# The Promise of a New Past

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If God found this paper offensive, would it now be too late for him to make it such that it was never written? Can God change the past? If he could, *would* he? Our treatment of these questions is based upon two Jewish traditions. On some ways of working them out, God will one day change the past by eliminating evil from it. 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 for certain sins is removed from the sinner. This makes for a new theory of atonement: the *Agent Substitution Theory*.

In §1, we outline the two traditions. In §§2–5, we explore theories of time in order to accommodate the traditions. In §6, we respond to a number of objections. In §7, we draw a distinction that helps 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 objections.

## 1. Two Views

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen (19th c.) argues that God will one day erase from history the sins of the 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 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 (1998: section 99).

R. Tzadok does not endorse nonchalance about sin, allowing sinners to
ignore past wrongs. 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 of forgetfulness, should it have occurred already.[1]

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

In [the Midrash] *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Rabbah* (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 the Midrash
*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:2] that the Holy One Blessed be
He is the heart of Israel. As it says, "[God] is the rock of
my heart" [Psalms 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 [Psalms* 51:4–5]. (Ibid.)

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1. 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.

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: things are real
only to the extent that they exist in God's mind (for extensive treatment,
see Lebens forthcoming). According to R. Tzadok, the distinction
between the creator and the created is illusory, since everything
actually exists within God's mind (see HaKohen 1912: 44–5; Brill 2002:
69). UF follows from this idealism in conjunction with the view that
God forgets 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 leading 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).

Consider R. Leiner's commentary to Genesis 2:16–7:

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. (1995: ad loc)

This passage raises questions of interpretation. On 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 punishment for the fall — which is theologically and morally problematic. Secondly, when Jewish mystics use the verb 'to clarify' (Heb. *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 clarifies the material at hand (see Jacobson 1993). When God is said to 'clarify' something, He's being said to change it in so doing.

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 and no punishment. God will have to go on changing the rest of the punctuation of the Torah, until it records an entirely new history.[2]

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2.  Some Hassidic masters are less interested in metaphysics than they may appear to be. For example, as Moshe Idel notes, "Like [the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism], R. Dov Baer [his most prominent disciple] did not deny the existence of the complex Lurianic theosophy, but was primarily interested in its immanence in this world and in man …" (1988: 151). They tend to take religious psychology and epistemology to be more pressing than metaphysics. In this light, Jerome Gellman contends (personal correspondence) that R. Leiner's point concerns only how sin will be perceived and experienced in the eschaton. Nevertheless, we can provide a metaphysical theory to undergird

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 arrangement of its letters and spaces (Nachmanides 2005: vol 1, introduction). R. Tzadok (1998: section 216) relates, in the name of R. Leiner, that the world itself is just a book that God wrote and the Torah a commentary on that book; as God continues to regenerate creation, He also has to regenerate the text of the Torah, given the tight connection between the two. 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.

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.[3] Perhaps it's being said that Adam's sin still leaves some 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 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 move 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

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the eschatological experiences R. Leiner describes, even if metaphysics was not his concern.

3.  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 *Shulkhan Arukh Y. D.* 201: 54.

hypertime, how God could change the past, leaving no trace of evil whatsoever.

## 2. Hypertime

Hudson (2014) compares five theories of time:

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" (2014: 79).
5. Eternalism is the view that past, present and future things exist, "with no additions, subtractions, or disappearing branches" (Ibid.)

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. This is one popular motivation for positing hypertime.[4] 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.[5]

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,

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4. See Smart (1949) and Markosian (1993) for doubts about the need for hypertime. In any case, hypertenses, as we shall see, certainly have their uses. 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 in making sense of UF and NME.

5. It has sometimes been argued that theories of an absolute and robust passage of time are bound to conflict with Einstein's theory of relativity. But see, for example, Zimmerman (2008), Belot (2005) and Skow (2015: chs. 8–9).

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.

Theories 2 and 3 appeal to "additions and subtractions [that] are unfailingly uni-directional and always in increments of (at least) an entire hyperplane" (Hudson 2014: 81). Instead of a growing or shrinking block, Hudson invites us to be more imaginative. He presents the hypothesis that spacetime is a *morphing block*.

It hyper-was the case, once upon a hypertime, that the calendars on the outermost surface of spacetime all read October 14, 1066. At that hypertime, spacetime has a certain specific volume. At another hypertime, the calendars on the outermost surface of spacetime all read April 19, 1775. At that hypertime, spacetime has a *different* volume. Imagine that the growth of spacetime between those two hyper-moments is steady and uni-directional, just as posited by the growing block theory. The volume of spacetime at the second 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*" (Ibid.: 82).

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 hypertime, in any number of ways. This block is morphing. If the growing and shrinking blocks are possibilities, then it seems that the morphing block is too.

### 3. Relegating Evil to the Hyper-Past

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. Thus Hudson:

> 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. (2014: 193–4)

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 won't cease to exist entirely; while no longer a part of history, it will exist in hyper-history.

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 better, and that the metaphysics of hypertime is unnecessary: God can change the past, even if there's no such thing as hypertime. 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 hypertime, moving from the hyper-present into the hyper-future) requires a hyper-hypertime. We find ourselves 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 endorsed in the once influential work of John William Dunne (1958).

C.D. Broad (1938: 279), J.J.C. Smart (1949: 484), and D.C. Williams (1951: 464) all fear that the invocation of hypertime will lead to this regress. 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" (2015: 49). 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 $t_1$, then, as we've already established, God can ensure that at hypertime$_2$, spacetime no longer contains E, neither at time $t_1$ 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 $t_1$. 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, $t_0$. At hypertime$_1$, time has *grown*: it now contains $t_0$ and $t_1$, but it also contains an evil event, as depicted by the circle around $t_1$, at h$_1$. 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 $t_2$, although the evil remains in the hyper-past — it remains at $t_1$ at h$_1$.
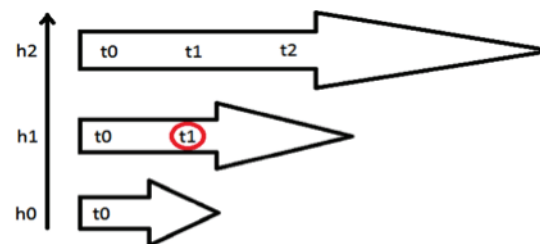


Figure 1

Let's now ascend to hyper-hypertime. At hyper-hypertime$_0$, event E exists at hypertime$_1$, at time $t_1$, 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 $t_1$. But it is clear what God should do: ascend to hyper-hyper-hypertime.
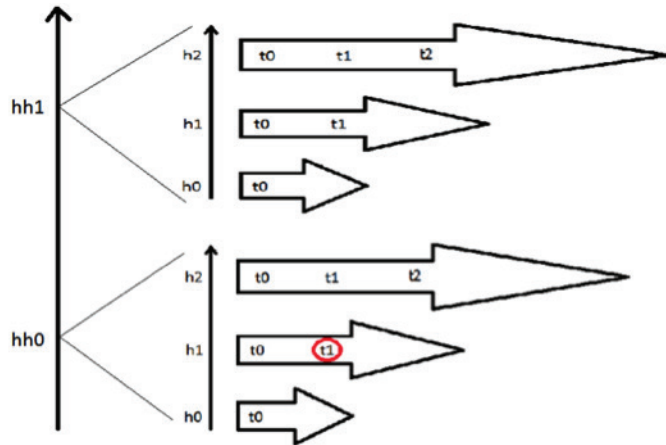


Figure 2

We propose that God can complete an infinite number of tasks, deleting all traces of E from time, hypertime, hyper-hypertime 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 $t_0$ as you are at $t_1$, even though *you* may have undergone a number of changes.[6] Likewise, the hypertimeline itself is what undergoes changes over hyper-hypertime;

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6. 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 hypertimeline undergoes change through hyper-hypertime, and so on.

the hyper-hypertimeline is what undergoes changes over 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 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 evil would, from our temporal point of view, already have vanished. The consequences of that atemporal action would already be manifest. But they are not.

Some readers might see no problem here. God performs the supertask outside of time, but its effects only become manifest to us at some point in the future. From that point onwards there will never (and hyper-never, etc.) have been any evil, even though there is evil manifest to us now. Other readers might worry. They might suppose that God's timeless actions should be manifest to us at the time of their temporal effects. For example, God split the Red Sea. Assuming his act was timeless, it still only became manifest to the Israelites at the time they needed it. In his timeless present, God is always performing the action, even though *we* don't come to see that until the time of that action's temporal effects. But the supertask has all instants of evil in our timeline and in every hypertimeline as its object. It is supposed to be affecting all of them. So God's supertask should be manifest to us wherever we are in time and hypertime, and we shouldn't ever notice any evil. But we do.[7]

If the epistemic possibility of the supertask is rejected, we will require another metaphysical model to allow for God to remove evil from the past without trace. We present this alternative model over the next two sections. If you think that God's timeless actions

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7. We're grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to clarify this concern.

needn't always become manifest to us at the time of their effects, then you're likely to think that the supertask in question is a live epistemic possibility. Notwithstanding, you might prefer the next model for its less cumbersome ontology that doesn't rely upon an infinite number of hypertimelines. Without rejecting the hierarchy view outright, the next model is presented as 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, 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" (2008: 219). Imagine that a dinosaur *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. (Ibid.)

Zimmerman provides one possible response: Things can instantiate "backward-looking" properties. A place, for example, can presently have the backward-looking property of having been occupied by a dinosaur 150,000,000 years ago. 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 and a hyper-presentist about hypertime. If so, you can make sense of talking about the hyper-past, and the hyper-future, merely in terms of hyper-backward-looking and hyper-forward-looking properties instantiated in the hyper-present. We call a "hyper-presentist" someone who uses hyper-tenses without thinking that they need be reduced to talking about hypertimes, just as a regular presentist will use regular tenses without thinking they need be reduced to talk about times.

Now consider a theory of time we haven't yet explored: the moving spotlight theory. We 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 takes them to undergo a *change*.

C.D. Broad illustrated this 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. (1923: 59)

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 (see Skow 2015: 46).

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 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 those associated with moving from the dark, into the light, and then back into the dark forevermore.[8] 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 hypertimes other than the hyper-present. To bring out some 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 hypertimes. The view is hyper-presentist.

8. Perhaps the only thing that changes is which things are present, which past and which future. But Williamson (1999) 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 have spatial location only for the moment that they're in the light, although it remains true of them that they once occupied space.

Rather, the truthmaker 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 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 that only will exist in the future. You can only speak of them *de dicto*. Hyper-presentism inherits 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 our preferred 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 a 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 mark, but not an evil one. The deleted events will be gone forever. What will remain will 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. Leiner's metaphor: that property, and not any actual evil *event*, is the garlic peel that's left behind.

We could propose an even more streamlined model to accommodate God's changing the past. Namely: bog-standard presentism as well as hyper-presentism. If you're a presentist, then God can change the past merely by changing what backward-looking properties are instantiated. But, if God really changes the past, then he must leave some trace. It must be hyper-true that the past used to be different; otherwise it won't be true that anything changed. So, if God changes the past, he does it by swapping backward-looking properties with hyper-backward-looking properties. Unfortunately, despite all of this, presentism cannot accommodate UF and NME.

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. If it's tragic for the world to instantiate certain backward-looking properties, why *isn't* it tragic for the world to instantiate otherwise identical *hyper*-backward-looking properties? But, if you're *not* a presentist about time — only a *hyper*-presentist about *hyper*time — then you can mark the following difference and bestow upon it axiological significance: (1) past evils are bad because

they exist in the past; they remain there forever replaying the horror of what was;[9] (2) merely hyper-past evils are not bad at all, since they don't exist; all that exists in *their* place is a shadow — a property that marks the fact that they hyper-used to exist. The scene-changing theory, in combination with hyper-presentism, allows God to *improve* the world by changing the past — exchanging evil events with mere properties.

But perhaps an even more streamlined model could do the trick.[10] If God wants to delete a scene from a presentist timeline, could he not simply remove the backward-looking property *without* replacing it with anything else? This model removes evil. And yet it does not — not because any evil secretly remains, but because nothing has been removed. Indeed, nothing has happened at all. For the present does not instantiate a hyper-backward-looking property to ground the claim that the past has changed. You might resign yourself to there being past (and hyper-past) truths without truthmakers — *Ostrich Temporalism*. With Zimmerman, on the other hand, *we* assume that past-tense (and, by comparison, hyper-past-tense) sentences *would* require truthmakers, namely backward- (and hyper-backward-) looking properties. Because we reject Ostrich Temporalism, we reject this maximally streamlined model. The garlic peel remains.[11]

We have encountered two models of time accommodating UF and NME. The first makes use of hypertimes, and comes in two forms: with

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

10. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer who brought this option to our attention.

11. If we reject Ostrich Temporalism, but insist that God changes the past without leaving any backward- or hyper-backward-looking trace, then once God will have made changes to the past, we won't be able to state truly that he's made them. Something will have happened, but by the time it *has* happened, there will be no way to describe it. Things are similar on the supertask view; but see the next footnote. At least on *that* view, the existence of the timeless supertask itself will ground the claim that God did *something*. On the view at hand, by contrast, we'd have something that, once it's happened, would admit of no true description whatsoever.

and without a hierarchy. Each form faces problems: either tying God's hands when it comes to the hyper-past, or making claims that might not be epistemically possible. 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 utterly to 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

Before exploring why God might *want* to change the past, we respond to questions arising from the mere 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 reads, "There is no forgetting before your throne of glory, and nothing is hidden from before your eyes" (Scherman 2007b: 510). 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, the evils that God will have deleted, once they've been 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 loose talk of God's forgetting things is more aptly put as his not *remembering* them: "your sins I will not remember" (Isaiah 43:25). 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 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 won't face 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" (Psalms 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 their 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 punishments. 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 occur only if sins are left unpunished. But if God makes it the case that the sins never occurred, then there aren't any unpunished sins.

Classical Jewish theology seems to value God's mercy over his justice. The Midrash suggests that God was able to create the world only by allowing his mercy to overpower (so to speak) his justice (Bereishit Rabbah 8: 4–5). The 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? His justice won't need to be *overpowered* — rather, thanks to God's mercy, there won't be any injustices for his 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. (Berakhot 9:3)

You hear screaming from the distance. You pray that it isn't anyone *you* love. You're then asking 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 of the Mishnah, the Rabbis incorrectly assume that God cannot change the unfolding of an event based upon a prayer uttered after the event. This seems to be the classical understanding of the text in the commentaries of Rabbi Ovadya of Bartenura, and Maimonides before him. Thus Rabbi Ovadya: "It's a vain prayer, because what has happened, has happened" (2001: ad loc), and Maimonides: "A thing which is past is a thing which is gone; whose time has come. One shouldn't pray over a matter that has already been decreed" (1962: ad loc).

Based upon this interpretation, Dummett (1964) attacks the Mishnah. 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. 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 assumptions are mistaken. We treat them in reverse order. Dummett considers any non-counterfactual power over the past to be a "logical impossibility" fraught with "self-contradiction" (1964: 341). He does not say 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 to say that two things are true: (1) that $p$ was never the case *and* (2) 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. Actual change of the past, 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 (1) $p$ used to be the case *and* (2) that it was never the case. Rather, after the change, we say that (1*) $p$ hyper-was the case, but that (2) it *was* never the case. Dummett's second assumption is false.[12]

12. The hypertime hierarchy view cannot provide a truthmaker for (1*), because it has God removing evil from the hyper-past, leaving nothing there to ground the truth of (1*). If the hierarchy view wants to avoid Dummett's

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 acts and miracles — not because God has no power to bring about the desired result.[13] The prayer is vain, if immoral, because God won't take an immorally uttered prayer into consideration. The Mishnah's prohibition on such prayers might therefore be neutral on matters of metaphysics.

If our Hassidic theories of time conflict with a Mishnah, then that would be a problem for their Orthodox pedigree. But, if the theories only conflict with a *reading* of the Mishnah put forward by certain *commentaries*, and have no bearing on how the *law* is applied, then the problem is significantly reduced. Furthermore, it's not even *certain* that R. Ovadya and Maimonides read the Mishnah as Dummett did (even if it's somewhat likely).

R. Ovadya's phrase, 'what has happened, has happened', doesn't *explicitly* entail that God can't change it. The problem might only be that it would take a miracle, and that it isn't our place to request one. The fact that the past went a certain way is, at least, *prima facie* evidence that God didn't mind it turning out that way. Maimonides, given his talk of God's "decree", might only be saying that it isn't our place to ask God to change the past since God might have wanted it to be as it was. Again, this gives us no reason to think that God *couldn't* change it.

We can read the Mishnah so as not to conflict with our theories of time. At a stretch, we can read the commentaries this way too. We *should*, and not merely to save the Orthodox pedigree of our Hassidic theories of time; we should do it to save the Mishnah and its commentaries from *Dummett's* attack, which would be quite apposite if the Mishnah's only concern were metaphysical.[14]

contradiction, it will have to adopt an Ostrich Temporalism (at least about the hyper-past). We think that this constitutes yet another reason to prefer the scene-changing model over the hypertime hierarchy.

13. Halbertal (2010) reads the Mishnah much as we do, but justifies his reading based on the wider context of the chapter in which it is found; see also Smilanksy (2014).

14. Thanks to Dov Weinstein for pressing us on the classical commentaries here.

The prohibition in question tells us nothing about Jewish attitudes towards God's temporal capabilities — nor do the classical commentaries unambiguously come down on this issue. 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*. The sin and the relevant temporal part of the sinner are still there, but they no longer belong to the sinner, who is thus no longer a *sinner* at all. The sinful temporal part would have been amputated from the "sinner". 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).

The verse in Isaiah states: "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 hyper-*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 relevant temporal part could come to be possessed by someone or something *else*. The next section identifies possible candidates.

Any model of time that allows God to change the past via deletion

would also allow him to leave things as they are, physically, and merely to change things metaphysically, via amputations of temporal parts. Any model of time that can support UF-D can support UF-A.

The deletion/amputation distinction does not apply to NME. NME eliminates the temporal part of the sinners and their sins (whereas amputation would leave the sin in place, but remove the sinner), and the temporal part of the victim and their suffering (whereas amputation alone can't obviously rid the world of victims). NME works only with deletion and not with amputation.

## 8. The Agent Substitution Theory of Atonement

Perhaps God shouldn't allow temporal parts to float freely. Imagine Gittel sins for five minutes starting at 2pm, January 1, 2016. Sometime 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 sinned. He doesn't remove the *sin* from time. He doesn't change history, physically, but changes it *metaphysically*. Accordingly, Gittel simply has a gap in her history for five 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?

When it hyper-was a part of Gittel, this temporal part 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.

Alternatively, we might deny that Tova is a person or enough like a person to sin — after all she's just an excised slice of a person, and might be thought to lack sufficiently rich properties to count as a person or as enough like a person to sin.[15] If so, we can deny that there *is* any sin once the part has been cut out. No sin is left to be mopped up. Instead, God leaves, in the wake of his past-changing activities, a trail of detached temporal parts that are unable to sin.

If we deny that Tova is a person or person-like enough, we bypass some of the problems to follow. But it is important to make sense of our view on the assumption that Tova *is* a person, or at least enough like a person to sin, and to be wrongfully treated as a mop for Gittel's wrongdoing. After all, why *deny* that she's a person or person-like enough? What properties of a person does she lack such that she cannot play the part of a sinner in Gittel's place? If she's not a person, for lack of sufficiently rich properties, is a *child* to be counted as a person? You might think that this question undermines our point, since even though children are people, on many accounts they can't sin until they reach a certain age. But Tova isn't childlike in *that* respect. She has adult sensibilities, skills, and knowledge — all of the properties that children are said to lack, exonerating them from sin. Our invocation of children is merely supposed to illustrate that short temporal extension doesn't undermine personhood.

In what follows, if only for the sake of argument, we assume that Tova would be a person in her own right, or person-like enough to be wronged if created as a mop. Accordingly, God will have to amputate the temporal part from Gittel, and *attach* it to something else, in order to prevent it from becoming a person or sufficiently person-like. Only in this way might we escape the emergence of Tova, and her legitimate grievance.

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

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15. This option was suggested by an anonymous reviewer.

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*.[16] 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. Furthermore, 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 so benefitting Gittel. Even though the sin never occurred, since, when God did it, it wasn't a sin, it will still 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 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.[17] But the Agent Substitution Theory of atonement *can* make sense of the widespread Biblical talk of God's "carrying" our sins.[18] 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. This Agent Substitution Theory obviates the need for the penal substitution theory of many Christian theologians.

Alternatively, if God detaches Gittel's sinful 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 sins, 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 for those new sins 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 going 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 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 he didn't commit, in addition to the crimes 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.[19] Some sinners try to inflict undeserved punishment on others, and perhaps they thereby *deserve* punishment for things that *they* didn't do.

On the third and final alternative, God detaches Gittel's sinful part and attaches it to a non-human — perhaps a goat, or a pile of coins, or

16. 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.

17. In the classical Jewish understanding, Isaiah is referring to the Jewish people — collectively — rather than to God.

18. 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 Schwartz (1994; 1995). The metaphor could be cashed out in terms of God's carrying the metaphysical stain of our sin, removing that stain from our souls. But we're not sure what such a stain could be.

19. Thanks to Gaby Lebens for this interpretation.

some bread crumbs. 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 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.

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, its soul in place of the person's soul, and the extremities of the sacrifice in place of the extremities of the person…. (Nachmanides 2005: vol 3, Leviticus 1:9)

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*? Perhaps, if your sacrifice was brought in sincere contrition, God might perform an act of amputation and substitution. God can

make it the case that the *goat* was the agent who performed the sins. The suffering that the animal goes through in the sacrifice is a concern, but some within the Jewish tradition, such as Saadya Gaon (10th c.; 1976: 3.10) have appealed to an animal afterlife as compensation.

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" (Scherman 2007a: 4). 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 money that 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" (Ibid.). 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 your hyper-past sins.

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 comes only 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 them! 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 us!

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![20]

The discussion above has proceeded in terms of temporal parts. But we aim for more metaphysical neutrality: we need not be committed to the existence of temporal parts that can be moved about. We can make sense of God's cutting and pasting project without necessarily adopting a temporal-parts ontology — and in terms of two main theories of the nature of substance.

First, the substance-attribute theory posits that each substance (each thick particular) is made up of a substratum (a thin particular) and properties. We can then make do without temporal parts as follows: a substratum hyper-had certain properties (being sinful or vicious) during an interval; the 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 that interval.

Second, the bundle theory posits that each substance is a bundle of compresent properties without any further substratum. We can then

make do without temporal parts as follows: a subject is a bundle of properties; it 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 over that interval.

Instead of amputating a temporal part of Gittel and attaching it to something else, properties could be amputated and attached to some other substratum or bundle — that of either God, an evil person or some non-person.[21] Along these lines, the reader can make the relevant adjustments — deletions and amputations, if we may — to the account presented above.[22]

There was the problem that God shouldn't leave amputated temporal parts free-floating, in case this brings about a new person or person-like being — who could be wronged if created only as a cosmic mop. Now the problem is that God shouldn't amputate properties and attach them to a newly created substratum, or make them into their own bundle, because doing so would create a new person or person-like being. If God detaches a person-like collection of properties from a person, and doesn't want to get rid of them entirely, it seems that he should attach them to something or somebody else. In this way, once you accept that God can change the past, you don't need to adopt a temporal-parts ontology to make sense of amputation of sin (UF-A) or of the Agent Substitution Theory of atonement.[23]

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20. See Nachmanides (2005: vol 3, Leviticus 16:8) and the Midrashim that he cites therein. Nachmanides talks about some sort of burden transferred from the person onto the goat. The burden might be something like the metaphysical stain of sin. But we're not sure what that means. Accordingly, we suggest that what is transferred is the temporal part that did the sin, and thus the property of actually having done the sin in the first place, even if Nachmanides wouldn't have thought in these terms.

21. The most complex example of agent substitution is the view that Esau takes on the temporal parts of the goats that took on the temporal parts of us sinning (a view we attribute to Nachmanides—see the previous footnote). On the substratum theory, this translates into the view that 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 theory, all of those properties (Esau-properties, goat-properties and sin-properties) belong to the same bundle.

22. We're grateful to an anonymous reviewer for having us clarify the role of these theories in our overall scheme.

23. There are other models—some wedded to a temporal-parts ontology, and some not—for amputation and substitution that we don't explore in this paper.

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 to 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 (including ourselves) to (continue to) see. Saving penitent sinners

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Some of them have a historical pedigree. Duns Scotus develops a metaphysics of substance and property to account for the possibility of the incarnation. This metaphysics allows for the possibility of "alien supposits"; see McCord Adams (2006: ch 5). McCord Adams assured us (in correspondence) that the notion of an alien supposit would allow for amputation, by which a goat, say, could come to *alien supposit* the properties that used to belong to a sinful human being; even those properties that wouldn't naturally be had by a goat. Scotus's view is that only in the incarnation does alien supposition occur. The Jewish view, by contrast, would be that it didn't occur where Scotus thought it did, but might occur much more often than he thought nonetheless.

Chisholm (1976: Appendix A) sets out Jonathan Edward's account of how God might justly impute to us the sin of Adam via the doctrines of temporal parts and "of truth by divine convention": When God contemplates the temporal parts of objects at different times as one, they thereby come to compose one thing. Thus: "God could regard temporally scattered individuals—you this year, me last year, and the Vice-President the year before that—as comprising a single individual. And then he could justly punish you this year and me last year for the sins that the Vice-President committed the year before that" (1976: 139). This is one way of understanding how substitution works, and it might provide one way to understand how amputation works too. Amputation might draw on the "doctrine of truth by divine convention" in the opposite direction of Edwards: God could cease to treat the relevant temporal part as a part of the sinner.

from this eternal shame might be sufficient reason for God to change the past.

## 9. The Divine Proofreader

Our first response to why God might want to change the past is tied to UF, and to 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.

Why might God want to change the past, when that comes at the risk of retroactively robbing us of our 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 (see Luzzatto 1982: 17–19; see also Rasmussen 2013). 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. 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. (2013: 259)

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 actually *can*, but it can't easily account for why *natural* evils *hyper*-happen.

God is like a proofreader 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.

## 10. Objections and Replies

We have argued that God can change the past and has reason to do so. According to UF, 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. 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, at least

when unadorned by the Divine Proofreader Theory, or when that theory fails, for one reason or another) or metaphysically gappy (on UF-A). These 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 rendered random and chaotic.

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. Alternatively, the entire scene would have been rewritten. 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 is reprehensible, but he is 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 had 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 (Berakhot 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 (see Luzzatto 1997: I.3.5–9).

**Reply.** We reply to the particular forms of the problem in order. The physical problem of violating conservation laws is a problem only 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 a problem only if the principle of sufficient reason is true. We take it that many of our readers will not accept the principle of sufficient reason.[24] The

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24. Amputation and substitution give rise to further metaphysical problems about spatially and temporally scattered objects. For an example of spatial scatter: a goat could be grazing in a field outside Jerusalem and simultaneously have a human-like part committing a sin in Rome. For an example of temporal scatter: a human could, upon sinning, suddenly cease to exist, only to subsequently suddenly return to the scene. The objection contends that such gaps are impossible. However, we have no plausible theories of synchronic or diachronic composition that would rule out spatial or temporal scatter — not least because we have no plausible theories of composition. Certain theories would indeed have spatial scatter impossible; but such theories are false (see van Inwagen 1990: chs. 3, 6–7). Objects often *do* have spatially distant and disconnected parts: consider a bee colony or a solar system. Objects would also seem to have temporal gaps: consider disassembling and reassembling a ship — plausibly the same ship goes out of and later comes back into existence. Certain theories of personal identity must allow for temporal gaps

aesthetic problem is a problem only 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. First, we have to recognise that sometimes proofreading won't be sufficient to fill in the gaps. We initially provided a movie director analogy to illustrate the Divine Proofreader Theory. In simple cases of Divine Proofreading, you might have whole scenes that can simply be cut and reshot, 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 reshoot. God might then need to become a more heavy-handed editor.

On traditional religious views, God created and sustains the universe, and thus could be described not merely as its proofreader, but as its lead 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 the fear of heaven" (Berakhot 33b) — everything is determined by God, except for our own moral choices. After deleting certain heavily embedded evils, God himself might set the goods that remain into a new world history. History could thus remain physically, metaphysically and aesthetically seamless, even in the wake of the most intricate and involved edits.

These thoughts begin 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* a sinner; the nurse no longer will have had the opportunity to show kindness to those suffering, since there will

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in persons: for example, a psychological continuity theory must allow for a temporal gap in the case of a temporary coma.

no longer have been any suffering. Now, however, we have proposed that God's editorial toolbox allows for some radical fixes.

In his commentary on Exodus 32:32, R. Hayyim Ibn Attar (the *Or HaHayyim*, 18th c.) anticipates this kind of problem. After Israel's sin with the golden calf, Moses beseeches God: "But now, forgive [lit. carry] their sin, and if not, please erase me from the book You are writing." The commentators debate which book Moses is referring to. According to the Or 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. This 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 Or 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. (1995: ad loc)

Moses wasn't issuing an ultimatum at all. He was merely raising our moral problem. If God was going to write the entire Jewish people out of history, then who will Moses have led 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 — however tightly intertwined the bad and good might be. We're not told how, but we're told that it's possible.

*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 the cost of some deception, however, and ties us to a particular moral theory. God might avoid causing the deception, and allow for the agent's actions to have real-world effect, 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 give rise to 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 now have the care and patience, even while she might not have the opportunity to manifest them. These *dispositions* may be virtue enough.

These maneuvers of heavy-handed editing might 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? The nurse wasn't given a chance to reshoot scenes, improvising each take as she saw fit. In cases of heavy-handed editing, where does the freedom go?

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 (compare Kane 1998: ch. 5). With such tools at his disposal, God can ensure that humanity never fell from Eden *and* that each of us came to exist and came freely to perform the same sorts of goods that we hyper-originally performed.[25]

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 pale in comparison.

**Objection 2.** How many retakes of history will humanity require to get things right from start to finish? Perhaps we might suffer from trans-hypertime-depravity (compare Plantinga 1974: 188): perhaps we never hyper-will get everything right.[26] The immediate answer is that the opportunity to reshoot scenes increases the *odds* of our getting everything right. The odds hyper-will converge on certainty as the sequence of retakes approaches infinity. Then the objection is that near-certain odds still are not good enough. Maizen might contend that the disutility of gratuitous suffering is so high that no odds can justify the gamble.

**Reply.** Even in the face of the objection, the Divine Proofreader Theory is an improvement on the free-will theodicy. Even if the endless sequence of reshoots *doesn't* end up removing all evil, it will almost certainly reduce the amount. So God will be trading *less* evil for freedom than on the traditional free-will theodicy. That might not satisfy Maitzen. Accordingly, we have two ways to respond to the objection.

First, the objection operates under a problematic assumption. It assumes that the Divine Proofreader Theory only increases the *likelihood* of removing all suffering. But perhaps the theory can do more. As the number of reshoots approaches infinity, the chance of a history without evil converges on 1. We have already countenanced God performing supertasks. So could God complete an infinite number of retakes? If so, instead of a mere increased likelihood of a history without evil, there will be certainty. There will be no gamble. Free will might not be worth the price of hyper-eternal suffering. But if

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25. The task is made easier once one denies origins essentialism — which is easy enough (see Ahmed 2007: 45–8).

26. This concern was brought to our attention by an anonymous reviewer.

God *completes* an infinite series of retakes, then he can guarantee that no evil will be hyper-eternal. All evil will certainly be hyper-*temporary*, and one day hyper-will have never happened at all.

There might be a worry that, even if God can complete an infinite series of retakes, we — his human actors — cannot. Perhaps this problem is obviated if there's some sense in which all of the takes happen simultaneously. Exploring this will take us too far afield, so, instead, we offer an alternative response to the objection which is likely less metaphysically contentious. Our reply to Objection 1 conceded that proofreading might not always work, and that God may some(hyper)times have to combine proofreading with somewhat heavier-duty editing techniques — techniques which can preserve the goods of the hyper-past, alongside a Kane-style derivative freedom, while removing even the most trenchant evils. Accordingly, our second response to Objection 2 is that God can switch to heavier-handed editorial techniques where he concludes that a series of retakes is not eventually going to remove a certain evil episode.

This reply to Objection 2 is even more robust if God has a kind of middle knowledge. If middle knowledge is knowledge of true counterfactuals about how agents would freely act, then hyper-middle knowledge would be knowledge of true counterfactuals about how they would freely act in all possible futures, hyper-futures and hyper-hyper-futures, *ad infinitum*. Hyper-middle knowledge provides God with knowledge of what free agents hyper-would do.

God would then know when to give us multiple opportunities to retake our mistaken scenes, and when this would be futile — at which point he would opt for a stronger editorial option. We can't enter into the question of foreknowledge, hyper-foreknowledge, middle knowledge or hyper-middle knowledge in this paper, and our reply to the objection can remain neutral on these topics. Wherever possible, God will want to remove evil through proofreading alone. After all, it is a characteristic of God, in the Jewish tradition (canonically in the book of Jonah), to want to maximize our chances of getting things right on our own, and simple libertarian freedom might be thought to

be more valuable than Kane-style derivative freedom. Yet God doesn't *have* to rely on proofreading.

If God has hyper-middle knowledge, he will know when to move on to something more heavy-duty than proofreading.[27] Without such knowledge, the decision to abandon proofreading after *n* takes, rather than after *n*+1 takes, will be arbitrary. But we can trust God to make an arbitrary decision rather than to gamble with hyper-permanent evil. God has the power to render any evil hyper-temporary, and to make it such that it never occurred. Our freedom hyper-will not have come at any price at all.

**Objection 3**. 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.** Even if Gittel is left with shame from false memories, there would still be less total evil in virtue of God's changing the past. This would make sense if God's motive for changing the past is to reduce evil. Alternatively, God could alter Gittel's psychology so that she no longer feels shame from false memories. Furthermore, even if God's motive for changing the past really is shame reduction, he could merely inform Gittel that her memories are hyper-now false, and thereby remove at least *some* of the shame from them. Even if shame reduction is the main reason for God changing the past, leaving Gittel with some residue shame might serve the additional purpose of soul-building: Gittel might thereby be more modest or less judgmental.

Even if the relevant memories are deleted, there is still some added benefit in deleting or amputating the sin. In the first case, after deleting

27. We're grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that hyper-foreknowledge might not be up to the task, and for recommending a kind of middle knowledge.

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. In addition to their having been forgotten, 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 evil, 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. The considerations that apply to the goat seem to apply equally well to the crumb (or the chicken, or the money).

In short, shame removal wouldn't be God's *only* motive for changing the past, via deletion or amputation. Even if God's changing the past leaves us with no memories of how things hyper-used to be, his changing the past would still secure more good than his merely changing our memories would have done. In changing the past, God can simultaneously affect both shame and evil reduction.

## 11. Conclusion

We have no reason to think that the promise of a new past is impossible. 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.[28]

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