The Promise of a New Past
Sam Lebens and Tyron Goldschmidt

If God found this paper offensive, would it now be too late for him to make it such that it was never written? We first explore whether God can change the past; we next explore why God might want to. Our treatment is based on two Jewish traditions, according to which God can and will one day make radical changes to the past. On some ways of working the traditions out, the changes will be the elimination of past evils. This makes for a new kind of response to the problem of evil: the "Divine Proofreader Theory". On other ways of working the traditions out, the past evil isn't eliminated, but personal *responsibility* is removed. This makes for a new theory of atonement: the "Agent Substitution Theory".

In §1, we outline the two Jewish traditions. In §§2-5, we explore theories of time to accommodate the traditions. In §6, we respond to a number of objections. In §7, we draw a distinction that will help us address why God might want to change the past. In §8 we use that distinction to frame the Agent Substitution Theory. In §9 we present the Divine Proofreader Theory. Our metaphysics of time makes the case that God *can* change the past while our Divine Proofreader and Agent Substitution Theories explain why God might *want* to. In §10, we respond to some final objections.

§1 - Two Views
Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen (19th c.) argues that God will one day erase from history the sins of the truly penitent, making it such that they never occurred. We call this view: Ultimate Forgiveness (UF). R. Tzadok comments on a Talmudic prohibition against reminding a penitent person of their past sins:

> A sign of complete repentance is when [the sinner] no longer remembers his sin at all, as it is stated (B. Met. 58b), that you should not tell a penitent person, "Remember [your past deeds]". And similarly, God, may He be blessed, doesn't remind the completely penitent, and automatically [the sinner] does not remember, since all of man's powers are from God, may He be blessed --- 'Who made man's mouth?' [Exodus 4:11] --- and similarly [with regard to the powers of] intellect and memory; if God, may he be Blessed, doesn't emanate unto him, and remind him, he does not remember.[1]

R. Tzadok does not endorse nonchalance about sin, allowing sinners to ignore past wrongs. On the contrary, he insists that the forgetfulness must be bestowed by *God*, and only upon sinners who have toiled to repent. But the bystander shouldn't remind the sinner because that risks thwarting the Divine gift, should it have occurred already.[2]

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[1] See Tzidkat Hatzadik, 99

[2] God could make the sinner forget again. It's not as if that would pose a significant obstacle to God's will. But to remind a sinner of their sin still would be in conflict with God's will.

R. Tzadok continues, although now it is not clear whether he has in mind the penitent only or all sinners:

> In [the Midrash] *Tana D'bei Eliyahu Raba* (91) [we learn] that in the future the Holy One Blessed be He will say, 'I don't remember his sins, and they don't arise in my heart.' And the sages already say [in Midrash Shir Hashirim Raba 5:2] that the Holy One Blessed be He is the heart of Israel. As it says, '[God] is the rock of my heart' [Psalm 73:26]. Automatically, [the sin] also doesn't arise in the heart of the person. And this is a taste of the world to come. All the while that a person hasn't arrived to this depth of repentance, which is the goal of the perfection of atonement, he isn't at ease. And about this, King David, peace be upon him, said, 'Wash me thoroughly [from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin]. For my transgressions I know,' and a person from his own perspective needs to be such that his 'sins are constantly before' him [Psalm 51:4-5].[3]

In the end of days, *everyone* will forget certain sins since God is the source of all of our mental powers; if it is no longer present in God's mind, then it won't be present in anybody else's. Until we forget, however, it is our *duty* to remember! Thus far, the view is merely that sins are erased from *memory*, not history. UF says more: God will *ensure* that the sins didn't occur in the first place.

R. Tzadok was committed to a trenchant idealism:[4] things are only real to the extent that they exist in God's mind. According to R. Tzadok, the distinction between the creator and the created is illusory,[5] since all that exists actually exists within God's mind.[6] UF quite obviously follows from this idealism in conjunction with the view that God forgets the sins. If God doesn't remember something, then it isn't in his mind, and if it isn't in his mind, then it doesn't exist.

There are other arguments that lead from the view that God forgets sins to UF. God would not be omniscient if there were past events he had forgotten -- there would be something he wouldn't know. To secure God's omniscience *and* forgetfulness, the forgotten events need to disappear altogether. Furthermore, a key Biblical source supports UF. God says: 'I, even I, am He that erases your transgressions for my own sake; and your sins I will not remember' (Isaiah 43:25). He won't remember them because he will have erased them.

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner (19th c.), the teacher of R. Tzadok, appears to go further than his disciple: God will remove absolutely all traces of evil from the past - moral evil *and* natural evil. It will one day be the case, that nothing bad will ever have happened. We call this more strident theory: No More Evil (NME).

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[3] Ibid.

[4] For an extensive treatment, see Samuel Lebens, 'Hassidic Idealism: Kurt Vonnegut and the creator of the Universe', in Tyron Goldschmidt and Kenneth Pearce (eds), *Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

[5] Likutei Mamarim, pp. 44-45, Bar Ilan Responsa version.

[6] See Alan Brill, *Thinking God: The Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok of Lublin*, 2002, Jersey City: KTAV publishing house, especially pg. 69.

Consider R. Leiner's commentary to Genesis 2:16-17:

> In the future, when the sin of Adam will be fixed, then the verse will be rearranged [i.e. re-punctuated], "from all the trees in the garden you may surely eat and from the tree of the knowledge of good," and after that the next verse will begin, "And evil do not eat." Meaning to eat the good in the tree and not to eat the evil. The blessed God will clarify that [Adam] only ate the good, and the sin was only in His mind as insignificant as garlic peel, and no more.

This passage raises questions of interpretation. Yet on at least one plausible reading, R. Leiner espouses NME.

On a contrary reading, all that's said is that we'll one day discover that Adam didn't do anything wrong. In fact, he only ate from the good, and not from the bad. It isn't that the past will undergo some change, but merely that we'll discover something hitherto unknown. There are two reasons to reject this reading. First, if Adam had never done anything wrong, then nothing justified the millennia of punishment for the fall of man -- which is theologically and morally problematic. Secondly, when Jewish mystics use the verb 'to clarify' (in Hebrew, *levarer)*, they rarely just mean intellectual clarification. Intellectual clarification doesn't effect its object; the object merely comes to be better known. The clarification that mystics tend to refer to involves the object itself undergoing change, much like the purification of a metal - a process that changes, and also clarifies the material at hand.[7] When God is said to 'clarify' something, He's likely being said to change it in doing so.

On our reading, God returns to the original sin and *changes* it. He makes it such that it didn't happen. If that sin didn't happen, then presumably there was no fall from paradise and no punishments. God will have to go on changing the rest of the punctuation of the Torah, until it records an entirely new history, one in which humanity only ever ate from the good fruit; never from the bad.

The mystical tradition takes the Torah text itself to be constitutive of reality in some deep way. Nachmanides (13th c.) argues that every possible world correlates to a different way of ordering the letters of the Torah.[8] R. Tzadok relates, in the name of R. Leiner, that the world itself is just a book God wrote and the Torah a commentary on book; as God continues to regenerate creation He also has to regenerate the text, given the tight connection between the two.[9] If God is presented, in the end of days, as tampering with the Torah's historical narrative, then he is also presented as tampering with history itself. NME gives new significance to Isaiah's prophecy that, in the end of days, God will wipe away our tears (Isaiah 25:8): God will make it such that we never cried in the first place.

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[7] See Yoram Jacobson's 'The aspect of the "feminine" in the Lurianic Kabbalah' in Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan (eds.), *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism: 50 years after*, 1993, J. C. B. Mohr, for a discussion of clarification - Heb. *berur* - in Jewish mysticism.
[8] See the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch.
[9] See Tzidkat Hatzadik, section 216

A problem with our reading concerns the residual "garlic peel" mentioned above. The garlic peel is an allusion to the Zohar, and other mystical texts, that speak of reality having a garlic-like structure, with superficial layers covering something more substantial.[10] Perhaps it's being said that Adam's sin still leaves some sort of residue. Or perhaps all that's being said is that Adam's sin will be totally discarded, as the new past -- a past without sin -- is revealed beneath it. We'll return to the garlic peel in §3.

We now turn to the metaphysics of time. In §2, we explore the notion of hypertime. In §3 we present Hud Hudson's view. He allows God to change the past but, on his view, there is a sort of evil that God *can't* change--the evils of the *hyper-past*. We offer an amendment that moves beyond this limitation by appealing to an infinite hierarchy of timelines. However, in §4, we set out a more streamlined metaphysics of a moving spotlight theory of time. This allows us, in §5, to explain, *without* the metaphysics of hypertime, how God could change the past, leaving no trace of evil whatsoever.

§2 - Hypertime
Hudson compares five theories of time:[11]

1. Presentism is the view that only present things exist.
2. The Growing Block Theory is the view that only present and past things exist.
3. The Shrinking Block Theory is the view that only present and future things exist.
4. The Disappearing Branch Theory is the view that past, present and future things exist, and that the future 'consists of a proliferation of equally real branches that suddenly disappear as soon as time flows along any path excluding them.'[12]
5. Eternalism is the view that past, present and future things exist, 'with no additions, subtractions, or disappearing branches'.[13]

All these views, other than eternalism, take time to be changing, in terms of growth, or shrinkage, or branches falling off, or things going in and out of existence. For *change* to make sense here, there might have to be some sort of quasi-temporal dimension, external to time itself, in which time can be changing. Call that dimension 'hypertime'.[14] We can illustrate the appeal of hypertime, by focusing on the Growing Block Theory. The idea would be that the block of spacetime is such-and-such a size at hypertime 0 and is *bigger* at hypertime 1. The duration of the growth is measured in hypertime. Time grows over the course of hypertime.[15]

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[10] Garlic peel is also referred to in Jewish legal texts as setting the standard for a miniscule but still legally significant volume for a channel connecting bodies of water, See Shulchan Aruch Y. D. 201:54.
[11] Hud Hudson, *The Fall and Hypertime*, Oxford University Press, 2014
[12] *The Fall and Hypertime*, pg. 79
[13] Ibid.
[14] See J. C. C. Smart 'The River of Time', *Mind*, vol. 58 (1949), pp.483-94 and Ned Markosian 'How Fast Does Time Pass?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 61 (1993), pp. 829-44, for some doubts about the need for hypoertime. In any case, hypertenses, as we shall see, certainly have their uses. And whether or not any theory of time *requires* the existence of hypertime, if hypertime is a metaphysical and epistemic possibility, then we should investigate it for its potential to help with making sense of UF and NME.
[15] It has sometimes been argued that theories that try to make sense of an absolute and robust passage of time are bound to conflict with Einstein's theory of relativity. But see, for example, Dean Zimmerman,

Supplement English with hyper-tenses: what hyper-was the case is what is the case at earlier moments in hypertime; what hyper-is the case is what is the case at the hyper-present; what hyper-will be the case is what is the case in the hyper-future. The invocation of hyper-tenses helps make more sense of time undergoing change, and thereby allows for a more perspicuous statement of the theories:

1. Presentism is the view that only present things hyper-presently exist.
2. The Growing Block Theory is the view that over the course of hypertime, spacetime is growing. At any hypertime, the interior of the spacetime block is called 'the past', and the outermost hyperplane of spacetime, in the direction of its growth, is called 'the present'. Past things exist in the past and present things exist in the present. At no hypertime can there be said to be a future, containing future things.
3. The Shrinking Block Theory is the view that over the course of hypertime, spacetime is shrinking. At any hypertime, the interior of the spacetime block is called 'the future', and the outermost hyperplane of spacetime, in the direction of its shrinkage, is called 'the present'. Future things exist in the future and present things exist in the present. At no hypertime can there be said to be a past, containing past things.
4. The Disappearing Branch Theory is the view that, at any hypertime, past, present and future things exist, and that the future consists of a proliferation of equally real branches, some of which hyper-disappear in the next hyper-moment, as their peers hyper-become the present and, hyper-later on, the past.
5. Eternalism is the view that, at any point in hypertime, past, present and future things exist, with no additions, subtractions, or disappearing branches as hypertime progresses. From the perspective of eternity, there is no distinction between past, present, and future. All times exist unchangingly. Only from within the perspective of a given time will that time be called present, another one called past, and another future. Indeed, Eternalism generates no *prima facie* need to posit a hypertime at all. Whatever hyper-was, hyper-is and hyper-always hyper-will be.

Such theories all seem to appeal to 'additions and subtractions [that] are unfailingly uni-directional and always in increments of (at least) an entire hyperplane.'[16] Instead of a growing or shrinking block, Hudson entertains the possibility of spacetime being a *morphing block*.

It hyper-was the case, once upon a hyper-time, that the calendars on the outermost surface of spacetime all read October 14, 1066. At that hypertime, spacetime had a certain specific volume. At another hyper-time, the calendars on the outermost surface of spacetime all read April 19, 1775. At that hyper-time, spacetime has a *different* volume. Imagine that the growth of spacetime between those two hyper-moments was steady and uni-directional, just as posited by the Growing Block Theory. The volume of spacetime at the second

'The Privileged Present: Defending an 'A-theory' of Time', in Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne and Dean Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, Blackwell, 2008, pp. 211-25), Gordon Belot, 'Dust, Time, and Symmetry', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 56 (2005), pp. 255-91); and Bradford's Skow's *Objective Becoming* (Chapters 8 and 9).
[16] *The Fall and Hypertime*, pg. 81

hyper-moment will be larger than it was at the first hyper-moment, since 'the first plurality of hyperplanes have been joined by uncountably many others over the 709-year interval that separates the two occasions; *reality is growing*.'[17]

Imagine that at some later hyper-moment, hyperplanes start steadily appearing at *both* ends of the block --- time starts growing into the past, *and* into the future! Perhaps this is hyper-followed by a reversal, in which the last hyperplane of spacetime remains fixed, as more, and ever earlier, hyperplanes continue to be added to the other end: reality is hyper-now growing only in the pastward direction. Imagine then an alarming hyper-development: hyperplanes at both ends hyper-begin to disappear. This block is unpredictable. It can change, over hyper-time, in any number of ways. This block is morphing. If the growing and shrinking blocks are possibilities then it seems hard to deny that the morphing block is.

§3 - Relegating Evil to the Hyperpast
We can make use of the morphing block theory to make sense of UF and NME:

UF-Hyper: The spacetime block that is present to the hyper-present contains a past in which Gittel sinned. Gittel repents. God will thus ensure that at some point in the future (i.e., the eschaton), the spacetime block that hyper-will be present to that point in hypertime will no longer contain Gittel's sin (the event will be replaced by a sin-shaped hole in spacetime, so to speak).

NME-Hyper: The spacetime block that is present to the hyper-present contains all sorts of past evils -- both natural and moral. At some point in the hyper-future, however, the spacetime that will be present to that point in hypertime will contain a past with no evils whatsoever. It hyper-will be the case that bad things never happened.

God's hands are not tied by time's passage. That something is hyper-presently in the past doesn't mean that it hyper-always hyper-will be in the past. However, God's hands *are* tied by the passage of hypertime. Hudson himself alludes to this limitation:

> Although it does not now lie in anyone's future, perhaps some hyperday, every tear may be brushed away in the most permanent of ways, with pain and suffering not merely being a thing of the past but instead belonging only to hyperhistory.[18]

On NME-Hyper, God can remove all suffering from the past, but it will leave a hyper-permanent trace in the *hyper*-past. On UF-Hyper, Gittel's sins can be removed from her past, but not from her hyper-past. Perhaps this picture captures R. Leiner's garlic peel metaphor. Like a husk peeled from the clove, removed but not entirely destroyed,, Adam's sin will be peeled away, but it won't cease to exist entirely; it will no longer be a part of history but it will exist in hyper-history.

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[17] Ibid., pg. 82
[18] Ibid., pp. 193-4

Is an evil any less bad for existing just in the hyper-past? What real consolation does this form of NME or UF provide? We propose that God can do even better. The metaphysics of hypertime unnecessary: God can change the past, even if there's no such thing as hypertime. But before relinquishing hypertime, we investigate an extension of Hudson's theory that allows God to remove evil even from the hyper-past.

§3.1 - Heavenly Super Tasks

Imagine that robust temporal becoming (the *changing* of the present, or the *growing*, or *shrinking* of the block) requires a hypertime. By parity of reason, you might assume that *hyper*-temporal becoming (the robust passage of hyper-time, moving from the hyper-present into the hyper-future) requires a hyper-hypertime. We soon find ourself upon an infinite regress. And yet, if hypterime is a possibility, we don't see why we shouldn't extend the same status to an infinite hierarchy of timelines. An infinite regress of timelines was indeed endorsed in the once influential work of John William Dunne[19].

C. D. Broad,[20] J. C. Smart,[21] and Donald C. Williams[22] all fear that the invocation of hyper-time will lead to this regress of hypertimes. Bradford Skow thinks that the hypothesis of a hierarchy of hypertimes is no more absurd than the hypothesis of a *single* hypertime: both are 'ridiculous... I just cannot bring myself to take it seriously as a theory of the world that might well be true.'[23] The hypertime and hierarchy hypotheses also strike us as weird, but who's to say that the basic structure of reality *wouldn't* strike us as weird?

If, at hypertime 1, spacetime contains evil event E, at time *t1*, then, as we've already established, God can ensure that at hypertime 2, spacetime no longer contains E, neither at time *t1* nor at any other time. Unfortunately, E, though it has been removed from spacetime, by hypertime 2, still exists in the hyper-past. It still exists at hypertime 1, at time *t1*. We illustrate this in figure 1. As hypertime extends into the hyper-future, time itself is growing, as predicted by the growing block theory. At hypertime 0, time only contains one instant, *t0*. At hypertime 1, time has *grown*: it now contains *t0* and *t1*, but it also contains an evil event, as depicted by the circle around *t1*, at h1. At hypertime 2, God has changed the past. By the time we get to hypertime 2, there is no longer any evil in the past of *t2*, although the evil remains in the hyperpast--it remains at *t1* at *h1*.

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[19] *An Experiment with Time*, 3rd Edition, Faber and Faber, 1958.

[20] *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, Volume 2, Part 1, Cambridge University Press (1938) pg. 279

[21] 'The River of Time', pg. 484; This was one of Smart's concerns with hypertime that we alluded to in footnote Y above.

[22] 'The Myth of Passage', The Journal of Philosophy, volume 48 (1951), pg. 464
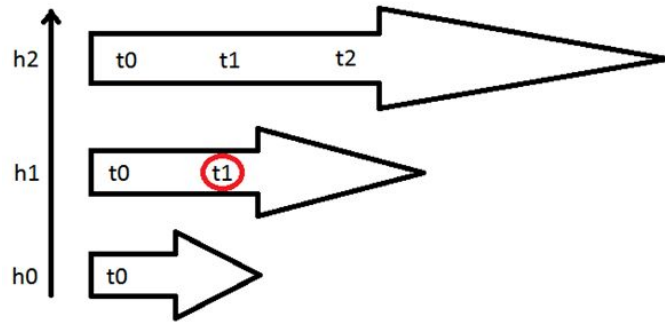
[23] Ibid., pg. 49

Figure 1

Let's now ascend to hyper-hypertime. At hyper-hypertime 0, event E exists at hypertime 1, at time *t1*, as indicated in figure 2 below. But, hypertime itself can change. At hyper-hypertime 1, God can ensure that hypertime no longer contains E, neither at hypertime 1, nor at any other hypertime. Unfortunately, E, though it *has* been removed from hypertime, still exists in the hyper-hyper-past. It still exists at hyper-hypertime 0, at hypertime 1, at time *t1*. But now it is clear what God should do: ascend to hyper-hyper-hypertime.
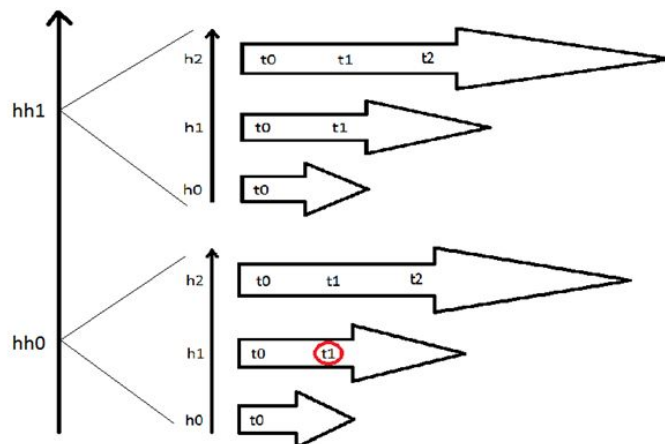

Figure 2

We propose that God can complete an infinite number of tasks, deleting all traces of E from time, hypertime, hyper-hyper time, and so on. God *can't* undertake this supertask in time, nor in any level of the hypertime hierarchy, if He wants completely to eradicate E from every level. Rather, the supertask *must* be atemporal: God acts, but not in time, nor in hypertime, nor in hyper-hypertime, etc.

The timeline that is present to hypertime 0 is the *very same timeline* that is present to hypertime 1, even if that timeline has undergone changes, just as you are the very same person at time 0 as you are at time 1, even though *you* may have undergone a number of changes.[24] Likewise, the hypertime line itself is what undergoes changes over hyper-hypertime, the hyper-hypertime line is what undergoes changes over

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[24] Whether the timeline endures through hypertime, or perdures is of no consequence for our argument, but it does seem to be essential to our argument that the timeline itself undergoes change through hypertime, and that the hypertime line undergoes change through hyper-hyper time, and so on.

hyper-hyper-hypertime, and so on. If God is atemporal, and if there exists an infinite hierarchy of timelines, allowing for each timeline to change within the timeline above it, God would have the power to remove any evil from history, leaving no trace whatsoever of it in the infinite hierarchy.

The supertask would atemporally exist, but the deleted evil wouldn't. There is no reason, besides incredulity, to deny that God could perform the supertask. However, there is reason to deny that he ever actually performs it: If God atemporally deletes all evil in a supertask, then the evil would, from our temporal point of view, already have vanished. The consequences of that atemporal action would already be manifest to us. But they are not.

We can perhaps salvage the epistemic possibility of the supertask. God's atemporal acts need not be manifest to us at all times. For example, God split the Red sea. If his act was atemporal, it only became manifest to the Israelites at the time that they needed it. In his atemporal present, He's always splitting the sea, even though *we* don't come to see that until a certain point in time. Similarly, the atemporal supertask might only become manifest to us in the eschaton, and from that point in the future, it will no longer be true that there was any evil, and it will no longer be true that there hyper-was, or hyper-hyper-was any evil.

Some will think the hierarchy of hyper-times too ontologically cumbersome. We also recognise how uncomfortable it might be to propose that the supertask won't become manifest until later on, given that the task itself is that of deleting things we're all too painfully aware of right *now*! Making sense of this sort of atemporal supertask only becoming manifest to us later on requires a sophisticated account of the way God's atemporal activity ties into our temporal experience. It's not entirely clear to us how to construct such an account. Without dismissing the hierarchy view outright, we therefore propose a second model of time that allows God to erase past evils without trace -- our *preferred* model.

§4 - The Moving Spotlight and Hyper-Presentism

We draw upon a curious feature of presentism. The presentist denies that the past and the future exist. Only the present exists. If so, then there's a problem explaining how past tense sentences can be true. Dean Zimmerman illustrates the problem with the following sentence: 'A dinosaur walked past this place 150,000,000 years ago.'[25] Imagine that the dinosaurs *did* walk past the place in question, but left no lasting trace. The opponent of presentism objects:

> Point to something in the world … that *makes it true* that a dinosaur walked past this place 150,000,000 years ago. It *is* true, but there is nothing about the way the world is now that requires that it be true or that *makes* it true; and according to you presentists, there is nothing more to the world than the way it is now. So you have no truthmakers for such straightforward truths about the past.[26]

Zimmerman answers that things can instantiate certain 'backward-looking' properties. A place, for example, can presently have the backward-looking property of having been

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[25] Dean Zimmerman, 'The Privileged Present: Defending an 'A-Theory' of Time', pg. 218
[26] Ibid.

occupied by a dinosaur 150,000,000 years ago.[27] Presently instantiated but 'backward-looking' or 'forward-looking' properties provide the resources for making sense of the past and future tense, and the truths that they can be used to express, without invoking past and future events, objects, and times.

Drawing this lesson, we can make sense of hyper-tenses, without committing ourselves to hypertimes, hyper-pasts and hyper-futures. You can be a growing block theorist about spacetime whilst being a hyper-presentist about hyper-time. If so, you can make sense of talking about the hyper-future, and the hyper-past, merely in terms of hyper-backward-looking and hyper-forward-looking properties instantiated by or in the hyper-present. We call a hyper-presentist a person who uses hyper-tenses without thinking that they need be reduced to talking about hyper-times, just as a regular presentist will use regular tenses without thinking they need be reduced to talk about times.

Consider now a theory of time we haven't yet explored: the Moving Spotlight Theory. We have noted that eternalism doesn't require hyper-tenses, since there are no hyper-changes that need to be described. For the eternalist, all times exist eternally, and times are only past, present, and future, with respect to other times; all times are unchanging. The Moving Spotlight Theory, by contrast, accepts that all times exist, but it also thinks that they undergo a *change*.

C. D. Broad, illustrated the theory in terms of a 'policeman's bull's eye', a lamp that casts a beam of light:

> We are naturally tempted to regard the history of the world as existing eternally in a certain order of events. Along this, and in a fixed direction, we imagine the characteristic of presentness as moving, somewhat like the spot of light from a policeman's bull's-eye traversing the fronts of the houses in a street. What is illuminated is the present, what has been illuminated is the past, and what has not yet been illuminated is the future.[28]

The Moving Spotlight Theory accepts that over the course of hyper-history the eternally existing times undergo change. At one hyper-moment, one time will be lit up by the spotlight of presentness, and at another hyper-moment, a different time will be lit up, and the previous present will lie in the darkness of the past. But you *can* be a Moving Spotlight Theorist without believing that hypertime *exists*. You can be a Moving Spotlight Theorist *and* a hyper-presentist.[29]

Now we illustrate the theory of time best suited to accommodate NME and UF. Let's transform Broad's policeman's bull's eye into a theatre spotlight. At any hypertime, only the actors, props and scenery in *one* region of the stage can be seen in the spotlight. The rest of the stage, populated though it is, with actors and props, and scenery, is shrouded in

[27] Ibid.
[28] C. D. Broad, *Scientific Thought*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1923, pg. 59.
[29] This combination of views is explored at length, though not adopted, by Skow, who calls it MST-Supertense; see his *Objective Becoming*.

darkness, until the spotlight makes its way along its sweep towards the future. But, who's to say that things stay still in the dark? In a slick Broadway production, while the audience is looking at the lit up regions, the stage crew, clad in dark clothes, is rearranging the furniture in the dark.

On the Moving Spotlight Theory, the past is fixed. The only changes it undergoes are changes associated with moving from the dark, into the light, and then back into the dark forever more.[30] On our *new* theory, the "Scene Changing Theory", what's past doesn't hyper-always hyper-have to be past; the stage crew can hyper-sometimes change the scenery in the dark. Our theory is also coupled with hyper-presentism. It doesn't commit us to hyper-times other than the hyper-present. To bring out some interesting features of this model, consider the following sentences.

1. It *was* the case that *p*
2. It hyper-was the case that *p was* past

Sentence 1 will be true iff *p* is true somewhere in the dark regions on the past-side of the moving spotlight. The truthmaker of 1, will therefore be the fact that the fact that *p* is hyper-presently located on the stage of time, on the past-side of the spotlight. The truthmaker of 2, on the other hand, is quite different. 2 isn't made true by the location of the fact that *p* in some place called the hyper-past. The view we're exploring doesn't believe in hyper-times. The view is hyper-presentist. Rather, the truth-maker of 2 will be the fact that the timeline itself instantiates a hyper-backward-looking property, the property of hyper-having-been-such-that-*p*-was-located-in-the-past.

§5 - Scene Changes in the Dark
We use the scene changing theory to make sense of UF and NME:

UF-Scene-Change: Gittel sinned. Gittel repented. It hyper-was the case that Gittel's sin was located on the stage (first in the region called the future, then in the spotlight, and then in the region called the past). In virtue of her repentance (or simply in virtue of the coming of the eschaton), God removes the sin from the stage of time. The stage will now only have the hyper-backward-looking property of hyper-having had Gittel sin upon it. But that sin exists nowhere. The sin has been replaced by a property.

NME-Scene-Change: As things appear to us, the stage of time contains many evils -- both natural and moral. At some point in the hyper-future, those evils will be located nowhere. It will still be true that they existed in the hyper-past, but that won't be made true by the existence of any evil

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[30] Perhaps the only thing that changes is which things are present, which are past, and which are future. But Timothy Williamson ('Existence and Contingency,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 73 (1999), pp. 181–203) argues that objects and events change not just in terms of their presentness, pastness or futureness as the spotlight moves across the series of times. He proposes that objects and events only have spatial location for the moment that they're in the light, although it remains true of them that they once occupied space.

events in some place called the hyper-past, but only by a hyper-backward looking property.

One feature of Presentism is that you can't refer *de re* to things that no longer exist, or to things that only will exist in the future. You can only speak of them *de dicto*. Hyper-presentism will inherit an analogous feature. We can't refer *de re* to events that are only in the hyper-past or the hyper-future. We can only describe them, *de dicto*. Accordingly, hyper-backward-looking and hyper-forward-looking properties can describe hyper-past evils *de dicto*, but if the evils are not hyper-present, there will be nothing to describe *de re*.

On the Scene Changing View, there are no hypertimes, let alone an infinite hierarchy. God is never forced to perform a supertask, and we don't have the problems associated with this. Instead, we can make sense of the claim that a temporal or an atemporal God changes the past, but only as of some moment in the future. The evil that God will obliterate really will disappear. Reality will be such that it hyper-used to have the evil located in the past. But once the evil is gone, it's gone. We won't even be able to refer to it *de re*. In this respect, our model allows God to erase evils without trace.

Another way of putting the point: God will be able to erase evil events without leaving a trace of *evil*. The event *will* leave some sort of mark, but not an evil one. The deleted events will be gone forever. What will remain will merely be the instantiation in the hyper-present of a hyper-backward-looking property that describes (*de dicto*) a non-existent event that hyper-used to be. To return to R Leinier's metaphor: that property, and not any actual evil *event*, is the garlic peel that's left behind.

On presentism, the world's containing past-evils is just the present instantiating certain backward-looking properties that describe evil; if past-evils are bad, then the backward-looking properties are a bad thing for the present to instantiate. But, if you're *not* a presentist about time, but only a hyper-presentist about hyper-time, then you can mark the following difference and bestow upon it a real axiological significance: (1) past evils are bad because they exist in the past; they remain there forever replaying the horror of what was[31]; (2) merely hyper-past evils are not bad at all, since they don't exist; all that exists in their place is a property that marks the fact that they hyper-used to exist.

We have encountered two models of time accommodating UF and NME. The first makes use of hypertimes, and comes in two forms: with and without a hierarchy. Each faces problems: either tying God's hands when it comes to the hyper-past, or making claims about God's atemporal actions becoming manifest to us that would be difficult to articulate. The second model makes no use of hypertimes, but only of hyper-*tenses*. This model, the Scene Changing Theory in conjunction with hyper-presentism, seems to us to be more promising. It allows God to utterly obliterate evils from the past. The conjunction of the Scene Changing Theory and hyper-presentism is, so far as we can tell, a live epistemic possibility.

§6 - Objections to the Metaphysics

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[31] Or, at least, some of the horror, depending upon how much you think things change in virtue of being past.

Before exploring why God might want to change the past, we respond to questions arising from the mere the possibility that He could.

Objection 1. God still *forgets* sins and other evils in the sense that he knew about them at an earlier time but does not know about them at a later time. Since God is essentially omniscient, God knows everything at every time, and so cannot forget anything. Even if you argue that omniscience is a doctrine that arrives on the scene in medieval thought, and never becomes an *essential* component of Jewish Orthodoxy, the Bible explicitly presents God as not forgetting sins (Amos 8:7). The liturgy of the high holy days says, 'There is no forgetting before your throne of glory, and nothing is hidden from before your eyes'. Thus the very possibility of UF and NME are incompatible with the doctrines of Orthodox Judaism.

Reply. God can forget things at a later time only if those things actually existed at some prior time. God cannot forget about something that never existed. On UF and NME, then at the later time, the evils that God will have deleted, *never existed*. Thus, on UF and NME, God does *not* forget anything. What this objection shows is that if UF and NME are true, then God is more accurately described as not *remembering* any sins or evils than as *forgetting* them: "I, even I, am he who erases your transgressions, for my sake, and your sins I will not remember." (Isaiah 43:25). And he will not remember them not because he will have *forgotten* them, but because they will never have happened. God *does* promise not to forget certain sins (Amos 8:7). Either these occasions are exceptions, where God resolves never to remove *particular* sins from the past, so that the perpetrators' punishment will be hyper-eternal, *or* God will never forget them even though he will one day delete them from history; at which point, he still won't (strictly speaking) *forget* them, because there will be nothing *to* forget.

Objection 2. The second objection is that on UF or NME God does something unjust, since sinners will not face any negative consequences for their sins; instead the sins will be eliminated and they will no longer have been sinners. The Hebrew Bible presents God as judging everybody fairly; for example, 'He will judge [all] nations with equity.' (Psalm 96:10). Therefore, UF and NME are false, if the Bible is true.

Reply. There are at least three replies to this objection. First, on UF, sins might only be deleted if the sinner was *repentant* hyper-before the change of the past. Providing that the repentance was sincere, and providing that the wrongdoer did everything that can reasonably be expected of them in order to compensate and ask forgiveness from the victims, then it doesn't go against God's nature to forgive. And what better way for God to forgive, and to rehabilitate the penitent sinner, than to make it the case that he never sinned?

Second, on NME, or versions of UF, in which God ultimately deletes *all* sins, irrespective of repentance, it could still be the case that God punishes sinners, commensurate with their sins --- *before* erasing the sins and the punishment. Adopting this strategy, God could ensure that no wrongdoing is left unpunished in the hyper-past, and also that no sins and no punishments end up existing at all.

Third, UF and NME do not undermine God's justice. Injustice can only occur if sins are left unpunished. But if God makes it the case that the sins never occurred, then there aren't any unpunished sins.

Finally, that classical Jewish theology seems to value God's mercy over his justice. The Midrash suggests that God was only able to create the world by allowing his mercy to overpower (so to speak) his justice.[32] Our liturgy sometimes urges God to allow his mercy, once again, to overpower his justice. What could be a better combination of mercy and justice than arranging, in his mercy, for the sins of the sinners never to have occurred, such that his justice won't need to be exercised at all? His justice won't need to be *overpowered* -- rather, there won't be any injustices left in history for justice to respond to.

Objection 3. The third objection is from an interpretation of the Mishnah (2nd c.), which forbids praying for a change in the past/present:

> He who beseeches over the past--behold, that is a vain prayer. How so? If his wife was pregnant, and he said, 'May it be [God's] will that my wife will give birth to a boy'--behold, that is a vain prayer. If he was along the way and heard a voice screaming in the city, and he said, 'May it be [God's] will that these are not the members of my household'--behold, that is a vain prayer. (Ber. 9:3)

You hear screaming from the distance. You pray that it isn't anyone *you* love. You're then asking for God to act upon something already in progress; someone is *already* injured. It's too late for God to intervene on your behalf. The Rabbis consider this prayer pointless, and therefore forbid it. What has already been done cannot be undone. But UF and NME require just that. No matter their Hassidic pedigree, if UF and NME are incompatible with a legally binding view of the Mishnah, then an Orthodox Jew will have to renounce them.

Reply. On Michael Dummett's reading, the Rabbis incorrectly assume that God cannot change the unfolding of an event based upon a prayer uttered after the event. But, he argues, if God has *foreknowledge* then he can act on the basis of your *future* prayer, before you utter it, and without having to change the past. Given God's foreknowledge, such a prayer *can* be eminently reasonable.[33] Dummett makes the following two assumptions:

1. The Rabbis forbade this type of prayer on the belief that God wouldn't be able to answer such prayers affirmatively, given the fixity of the past.
2. God *can* change the past, but *only* in a counterfactual sense; God would have made the past different had your prayer not occurred in the future.

Both of these assumptions are mistaken. We'll take them in reverse order. Dummett considers any non-counterfactual power over the past to be a 'logical impossibility' fraught with 'self-contradiction'.[34] He does not tell us why. We assume his concern is this. If *p* used to be the case, and then we change the past, such that *p* was never the case, then we have

[32] Bereshit Rabba 8:4-5
[33] 'Bringing About the Past', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (Jul., 1964), pp. 338-359
[34] Ibid., pg. 341

to say that two things are true: that *p* was never the case *and* that *p* used to be the case. But if it was never the case, then it can't ever have been the case! And, if it was never the case, then what was it that was *changed*? God's altering events based on his knowledge of the future, provides a *counterfactual* power over the past, but the past is never *actually* changed. The alternative, Dummett thinks, is incoherent.

However, Dummett's linguistic resources are impoverished. He lacks hyper-tenses. We can quite easily make sense of the past changing, without giving rise to contradiction. We don't have to say that *p* used to be the case *and* that it was never the case. Rather, after the change, we say that *p hyper*-was the case, but that it never *was* the case. Dummett's second assumption is false.

Dummett also likely reads too much metaphysics into the Rabbis' prohibition. Perhaps they forbade such a prayer merely because there's impiety implicit in asking God to perform certain miracles, and in asking God to perform certain acts — but not because God has no power to bring about the desired result.[35] The prayer is vain, if immoral, because, God won't take an immorally uttered prayer into consideration. The Rabbinic prohibition on such prayers might therefore be neutral on matters of metaphysics. The prohibition in question tells us nothing about Jewish attitudes towards God's temporal capabilities. Dummett's first assumption is groundless.

The metaphysics of time, even when conjoined with the distinctive doctrines of Orthodox Judaism, gives us no reason to conclude that God can't change the past. The question now becomes whether he would or should. Before turning to that, we need to draw a distinction.

§7 - Deletion and Amputation

We distinguish between two versions of UF. First, God could erase past sins, eliminating entire scenes from history, destroying the parts of spacetime where they take place -- leaving some sort of *gap* in their place. This is 'Ultimate Forgiveness - Deletion' (UF-D). Alternatively, God could leave the sins in place -- keeping scenes of history looking much as they do, as it were, from the outside -- but making it such that the sins are no longer performed by the *sinner*. God could amputate the relevant temporal part from the sinner. The sin and the temporal part are still there, but they no longer belong to the sinner, who is thus no longer a *sinner* at all. On this view, history is left without any gaps, but *people* can be left with temporal gaps in their *histories*. This is 'Ultimate Forgiveness - Amputation' (UF-A).

This distinction corresponds with two ways of reading the verse in Isaiah: 'your sins I will not remember.' According to UF-D, God won't remember them because they won't be *there* to remember. According to UF-A, God won't remember them as *your* sins, because it *will* be the case that it wasn't *you* who performed them.

The amputation can occur in two ways. First, the sin and the relevant temporal part could remain in place while no longer belonging to anyone -- the temporal part is actually no *part* of anything at all. Alternatively, if sins and temporal parts could not float freely, the sin and

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[35] See Moshe Halbertal, 'The Limits of Prayer', *Jewish Review of Books*, Summer 2010. See also Saul Smilansky, 'A Moral Problem about Prayer', *Think*, Vol. 13, No. 36 (2014), pp. 105-113.

relevant temporal part could come to be possessed by someone or something *else*. The next section identifies a number of possible candidates.

Any model of time that allows God to change the past and the hyper-past (and the hyper-hyperpast *ad infinitum*) via deletion, would also allow him to leave things as they are, physically, and merely change things metaphysically, in the past and the hyper-past (and the hyper-hyperpast *ad infinitum*) via amputations of temporal parts (and hyper-temporal parts, and hyper-hyper-temporal parts *ad infinitum*). Any model of time that can support UF-D can support UF-A

The deletion/amputation distinction does not apply to NME. NME is the elimination of absolutely all past evil. UF-A removes the sinner, but it retains the sin, as it were. On one reading of R. Tzadok's words, it only applies to sins *repented* for. Therefore, UF does not remove all evil. In contrast, NME deletes all evil -- eliminating scenes from history altogether. NME thus eliminates both the temporal part of the sinners and their sins, both the temporal part of the victim and their suffering. There can only be a deletion NME; there cannot be amputation.

§8 - The Agent Substitution Theory of Atonement
We now explain how UF-A gives rise to the *Agent Substitution Theory of atonement*. This theory has the power to explain a number of Biblical laws and Jewish customs concerning atonement, it also gestures towards an answer to the question: if God could change the past, why would He?

Perhaps God shouldn't allow temporal parts to float freely. Imagine. Gittel sins on Friday the 1st of January 2016, at 2 o'clock, for five minutes. Some time later, Gittel repents . In virtue of her repentance (or perhaps in virtue of the coming of the Messiah, even *without* her repentance), God makes it such that Gittel wasn't the agent who performed the sin. He doesn't remove the *sin*. He doesn't change history, physically, but changes it *metaphysically*. Accordingly, Gittel simply has a gap in her history for 5 minutes.

Who then was doing the sin? Some Gittel-like thing that hyper-was a temporal part of Gittel, but which isn't a temporal part of her hyper-anymore. It looks just like Gittel, it thinks it is Gittel. But it isn't. What *is* this detached temporal part, and why do we say that God really shouldn't allow it to float freely? Because it has all the properties necessary for being a person in its own right. When it hyper-was a part of Gittel, then it *wasn't* a person in its own right - we surely don't want to say that all of our people-like parts are people in their own right - that would unleash the problem of the many. But now that it's not a part of Gittel (any hyper-more), but it does have a human body, a psychology, an ability to act, and an ability to sin, it seems that we should regard this temporal part as a person in its own right. Not Gittel, because of the amputation, but *Tova* (who incorrectly thinks that she's Gittel).

Tova is created only to do the sin that Gittel hyper-*had* done. But surely it is unfair to be created only to mop up the sins of another. So, if God will have to *amputate* the temporal part from Gittel, and *attach* it to something else to prevent it from becoming a person in its own right. Thus we might escape the emergence of Tova, and her legitimate grievance.

In the preceding paragraphs, we've been talking about temporal parts of people. We note that we're not *really* committed in any *robust* way to the existence of temporal parts that can be moved about. In what follows we provide two ways of cashing out our temporal part talk, in terms of the two main theories of substance.

The two main theories of substance -- the substance-attribute theory and the bundle theory -- make for two ways of framing what happens. The substance-attribute theory posits that each substance (each thick particular) is made up of a substratum (a thin particular) and properties. If so, the temporal part becoming the part of another substance amounts to something like this: your substratum hyper-had certain properties (being sinful or vicious) during an interval; your substratum no longer exists during that interval, or it exists but no longer has those properties during the interval; and another substratum takes on those properties over the interval. This could be the substratum of some other pre-existent being -- more about potential candidates soon. In this way, the amputation of Gittel's sinful part won't have to bring about the existence of a new person.

The bundle theory posits that each substance is a bundle of compresent properties without any further substratum. If so, Gittel's temporal part leaving her and becoming the part of another substance, amounts to something like this: Gittel's bundle of properties hyper-had certain properties (being sinful or vicious) during an interval; the bundle no longer exists during that interval, or it exists but no longer has those properties during the interval; and another bundle comes to be compresent with those properties overthe interval. This could be a pre-existent bundle. In this way, the amputation of Gittel's sinful part won't have to bring about the existence of a new person.

There are at least three candidates the temporal part of Gittel could become a part of: (a) God, (b) an evil person, or (c) an entity that *isn't* a person -- on option (c), even though it's a person-like part being attached to a non-person, that part won't become a person in its own right because it goes from being merely a person-like part of a person to being a *person-like part* of a *non-person*.[36] We consider the alternatives in order.

If God attaches the sinful temporal part to himself, then the sin that Gittel hyper-did wasn't performed by Gittel at all; it was performed by God. Furthemore,if God did it then it might not be a sin at all. First, God might not have been prohibited from performing the relevant action. While it might be *e.g.* a sin for Jews to desecrate the Sabbath, this would not be a sin for God. Secondly, God might actually be performing a good deed in manifesting his mercy and benefit Gittel. Even though the sin never occurred, it will be the case, counterfactually, that had God not done the act, *Gittel* would have sinned. This true counterfactual will make for a manifestation of God's mercy. We are not forced into the theologically objectionable view that God sins.

The suggestion on the table is only *superficially* similar to a Christian theory of atonement, on which God takes on the punishment due to us for our sins. On *our* account, God himself

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[36] We're assuming here a solution to the problem of the many, such that we don't think that each temporal part of a person is a person in its own right.

performs our sins, and they thereby cease to be sins. There is no need for punishment, once the sins have been wiped away. Jewish tradition doesn't read the suffering servant passage of Isaiah (53) as referring to God, suffering in place of us.[37] But the agent substitution theory of atonement *can* make sense of the widespread Biblical talk of God's 'carrying' our sins.[38] God will carry them by performing them in our place in our hyper-future past. He will never need to be *punished* on our account because the 'sins', upon God's performing them, will no longer be sins.The agent substitution theory obviates the need for the penal substitution theory of many Christian theologians.

Alternatively, if God detaches Gittel's sinful temporal part and attaches it to an *evil* person, say Hitler, then the sin that Gittel hyper-did wasn't performed by Gittel at all; it was performed by Hitler. Part of his eternal punishment is that he's used as a cosmic mop to clean up other people's sin, and to be punished for *them* too.

How might it be just to punish a person by lumbering them with sins that they hyper-didn't commit, and then punishing them too? In the book of Esther, when the evil Haman is brought to justice, it seems as if he is being executed for his having sought to seduce Queen Esther in the King's own house. In actual fact, Haman *wasn't* trying to seduce her at all; he was begging her for mercy. It's clear that Haman was going to be punished for trying to wipe out the Jews, but it's not clear that he was to be *executed* until the King misconstrues what Haman was doing, as he had fallen upon Esther's couch.

Although the reader of the book is right to conclude that Haman is being punished for his genocidal plans, Haman also has to suffer the additional indignity of being punished for a crime of seduction he *didn't* commit. And yet there's a certain poetic *justice*. Haman was going to kill every Jew for a crime that wasn't a crime--*existing*. Thus, the poetic justice is his receiving punishment for a crime that *he* didn't commit, in addition to the crimes that he *did* commit. If Hitler is used as a cosmic mop, there would be a certain justice, despite -- in fact *because* -- of the seeming injustice.[39] Some sinners try to inflict undeserving punishment on others and thereby *deserve* punishment for things that *they* didn't do!.

On the third and final alternative, God detaches Gittel's sinful temporal part and attaches it to a non-human -- perhaps a scapegoat, or a pile of coins given to charity, or to some bread cast away into a river. In that case, the sin that Gittel hyper-did wasn't performed by Gittel at all, but was, performed by a goat, or a pile of coins, or by some crumbs of bread. Presumably, the goat won't feel hard done by, having a sinful person-like-part attached to it, since it's just a goat. *A fortiori* in the case of inanimate substitutes. The suffering that the

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[37] In the classical Jewish understanding, Isaiah is referring to the Jewish people - collectively - rather than to God.

[38] The central Biblical description of God describes him as 'merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, carrying iniquity and transgression and sin' (Exodus 34:6-7). The metaphor of God's carrying sin is widespread beyond this quote. See Baruch J. Schwartz, ''Term' or Metaphor—Biblical נשא עון/פשע/חטא' (Hebrew), Tarbiz 63 (1994): 149-71, and Baruch J. Schwartz, 'The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,' in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 3-21.

[39] Thanks to Gaby Lebens for this interpretation.

animal goes through in the sacrifice is a concern, but some within have appealed to an animal after-life as compensation.[40]

This third alternative can help make sense of a number of Jewish texts, laws and rituals concerning atonement. Nachmanides explains animal sacrifice in the following terms:

> [S]ince the deeds of man are completed in thought, word and action, God commanded that when they sin they should bring a sacrifice, place their hands upon it -- [an action] in place of the action -- verbally confess in place of the [sinful] word, and burn in fire the intestines and the kidneys, which are the seat of thought and desire, and its legs, in place of the hands and legs of a person, that performs all actions, and to sprinkle the blood over the altar, in place of the blood of the person's soul, so that the person should think, in his doing all of this, that he has sinned to his God with his body and his soul, and it would be fitting to spill his [own] blood, and burn his [own] body, were it not for the lovingkindness of the creator, who takes our offerings from us, and the sacrifice atones such that its blood should be in place of the person's blood, it's soul in place of the person's soul, and the extremities of the sacrifice in place of the extremities of the person…[41]

The goat dies on your behalf. As soon as a person has sinned, there's a sense in which he is no longer worthy of living (see Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4). When you bring a sin offering you recognise this fact. You recognise that there's some sense in which you're worthy of death, but God in his mercy allows you to put an animal in your place. How does that help? We can say that, if your sacrifice was brought in sincere contrition, then God performs an act of temporal-part amputation and substitution. God can make it the case that the goat *was* the agent who performed the sins.

Post-Biblical Judaism developed a number of further rituals that can be explained similarly. In one such ritual, Jews swing a chicken overhead and then donate it to the poor. During the ritual, they utter a prayer over it: 'This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This rooster (or hen) will go to its death, while I will enter and proceed to a good long life and to peace.'[42] UF-A allows us to take this declaration quite literally. If God finds you to be worthy of atonement, then he can make it the case that the *chicken* was the one who performed the sins that you *hyper*-performed. Some people perform the same ritual, not with a chicken, but with they will give to the poor. A person declares: 'This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This money will go to charity, while I will enter and proceed to a good long life and to peace.'[43] UF-A allows us to take this declaration quite literally. If God finds you to be worthy of atonement, God can make it the case that a person-like part of the *money* performed the sins.

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[40] Saadya Gaon, Emunot VaDeaot 3:10.
[41] Nachmanides, commentary to Leviticus 1:9.
[42] *Artscroll Machzor: Yom Kippur*, pg. 4
[43] Ibid.

One final ritual. On the Jewish New Year, people have a custom of throwing bread into the river, as a sign that they have discarded their sins. This ritual needn't be mere symbolism. If it be God's will, he can make it the case that the bread performed the sins that you are quite literally casting off.

Who should your victims be angry with, once you've received atonement? You, or crumbs of bread, or the pile of money that actually performed the sin that you hyper-once performed? The question threatens to reduce UF-A ever closer to absurdity. But, if you think that atonement only comes after real and sincere repentance, and that real and sincere repentance requires substantial efforts to ameliorate and compensate your victims, then your victims *shouldn't* be angry with you by the time that you receive atonement. Their anger would, by now, be unreasonable - as unreasonable as being angry with a pile of money for having wronged you! Alternatively, if atonement comes to everyone in the eschaton (irrespective of repentance), perhaps it's right to say that anger would be a misplaced emotion in the utopia of the eschaton, as misplaced as being angry with some crumbs of bread for having wronged you!

We have suggested three candidates for substitution -- God, some evil agent, or some non-human agent or entity. There may be Jewish rituals that are best explained by a combination of these candidates. Some classical sources identify the scapegoat used for the ritual on the day of atonement as Esau ---- playing on a shared Hebrew term for both, *Seir*. Thus both an evil person *and* a goat take on the sin - because the evil person takes on the goat who takes on the sin![44]

UF-A, with the various candidates that we have suggested for possible substitution, helps us to explain a number of perplexing Jewish rituals and texts, and provides a distinctive new theory of atonement. This theory of atonement explains why God might want to alter the past.

If you believe that God gave us free will for a reason, you might think that even could He change the past, He *wouldn't*--at least not where changing the past entails changing the ways in which we have acted. For to do so would be, retroactively, to strip us of our freedom. UF, when conditioned upon repentance, suggests a response. God allows history to unfold in accordance with the free will given us. But what happens if we come to regret what we've done? We can repent, and try to make amends. This might engender God's forgiveness. But we might want more than forgiveness. We might want to be saved from the shame of having those episodes recorded in our biographies for all to see. Saving penitent sinners from this eternal shame might be sufficient reason for God to change the past.

§9 - The Divine Proofreader

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[44] That is to say, on the substance-attribute view, the same substratum that has Esau's properties, and the properties of being a goat in a certain time and place, also has the property of having done the sins that hyper-were the sins of others. On the bundle view, all of those properties (Esau-properties, goat-properties and sin-properties) belong to the same bundle. See Nachmanides to Leviticus 16:8 and the Midrashim that he cites therein.

Our first response to why God might want to change the past is tied to UF, and and amputation or deletion being conditioned upon repentance. A broader response explains why God might want to alter the past more radically, even opting for NME.

Again, why might God want to change the past, when that comes at the risk of retroactively robbing us of freedom? It's classically maintained that God wanted to make us free. Freely performed goods are better, all things considered, than coerced goods and rightfully earned reward is cherished more than arbitrary reward. Accordingly, God creates us *free* to give us the opportunity to earn *just* reward. The problem, of course, is that we can *abuse* our freedom. According to the free will theodicy, moral evil is a price worth paying for the good of free will. This doesn't explain natural evil, and it's not at all obvious that the all moral evils are a price worth paying. Thus Stephen Maitzen objects that no good God would allow a child to experience intense suffering merely to preserve the free will of their abuser:

> To put it mildly, there's something less than perfect about letting a child suffer terribly for the primary benefit of someone else—whether for the benefit of a bystander who gets a hero's chance to intervene, or for the benefit of a child-abuser who gets to exercise unchecked free will. If you doubt the previous sentence, consider whether you would dream of letting a child you love suffer abuse in order to secure either of those benefits.[45]

But NME and UF-D allow for free will *and* ensure that, ultimately, no evil ever occurs.

God gives us free will and, so to speak, says, 'Take one'. Then we try to live our lives. We do some good, and we do some bad. All of it is of our own creation. At the end of time, God says, 'Cut'. Imagine that scenes 1 and 3 are fantastic, but that scene 2 is horrific. God cuts out scene 2. This would leave a gap. So God says, 'scene 2, take 2'. We then get another shot at linking scenes 1 and 3 together. Again, we might do good, or we might do bad. Scene 2, take 2, is of our own authorship. But God is a patient director. We can do a take 3, or 4, or however many more. By allowing evils to exist hyper-temporarily, God can have the best results of free will -- all goods will be of our own creation and all rewards will have been justly rewarded -- but eventually it will be the case that nobody will have done any bad. God can have his cake and eat it too. Even the natural evils can be removed, although we're still in need of a reason for their having hyper-occurred at all. Then again very few responses to the problem of evil can account for *all* evils; ours can, in fact, but it can't easily account for why natural evils *hyper*-happen).

God is like a proof-reader who allows us to write our own biographies, but once we're finished, he asks us to rewrite the passages that need editing. Free will might not be a worthy price to pay for evils that are *always* going to exist (we can agree with Maitzen about that). However, free will might be worth the price of *hyper-temporary* evils that will one day never have existed. Thus, God is able to give us all free will and ultimately to ensure we will never have abused it. This is the Divine Proofreader Theory.

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[45] See Stephen Maitzen's 'Atheism and the Basis of Morality', in A. W. Musschenga and Anton van Harskamp (eds.), *What Makes us Moral?*, 2013, Springer Publishing: pp. 257-269

God can change the past. According to the agent substitution theory, He might want to do so in order to save penitent people from eternal shame. According to the Divine Proofreader theory, He might want to do so in order to rid the world of evil, whilst also ensuring free will.

§10 - Objections and Replies
We have argued that God can change the past and has reason to do so. Before concluding, we respond to some objections.

Objection 1. The first objection we call the 'objection from historical coherence'. If temporal parts of sinners are deleted or amputated, then the past will become physically gappy (on UF-D or NME) or metaphysically gappy (on UF-A). The gaps are problematic for physical, metaphysical, moral, theological and even aesthetic reasons. The objection thus takes more particular forms. To illustrate the physical, metaphysical and aesthetic forms of the problem, consider an otherwise evil event that has a good effect. Once, the evil is deleted, the good will no longer be an *effect*--since it will have no cause. It will be a free-floating event. The physical problem is that the event will violate physical conservation laws; the metaphysical problem is that the event will violate the metaphysical principle of sufficient reason; and the aesthetic problem is that the historical scene is chaotic.

The metaphysical problem takes a different form depending on whether we're dealing with deletion (i.e., UF-D and NME) or with amputation (i.e. UF-A). Amputation and substitution give rise to questions about identity over time. Can people exhibit temporal gaps or will a temporal gap divide a person into *two* persons? If a goat can be grazing in a field, and simultaneously, have a human-like part committing a sin miles away, then how should we understand goat identity? And, if a person can enter a room, and be seamlessly replaced by a goat, before seamlessly slotting back in, then what becomes of the causal order? The causal order, and the principle of sufficient reason faces an even more serious threat if *deletion* occurs.

To illustrate the moral problem, consider the case where a temporal part of a sinner is deleted or amputated. Any act of kindness directed towards that sinner at that time would be undermined. For example, a preacher who hyper-once had encouraged the sinner to change his ways, will now have been preaching towards a goat, or money (on UF-A). If deletion occurs, then the preacher will turn out to have been preaching to a physical gap. Alternatively, if your theory of deletion is supplemented by the divine proofreader theory, then the whole scene might no longer occur in such a way as to provide an opportunity to preach.

On NME, kindness towards those suffering from natural evils will be undermined. For example, a nurse who hyper-once had tended to the victim of a disease will now be tending to a perfectly healthy subject, or to no one at all, or the entire scene would have been re-written. As traditional theodicies point out, some goods are inextricably connected to evils; thus with the deletion or amputation of evils there will sometimes also be less good.

To illustrate the theological, or religious problem, consider the rabbinic promises to penitent sinners such as Eliezer ben Dordia (Avodah Zarah 17a). Eliezer's life was reprehensible, but he was finally moved to repent. His repentance takes so much effort that he dies in the act of beseeching God. The Talmud (Ibid.) reports a heavenly voice declaring Eliezer's acceptance into heaven, and honours him with the title, 'Rabbi'. But, since his life was so debaucherous, if God deleted the sinful parts, almost nothing would have remained of him. How does this advantage him? Why would the tradition celebrate such death-bed penitents, if so little of their lives are destined to remain on the historical record? The Talmud (Brachot 34b) tells us that the truly penitent attain a higher place in heaven than the those who didn't sin in the first place. Why, if repentance merely renders you with a shorter life than you had before?

In sum, the first objection is this: playing with the past is going to have too much collateral damage. Most, radically, if Adam never sinned, in the hyper-future past, then we hyper won't have existed at all, since humanity hyper-will never have left Eden, and history hyper-will have taken a completely different course [source].

Reply. We reply to the particular forms of the problem in order. The physical problem of violating conservation laws is only a problem if God cannot violate laws. This is just the question of whether God can perform miracles. We take it that many of our readers will accept that God, if he exists, can perform miracles. The metaphysical problem of a violation of the principle of sufficient reason is only a problem if the principle of sufficient reason is true. We take it that many of our readers will not accept the principle of sufficient reason. The aesthetic problem is only a problem if God is always bound by aesthetic considerations. We see no reason for believing this. Whatever aesthetic reason God might have for retaining the evils can be outweighed by the moral reasons he has for removing the evils.

Besides these particular answers, there is also a general strategy that addresses the problems together. On the view developed thus far, God is, as it were, the proofreader of history. But he need not merely be a proofreader. On traditional religious views, God created and sustains the universe, and thus could be described as its author too. Free creatures might have some authorial privileges, but much might be left to God. Indeed, according to Jewish tradition, "everything is in the hands of heaven, except for fear of heaven" (B. Ber. 33b)--everything is determined by God, except our own moral choices. After deleting the evils, God might set the goods that remain into a new world history. History could thus remain physically, metaphysically and aesthetically seamless. Consider again the otherwise evil event that has a good effect. Once, the evil is deleted, the good event need not be free floating; God could create a new cause for the event, and set it in a quite reworked history.

We provided a movie director analogy above to illustrate how we might be given opportunities to freely re-enact a scene. We might now qualify this with a movie editor analogy: in some cases there might need to be a director's cut with more radical post-production edits. Sometimes you might have whole scenes that can simply be cut and re-shot; taking the action from a set start to a set conclusion, giving the actors complete freedom to improvise once more. But sometimes, as we've seen, the good and the bad are intertwined in such complex ways, or the cuts are going to render such causal and aesthetic

instability, that there's no possibility of a simple edit. God might then need to become a more heavy-handed editor.

These thoughts also begins to address the moral problem. The problem was that evils are necessary for certain goods. Once the evils are removed, the goods are removed too. Thus, the preacher no longer will have had the opportunity to help the sinner repent since the sinner will no longer have *been* be a sinner; the nurse no longer will have had the opportunity to show kindness to those suffering, since there will no longer have been any suffering. Now, however, we have proposed that God's editorial toolbox allows for some radical fixes. This might help us address the problem; we might see that the evils are not so necessary after all.

In his commentary on Exodus 32:32, R. Hayyim Ibn Attar (the *Ohr Hahayyim*, 18th c.) anticipates this kind of problem. After Israel's sin with the golden calf, Moses beseeches God: 'But now, forgive their sin,[46] and if not, please erase me from the book You are writing'. The commentators debate what Moses is referring to. According to the Ohr Hahayyim, Moses wanted to be erased from the book of remembrance -- a book in which God records our deeds and which he consults when judging us on the days of awe. But, as we've discussed in §1, to be written out of God's memory is to be written out of the past itself.

God's response to Moses (Exodus 32:33) is jarring. Moses has said that if God doesn't forgive the sinners then he wants to be erased from God's book. God's response is that only the sinners will be erased. But that seems completely to ignore Moses's ultimatum. God could have replied by accepting or rejecting the ultimatum, but to reply that he will erase only the sinners makes it seem as though he hasn't *heard* what Moses said at all. The Ohr Hahayyim responds:

> 'And if not, erase me' [Exodus 32:32]. That is to say that in the midst of that which transpired between Israel and the Holy one blessed be he, the faithful servant merited, with the merit that accrued to him in each command, and in particular, in the giving of the Torah, how much merit accrued to Moses in its coming to the people of Israel, and all is written in the book of memory before Him. And now, if [God] doesn't carry their sin, all of the merits of Moses will have to be deleted from the book, as [those merits] are written amidst the merits of Israel. And God replied, that [Moses]' words are not correct, since only the sinner himself will God delete from his book, after having written them in the book, but he who merited in the midst of it, will not lose his merit, which he merited in it, in virtue of undoing this one and his evil.

Moses wasn't issuing an ultimatum at all. He was merely raising the moral problem If God was going to write the entire Jewish people out of history, then who will Moses have lead out of slavery? What would become of Moses' acts of kindness? God's response is now appropriate. He's informing Moses that it is actually possible to edit out the bad parts of the past while holding the rest constant. We're not told how, but we're told that it's possible.

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[46] Lit: 'carry their sin'.

How is it possible? *Now* things must become speculative. For our part, at least, we can only begin to sketch such possibilities. Take, for example, the nurse who will no longer show kindness to the suffering, since there will no longer have been suffering. Something of her kindness could nevertheless be retained. She might perform the same act--at least as it is internally described--even while there is no suffering there. She might tend to a crying patient, even while there is really no suffering behind the tears. She might even tend to something like an hallucination of a crying patient. There will no longer be the kindness of actually alleviating suffering. But if what matters most are the actions --as internally described-- and the virtues these develop, then what matters most can be preserved.

This comes at some cost of deception, however. God might avoid causing the deception by changing the scene more radically. Instead of her tending to the crying patient, she could be performing a quite different action, even as internally described. But this action might build her character to the same degree--and otherwise have the same degree of moral value--as tending to the crying patient would. She might instead be tending to her garden: this could develop the virtues of care and patience--and a beautiful creation besides. She'd have to be very devoted to the garden. But the same quantity and quality of goods—or something close enough—might be realized in such a way. Alternatively, God could simply bestow the relevant virtues on the nurse, even while eliminating the events that hyper-had conferred these virtues. She will have the care and patience, even while she might not have the opportunity to manifest them. These *dispositions* may be virtue enough.

These manoeuvres might also be problematic. The nurse hyper-was responsible for the kindness of tending to the patient. But now God has coordinated what she does, or has simply bestowed the virtues on her. Is she still responsible for her actions or character? If compatibilism about free will is true, then so long as God coordinates her actions in the right way —so long as they are caused in the right way in the new scene— they will remain free. If compatibilism is not true, things become a little trickier. However, we might develop a kind of Kane-style invocation of derivative responsibility in such cases: even though the actions are now divinely coordinated, she is ultimately responsible for them because her actions are coordinated in light of how she hyper-had freely acted; even though the character trait is now divinely bestowed, she is ultimately responsible for it because it is bestowed in light of how she hyper-had freely acted.

Finally, there was the problem of repentant sinners like Eliezer ben Dordia: How do such sinners benefit by having so much of their lives deleted? There are four replies. First, Eliezer does not lose anything good or anything he values—after repentance he despises the evil parts of his life. Secondly, such an act of repentance might be sufficiently good as to make for a worthwhile life. Thirdly, God could replace Eliezer's sinful life with a different life. Fourthly, through his act of repentance he gains the world to come—overall he does not have a shorter life, but an infinitely longer life, against which all our finite lives pail in comparison.

Objection 2: Once it's the case that Gittel *didn't* actually perform the sin she hyper-once performed, will she be left with a false memory of performing it? Either way, we are left with

a problem. On the one hand, if she is left with a false memory, then the problem is that she isn't saved from the shame of remembering the sin. On the other hand, if her memory of the sin is deleted, along with everyone else's, then the problem is that there seems to be no further benefit in deleting or amputating the sin.

Reply. On the one hand, even if Gittel is left with shame from the false memories, there would still be less total evil. This would make sense if God's motive for changing the past is to reduce evil. Furthermore, God could alter Gittel's psychology so that she no longer feels shame from the memories, or God could inform Gittel that her memories are false, and thereby remove at least some of the shame from them. If Gittel is left with some residue shame, this might serve the purpose of soul-building: Gittel might thereby be more modest or less judgmental.

On the other hand, even if the memories are deleted, there is still some added benefit in deleting or amputating the sin. In the first case, after deleting the sin, there would be less total evil: the evil of the sin would have been removed. In the second case, after *transferring* the sin, there would be less total evil. The evil of the sin would have been removed, or at least reduced, depending on who or what takes on the sin. We consider our candidates --God, an evil person, a goat or a crumb-- in order.

First, if God takes on the sin, then it might no longer be a sin after all, and thus no longer evi, as explained in §8 above. Secondly, if an evil person takes on the sin, then the evil person has the opportunity to serve a good cosmic purpose. This might play a role in their ultimate redemption. And thus, the transfer of the sin to the evil person, adds value to the world. Thirdly, if the goat takes on the sin, then the badness of the sin is removed or reduced: after all, it is just a goat. Further, we get the added benefits of catharsis, so long as we have an understanding of passing the sin on to the goat. The considerations that apply to the goat seem to apply equally well to the crumb (or the chicken, or the money).

§11 - Conclusion
We have no reason to think that the promise of a new past is impossible. And we have argued that God has reason to want to change the past. We can't right now think of a better way to conclude, but perhaps in the hyper-future God will help us to have been more articulate.