kierland and Swenson (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Strictly speaking, Adams assumes that a person's special connection to *possible* people—not just actual ones—can justify a choice for less than the best. But if special connections to actual people can justify a choice for less than the best, then so can special connections to possible people. Someone concerned about future generations might make financial decisions now that will benefit any future children of her own more than those of strangers. If the preferential treatment of one's actual children can be appropriate, why can't the preferential treatment of possible future children also be appropriate?

The other prominent objection to Best World denies that there is a best possible world and contends that God is in an Ever Better Case: every world is such that there is another better than it. Following the popular intuition in such cases, Langtry (2008: 74-8; cf. Adams 1972: 317) contends that God can appropriately choose a world that has some arbitrarily high degree of value. No matter what world God chooses, he will be rejecting better worlds.

Langtry (2008: 74-8) argues that God satisfices in Ever Better cases, but he is using the term in the first pass sense (76, 78). He holds that God's moral perfection requires Him to aim at the optimum and to choose the optimum in the absence of countervailing considerations (e.g., 72-3; 90-1). He denies that God can aim at the good enough purely for its own sake. Langtry does not assume that satisficing can be appropriate, as he, Kraay (2013: 399-400), and Dragos (2013: 425) claim. What Langtry defends is motivated submaximization: God can choose less than the optimum only when the choice is motivated by some countervailing consideration, such as there being no optimum.

#### 4. Satisficing and Gratuitous Evil

An evil is *gratuitous* when permitting an evil of that severity isn't necessary to achieve the aims or purposes God would have. Such evils drive a popular objection to theism:

P1: If God exists, there is no gratuitous evil.

P2: There are gratuitous evils.

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C: God does not exist.

Many philosophers grant P1 without argument, but van Inwagen (1988, 1991, 2006: 106-11; cf. Langtry 2008: 195-6) challenges it. On his view, there is no minimum amount of suffering that can achieve God's purposes. For every degree of evil that would achieve those purposes, permitting some lesser degree of evil would equally well achieve them. So the first premise is false. Even if van Inwagen's objection refutes this version of the argument from evil, no one, including van Inwagen, thinks his response refutes every interesting version of the argument from evil. His response applies only to those versions that assume God would actualize the *minimum* amount of evil necessary for his purposes.

Various objections have been raised against van Inwagen's argument, but we are focused solely on Kraay's (2013; 2014) complaint that van Inwagen illegitimately assumes that satisficing can be appropriate. I argue that van Inwagen is not committed to satisficing, but only to motivated submaximization.

Suppose that the legislature of a new government wants to secure the good of effectively deterring armed assault. van Inwagen holds that there is no smallest penalty for armed assault that would still have this deterrent effect: for every such penalty, there is some smaller that would still effectively deter armed assault (1991: 164, nt 11; cf. 2006: 106-7). He thinks the same applies in the case of suffering. Let's suppose that van Inwagen is right, i.e., that God (appropriately) aims at getting some good G, that God can't get G without suffering, and that there is no minimum amount of suffering needed for G. If God actualizes G and .001 units of suffering, the overall value of the world will be slightly higher than if God actualizes G and .01 units of suffering. But since there is no minimum amount of suffering needed for G, there is no best world that



God can create. Consequently, God is in an Ever Better Case: for every world God can create (with G in it), there is at least one better (cf. Kraay 2013: 402; 2014: 227). In such a case, it is plausible that God can appropriately choose a world with some arbitrarily high value. The now familiar idea is that, even though God aims at the best world He can get, the lack of an optimal world can appropriately motivate God's rejection of the better for the good enough. van Inwagen, it seems, needs only a standard sort of motivated submaximization.

Further reflection reveals that van Inwagen's Ever Better Case adds a new twist. In the original Ever Better Case, the genie varied how good your life would be. In van Inwagen's case, the good remains fixed and only the degree of suffering is adjusted. In other words, van Inwagen's Ever Better Case, is also an Ever Less Bad Case: for every degree of suffering that suffices for God's worthy purpose, there is some smaller degree of suffering that would suffice.

Does the Ever Less Bad Structure make van Inwagen's position problematic? Even if there are special reasons to prevent suffering, any plausible view will allow an agent to appropriately bring about suffering for the sake of a worthy end. But if there is no minimum amount of suffering necessary for a worthy end, the lack of a minimum is plausibly a countervailing consideration that makes it appropriate to arbitrarily choose among low degrees of suffering, just as there being no optimum is plausibly a countervailing consideration that makes it appropriate to choose less than the best. Arbitrarily choosing some low degree of suffering when one could have chosen some even smaller degree of suffering might very well be better than not choosing some degree of suffering and, thereby, to give up the worthy good.

While van Inwagen's Ever Better Case has a slightly different structure, the differences don't seem significant. van Inwagen isn't committed to the appropriateness of satisficing as Kraay and Dragos (2013) claim, but only to a much more widely held and intuitive position, namely that the lack of a best (least bad) can appropriately motivate a choice for less than the best. He never assumes that God aims purely for its own sake at the good enough or that such an aim would be appropriate.

## 5. Submaximization and Perfection

I've argued that the relevant defenses of theism are committed, not to the appropriateness of satisficing, but to the appropriateness of motivated submaximization. Since motivated submaximization is so popular and well supported in the mainstream literature, it's not a substantial cost of these defenses that they appeal to the claim that motivated submaximization can be appropriate. Yet a careful reader might have the following objection (cf. Kraay 2013: 404-5). When we turned to the philosophy of religion, we started talking about what God, a perfect being, can do. Even if one grants that submaximization (whether motivated or not) can be appropriate, it doesn't follow that submaximization can be *maximally* or *perfectly* appropriate. The only choice that is perfectly rational and perfectly moral is choosing the optimum.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Langtry (2008: 76-8) replies to something like this objection when applied to the Ever Better Cases, but his reply assumes that a choice's being required entails that it is appropriate. At the very least, the assumption needs refinement if means-end coherence can require a choice without making it appropriate. A common view is that, in the absence of countervailing considerations, one is rationally required to take

For the purposes of this paper, I don't need to show that the objection is mistaken. I'm not trying to prove that the relevant defenses of theism succeed. My goal is to show that these theistic replies aren't committed to a type of divine choice that would be a significant liability for these replies. And that's fairly easy to do.

Here it is important to treat moral and rational evaluation separately rather than lumping them together with the term 'appropriate.' Moral supererogation is often regarded as an action that is morally better than merely doing what one is required (Vallentyne 2006: 27; Hurka and Shubert 2012: 8-9). Many people, then, will require more for morally perfect choices than they will for morally permissible ones. The relevance of supererogation to the cases at hand is questionable at best. Supererogation essentially requires some sacrifice of the agent, typically understood as the agent's undergoing some suffering or foregoing some increase in well-being (Vallentyne 2006: 27). The sort of motivated submaximization in the relevant theistic defenses, however, does not involve an agent choosing between his well-being and that of someone else. I don't know of anyone in the literature who claims that submaximization motivated by the lack of an optimal option or by special connections with other people counts as a case in which one has acted morally but not morally perfectly. Indeed, it is commonly argued that our special connections with others underwrite *obligations* to favor their interests (Jollimore sec 7).

With regard to rationality, theorists tend not to distinguish between rationality and perfect rationality. Sorenson is quite explicit that "To be rational is to be perfectly rational" (2006: 216). This tendency does, however, have at least one exception.<sup>12</sup>

Slote (1989: 115-22) suggests that an action might be rational without being perfectly rational and provides "two sorts of reasons" in favor of this position (1989: 120). The first sort involves cases in which a choice exemplifies great strength of will but still some weakness of will. Such choices involve an agent's failing to choose the optimal option because *she lacks the resolve to fully live up to her values*. Whatever one wants to say about such cases, they don't apply to the relevant theistic defenses. God can't create every possible person. If God chooses to create certain people because He has a special connection with them, it doesn't follow that He fails to fully live up to his values (God does value the people He creates in a special way, after all) or that He fails to fully live up to values that perfect rationality requires Him to have. Likewise, God might aim to get as much of the good as He can, but if there is no optimum amount of the good, He is in a special context in which choosing an arbitrarily high degree of goodness counts as fully living up to His aim at the optimum. In the theological cases at issue, God's choice for less than the best is not made because of a lack of resolve or weakness of will, but because of a countervailing consideration. The first reason does not apply to the cases at issue.

Slote's second sort of reason involves Ever Better Cases. In his judgment, if I were to tell the genie I want 1 million units of welfare rather than 1 million and 1, my choice

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the means necessary to achieve one's end; but if the end is itself inappropriate, it won't be appropriate to take the required means.

<sup>12</sup> Greenspan (2009: 305) seems open to a gap between rationality and ideal rationality, but this openness is due, apparently, to appreciating certain intellectual and psychological limitations of human agents in real world situations (see, e.g., 311, 315). It's unclear whether she thinks submaximization, whether motivated or not, could be rational for an omnipotent and omniscient being.

would be rational but not perfectly so. Slote's judgment is hardly consensus. In my view, Ever Better Cases create a special context in which choosing some arbitrarily high value is ideally rational, and this judgment is widely held (e.g., Adams 1972: 317; Langtry 2008: 74-8; Pollock 1986; Schmitz 1995: 42-45, 2004: 41-4). Slote's second sort of reason is a controversial intuition about Ever Better Cases.<sup>13</sup>

I don't expect everyone to agree that motivated submaximization can be perfectly appropriate (perfectly rational and perfectly moral). It's a controversial idea. The point is that, given the current state of the mainstream literature, it is endorsed too widely and is supported too well for it to count as a liability. And, for the types of motivated submaximization at issue, it's not much more controversial than the idea that motivated submaximization can be (merely) appropriate.

### Conclusion

Philosophers tend to mistakenly attribute assumptions about satisficing to defenses of theism because the mainstream literature fails to distinguish satisficing from motivated submaximization. One submaximizes with motivation when one aims at getting as much of the good as she can but then chooses a suboptimal option because of a countervailing consideration. Satisficing is a type of *unmotivated* submaximization: one chooses a suboptimal option but not because one is motivated by a countervailing consideration. To satisfice is to aim at the good enough purely for its own sake and to choose a suboptimal option because it realizes this aim.

Kraay, Langtry, Dragos, and Slote claim that one or more defense of theism is committed to the appropriateness of satisficing. Given how poorly defended satisficing is in the mainstream literature, this would be bad news for these defenses. We saw, however, that these defenses were committed only to *motivated* submaximization. As such, they require that God aims at the optimum but allow God to choose a suboptimal option when there are countervailing considerations. It is controversial that motivated submaximization can be (perfectly) appropriate. Yet it's hard to find a substantive philosophical position that garners more support. If the worst you can say about these theistic replies is that they rely on divine motivated submaximization, then you should be optimistic about their chances of success.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it's not clear to me to what extent Slote himself accepts this interpretation of the Ever Better Cases. One of his central ideas is that choosing the best option is not necessarily the option that is most rational to choose (1989: 21-22; 2004: 29, nt 18). This central idea makes it unnecessary to say that motivated submaximization isn't perfectly rational. Also see van Roojen (2004: 157-8) who stresses that this sort of motivated submaximization needn't involve making a choice that isn't perfectly rational.

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