The Problem of Evil

Eight Views in Dialogue

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N. N. Trakakis

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Introduction

1. The State of Play: The Problem of Evil Today

The 'problem of evil'—whether conceived broadly as the challenge of reconciling evil and imperfection with a commitment to ultimate justice, goodness, or harmony in the universe, or more narrowly in (say) theistic terms as the problem of reconciling the existence of an absolutely perfect being with the existence of sin and suffering—has a long and venerable history, exercising some of the finest minds from ancient to modern times. However, as will be discussed below, in recent philosophy of religion the debate seems to have reached a stalemate, where opposing camps rehearse tired and familiar lines of argument that remain singularly unconvincing to one another, giving the entire debate the character of what Imre Lakatos called a 'degenerating research program'. In reaction to this, signs have begun to emerge that the problem of evil and the discipline at large are on the cusp of a breakthrough that promises to bring to the forefront a series of imaginative, suggestive, and innovative, though unfortunately neglected, approaches to the nature of divinity and its relationship to evil. The present collection of dialogical essays is put forward as a contribution to this renewal.

Here I will outline two ways in which this nascent movement is manifesting itself in work on the problem of evil: metaphysically, and metaphilosophically. But before I do so, it will help to say something about the *status quaestionis*, specifically about the standard ways in which the problem of evil is understood and answered in contemporary philosophical discussions within analytic (Anglo-American) philosophy of religion.

To begin with, the standard approach conceives of God in a very particular way—call it *Standard Theism* (ST). ST is taken to accurately, albeit not exhaustively, reflect the variety of monotheism that is widely shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Specifically, ST holds that there exists just one God, that this God is a person or person-like, and that whatever else God is like God must be a proper object of worship (or object of 'ultimate concern', in Paul Tillich's phrase). But if God is to be worthy of worship and unconditional commitment, it is arguably the case that God must be *perfect*, where to be perfect is to be *the greatest being possible* or, to borrow Anselm's well-known phrase, *the being than which none greater can be conceived*. This minimal conception of divinity forms only the starting point in what has come to be known as 'perfect being theology' (Morris 1987, 1991; Rogers 2000). On this view, one begins with the idea of

God as maximally great or absolutely perfect, and then from this conception of deity one deduces all of God's core or essential attributes—i.e., those attributes which are constitutive of God's nature, so that he could not at the same time exist and lack any of these attributes. What these 'great-making' attributes are, or how precisely they are to be understood, remains open to debate, but a consensus has developed that God, as an absolutely perfect being, would possess some or all of the following properties as essential or intrinsic to his nature and being: *omnipotence* (God has the capacity to bring about any state of affairs that is logically possible in itself as well as logically consistent with his other essential attributes), *omniscience* (God knows all truths or knows all that it is logically possible to know), *perfect goodness* (God is the source of moral norms, or always acts in complete accordance with moral norms), *aseity* (God is ontologically independent, for he does not depend either for his existence or for his characteristics on anything outside himself), *incorporeality* (God has no body, he is a non-physical spirit), *eternity* (God is timeless, or is everlasting in having infinite temporal duration), *omnipresence* (God is wholly present in all space and time), and *perfectly free* (either in the sense that nothing outside God can determine his actions, or in the sense that it is always within his power not to do what he does). ST typically adds that God is the sole *creator and sustainer of the world*, though this is an attribute God is said to possess only contingently (given that he was free not to create a world).

The next stage in the standard approach to the problem of evil is to define this problem as a certain kind of challenge to ST: evil is conceptualized as a problem insofar as it casts doubt on, or undermines belief in, ST in specific ways. To formulate the problem of evil in this fashion is already to express it as a primarily intellectual and theoretical matter, as distinct from an experiential or existential concern. Accordingly, a distinction is now commonly made between two forms of the problem of evil, only one of which is taken to be the sole or principal concern of the professional philosopher. Firstly, there is the *experiential* problem of evil. Although variously interpreted, this form of the problem speaks to the practical and personal difficulties that issue from our knowledge and experience of suffering and evil. Such difficulties may consist in the concrete challenges of working, from within a religious community, to combat and eradicate injustice and inequality in one's society; or they may be conceived more personally as the difficulty of adopting or maintaining an attitude of love and trust towards God when confronted by evil that is deeply perplexing and disturbing. Alvin Plantinga expresses this latter predicament well:

> The theist may find a *religious* problem in evil; in the presence of his own suffering or that of someone near to him he may find it difficult to maintain what he takes to be the proper attitude towards God. Faced with great personal suffering or misfortune, he may be tempted to rebel against God, to shake his fist in God's face, or even to give up belief in God altogether . . . Such a problem calls, not for philosophical enlightenment, but for pastoral care.
>
> (1977: 63–4, emphasis in original)

Secondly, and by contrast, there is the *theoretical* problem of evil, which is the purely intellectual exercise of determining what impact, if any, the existence of evil has on the

truth-value or epistemic status of belief in ST. It is this latter version of the problem of evil that philosophers of religion address, to the exclusion of the practical problem, which they regard as the province of priests, social workers, and health professionals.

The theoretical problem is further subdivided into two broad categories: the logical (or deductive, *a priori*) problem of evil, and the evidential (or inductive, *a posteriori*) problem of evil. The logical problem consists in removing an alleged logical inconsistency between certain claims made by ST and certain claims made about evil (e.g., that the existence of the God of ST is logically incompatible with the existence of certain kinds of evil). The evidential problem, on the other hand, takes it as given that the question of logical consistency has been or can be settled, and focuses instead on relations of evidential support, probability, and plausibility: the question here is whether the existence of evil, although logically consistent with the existence of God, counts against the truth of ST insofar as evil lowers the probability that ST is true.

Although some, led by the Australian pair J. L. Mackie (1955) and H. J. McCloskey (1960, 1974), boldly took on the logical problem of evil and sought to demonstrate the comparatively strong thesis that God and evil cannot possibly co-exist, it has now been supposed for some time that such attempts are unlikely to succeed, or at least that they fail to get to the heart of the difficulty that constitutes the problem of evil. This is a difficulty that relates to our ability to explain and make sense of our world, as opposed to formal questions of internal or logical consistency. One of the major turning points that led philosophers of religion to make the transition from the logical to the evidential problem was William Rowe's (1979) seminal defence of atheism on the basis of an intuitively appealing argument that was crucially predicated on the inductive step that, given the countless instances of apparently pointless suffering found in the world, it is highly likely that at least some of these are in fact instances of pointless suffering.

As attention shifted to the evidential problem, two theistic responses took up much of the discussion. One response involved the construction of *theodicies*, this being the project of vindicating the justice or goodness of God by offering plausible explanations as to why God allows evil to abound in his creation. A multitude of theodicies have been developed, from John Hick's (1966) 'soul-making' theory (where suffering and setbacks are viewed as necessary for the development of virtue and character), to theodicies that make appeal to the value of human free will, and theodicies that take at least certain kinds of 'evil' (e.g., natural disasters) that befall humans and animals as the unavoidable by-product of the outworking of the natural laws governing God's creation. Just as theodicies are legion, so too are criticisms of them (paralleling the 'proofs' of God's existence). One could question, for example, whether the value of free will is great enough to offset such terrible evils as war, genocide, and sexual abuse.

In the face of such criticisms, the discussion gradually moved towards a different answer to the problem of evil, one that has come to be known as *skeptical theism*. This is the view that the limitations of the human mind are such that we are in no position to be able to discern God's reasons for permitting evil—and hence, the fact that we cannot identify such reasons should not surprise us and should not count against the truth of ST. As one of the original proponents of this position, Alvin Plantinga, has asked, in

rhetorical fashion: "Why suppose that if God *does* have a reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know?" (1977: 10, emphasis in original). Despite an initial degree of plausibility, the skeptical theist view has often struck critics as a last-ditch attempt to save face. Furthermore, skeptical theism has been criticized as opening the door to more radical and therefore more troublesome forms of skepticism (e.g., Almeida and Oppy 2003, Dougherty and McBrayer 2014).

In looking back over this debate, it can easily seem that the discussion has not progressed far since Rowe's 1979 paper. Some defenders of ST continue to attempt to cover up lacunae in traditional theodicies, while an increasing number have given up such attempts, preferring instead to simply defer to the inscrutability of God's ways. Opponents of ST, on the other hand, remain unconvinced by such appeals to the providential plans of God, whether these plans are knowable by us or not. Admittedly, deep disagreement of this sort is a common feature of philosophical debate, and it does not necessarily evince a lack of progress or a permanent impasse. Nonetheless, a mounting sense of frustration has become discernible, both within and beyond the philosophy of religion, over the current state of the debate. Michael Levine (2015: 340), for example, has noted that "instead of progress, insight or innovation, there has been backsliding, repetition, and obfuscation." Levine pessimistically concludes:

> Evil remains religiously and existentially problematic. For the religious, it should at times test faith along with an understanding of scripture. As an intellectual problem, however, it has been exhausted and resolved. Reiteration after reiteration; old wine in still old or slightly newer bottles, does not constitute philosophical advance. Become a student of the problem of evil if you must, but all you will find are anachronisms, alongside a new generation of apologists digging in their heels. (353)

But even if, as Levine with some plausibility contends, the discussion has become petrified into a select number of entrenched and defensive strategies, this need not lead us to conclude that the problem of evil is now 'dead', but might instead compel us to creatively rethink and redirect the discussion. We could, indeed, come to think the time ripe for a wholesale reconsideration of the problem of evil, where this involves reviewing, if not overthrowing, the parameters and presuppositions that often constrain the debates. Two ways in which this might be effected, as suggested also by contributors to this volume, will briefly be outlined.

2. Opening I: Reconceptualizing Divinity

The first possibility, or way of 'opening' up the debate around the problem of evil to new or neglected ways of thinking, has been foreshadowed by another recent Oxford University Press volume in philosophy of religion: Andrei Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa's edited collection, *Alternative Concepts of God* (2016). Buckareff and Nagasawa have commendably assembled a series of fascinating explorations of alternatives to classical theism "in the pursuit," as they put it, "of a more global perspective in the philosophy of

religion." They immediately add: "If we go global, we quickly discover that there are conceptions of divine or ultimate reality developed in various cultures that differ in significant ways from the received view we get from orthodox theology in the Abrahamic religions." (4) Buckareff and Nagasawa therefore invited a diverse range of philosophers of religion to present and defend alternatives to the Abrahamic orthodoxy, most of which turn out to be versions of 'pantheism' (the view, roughly stated, that the universe and God are in some special sense identical rather than distinct) or 'panentheism' (the view, again roughly stated, that God is immanent within all creation while at the same time transcending the physical world). These and other alternatives to standard theism are useful not only in bridging ingrained divides between Western and Eastern religious thought, but also in shedding light on the strengths and weakness of competing conceptions of divinity (or ultimate reality)—particularly with respect to the 'religious adequacy' of these conceptions. However 'religious adequacy' is to be construed, one criterion that is relatively uncontroversial concerns the capacity of a way of thinking about divinity to 'handle', or even 'resolve', the problem of evil.

It is common enough to find religious studies scholars, theologians, and historians of philosophy taking a keen interest in a variety of conceptions of the divine beyond standard theism, and also examining the consequences these conceptions have for the problem of evil. It has become less common for philosophers of religion to undertake such work, despite the undeniable benefits their distinctive tools and methods (e.g., logical rigour, conceptual and phenomenological analysis) could bring to the discussion. Some contributors to *Alternative Concepts of God* make a start in this direction, recognizing the problem of evil as a significant desideratum for conceptualizing divinity. Nagasawa, for one, considers a version of panentheism (what he dubs 'modal panentheism': God as the totality of all possible worlds, all of which are as real as the actual world) but finds that it succumbs to a version of the problem of evil even more troublesome than that faced by traditional theism. John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, in their essay in the same volume, expand upon this approach to trace the ways in which varying concepts of God generate varying problems of evil.

Bishop (1993, 1998, 2007) has been a longstanding critic of the traditional theistic model of God (or "the omniGod," as he calls it), in large part because of the intractable difficulties, as he sees them, that the problem of evil creates for such a model (see also Bishop and Perszyk 2016). The alternative he has sought falls within a position that is garnering increasing attention—'naturalist theism'. On this view, the natural world is all there is, and religious meaning and value are to be found solely in nature or some aspect of the natural order, thus rendering redundant any supernatural being, power, or principle. A leading advocate of this position in theological circles was the late Gordon Kaufman of Harvard Divinity School, who labelled his outlook "biohistorical naturalism" and who reconceived God as the "serendipitous creativity" of a cosmos that evolves and changes in surprising and unpredictable ways (Kaufman 2004). Similar voices can now be heard in the philosophy of religion. Mark Johnston (2009), for example, has sought to purge theism of the idolatry of supernaturalism, and replace it

with what he calls 'process panentheism', where God as the 'Highest One' (the One most worthy of worship) is defined as the wholly immanent self-disclosing process of the outpouring of Existence Itself in ordinary existents, a process that is manifested in the natural realm alone.[1]

Bishop, likewise, holds that a naturalist ontology suffices for developing a religiously viable conception of who or what God is, of what (as he likes to say) it is that fills "the God-role"—the role of being worthy of a special kind of practical commitment involving trust, worship, and obedience. To specify what fills the God-role, Bishop (2007) turns, firstly, to the Trinitarian insight that the Divine Being belongs to the category of relation, not that of substance. Bishop thus presses for a shift away from the traditional idea of God as supreme individual agent to the idea of God as supreme community, constituted by persons-in-loving-relationship. This leads to a second, Christological strand in Bishop's model, where he takes (metaphysically) seriously the New Testament claim that God is love (1 John 4:16). This is not construed to mean that God is identical with the universal, Love, but that God's relational being is instantiated, though not exhausted, by genuinely loving interpersonal relations within the world. In recent collaborative work with Ken Perszyk (2016), Bishop has added a 'euteleological' dimension to his account, where the standard view of God as supernatural producer of the world is replaced by the idea that the universe's being God's creation amounts to its being inherently directed upon the supreme good as its *telos* (goal, purpose), and existing only because that *telos* is realized within it. The result is a model of God that is thoroughly naturalistic, devoid of any supernatural agency or entity either within or beyond the natural world.

Reconfiguring divinity along these and other lines may not entirely remove the problem of evil, as Bishop acknowledges. Indeed, Bishop and Perszyk (2016: 124) concede that euteleological theism will seem improbable given the nature and extent of evil in the universe, *at least if* no additional theological resources (such as those provided by Christian revelation) are brought in. For Bishop and Perszyk, however, any conception of the divine "worth its salt" in dealing with what they call 'the existential problem of evil'—the problem of how to live virtuously and flourish, or find 'salvation', in a world seemingly unfavourable to such ideals—will almost certainly introduce a significant intellectual problem of evil (2016: 115). There may be some doubt about that (given that there may be adequate non-moral conceptions of God that *dissolve*, rather than needing to resolve, the problem of evil), but what is worth highlighting is the way in which the alternative conceptions of divinity developed by Johnston, Bishop, and other non-standard theists help us to see, if not answer, the problem of evil in innovative and insightful ways.

[1] It might be noted that such views are 'naturalist' just in the sense that they reject a separate supernatural realm: they are not, of course, a form of 'scientific' naturalism that identifies reality with the way it is depicted on our best scientific theories.

It is not even mandatory to believe in, let alone display resolute commitment to, these alternative Gods. Rather, they might be postulated in speculative fashion, in the manner of Whitehead's 'adventures of ideas'. It is to this that I now turn.[2]

3. Opening II: Renewing the Discipline

A second 'opening' has been suggested by yet another new Oxford University Press anthology, this time edited by Paul Draper and J.L. Schellenberg, entitled *Renewing Philosophy of Religion: Exploratory Essays*. The essays collected by Draper and Schellenberg address the previous concern of seeking to expand the *focus* of contemporary philosophy of religion beyond the bounds of Western theistic religions, even beyond traditional forms of religion altogether. But there is a second initiative in the Draper/Schellenberg volume that I want to pick up on—what they call, in their introductory essay, questions of 'standpoint': "that is, with how philosophers of religion are *placed*, in terms of such things as commitments brought to inquiry and assumptions about proper aims and procedures, as they address whatever particular issue becomes their focus." (7; emphasis in original)

The question of placement, in terms of religious commitments and methodological presuppositions, has arisen because of a decisive but problematic turn taken recently in philosophy of religion. This is a turn towards relatively traditional or conservative forms of religion and theology, and interestingly it has become evident in both analytic and Continental schools of philosophy of religion. Amongst Continental philosophers, suspicions were raised early, with Dominique Janicaud in a 1991 report objecting to what he called 'the theological turn in phenomenology' on the grounds that: "The dice are loaded and choices made; faith rises majestically in the background." (2000: 27)[3] Analytic philosophers, by contrast, have only just begun to raise concerns, against the background of the dominance over the last few decades of a new generation of (mainly mainstream) Christian philosophers, led in large part by the trailblazing efforts of (among others) Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, Peter van Inwagen, Marilyn McCord Adams, and William Lane Craig. Their goal has been to rejuvenate the field after (in their eyes) it lay fallow in the wilderness of twentieth-century positivism, and to do so by developing a distinctly and unashamedly Christian form of philosophy.

There is little doubt that 'analytic theists' have brought a newfound rigour, depth, and indeed sense of excitement to a formerly flailing discipline. At the same time,

[2] Rethinking the problem of evil of course requires much more than rethinking received ideas about God. For one thing, our understanding of evil requires further thought, so as to take in the social, structural, and political dimensions of evil delineated by Tilley and Clack in this volume. More broadly still, a holistic approach, of the sort advocated by Oppy with his emphasis on the comparison and evaluation of entire 'worldviews, would be helpful in seeing (what I have been calling) Standard Theism as only one option amongst many, even within the theistic camp.

[3] Janicaud was referring in this instance to the work of Levinas, though Janicaud was equally critical of other prominent phenomenologists in France, such as Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and Jean-Louis Chrétien.

questions are now being asked about the serious side-effects this religious turn has introduced. Paul Draper has done much to highlight this, not only in the volume he co-edited with Schellenberg, but also in an earlier paper co-authored with Ryan Nichols (Draper and Nichols 2013). Draper and Nichols' 'diagnostic hypothesis', as they put it, is that the discipline's poor health can be attributed to "a variety of cognitive biases operating at the nonconscious level, combined with an unhealthy dose of group influence." (424) These biases, according to Draper and Nichols, manifest themselves in at least four ways: (i) *partisanship*, or following the 'party' rather than the argument wherever it leads; (ii) *polemics*, or an adversarial and combative approach to philosophy; (iii) *focus narrowly placed* on mainstream Abrahamic traditions; and (iv) *religious constraints* (e.g., the teachings of a sacred text or a church), which limit or predetermine the outcomes of philosophical discussions. These symptoms, unfortunately, are not difficult to detect in recent work on the problem of evil, as Draper and Nichols observe:

> A philosopher of religion who is a theist, for example, could consistently admit (and even defend the view) that horrendous evil is strong evidence against theism, so long as they think, for instance, that this evidence is outweighed by even stronger evidence (whether inferential or noninferential) on the other side. Yet such admissions almost never occur. (421)

To wake philosophy of religion from its dogmatic slumber, what is required is a renewed appreciation of the kind of thinking that has traditionally been regarded as integral to philosophy—a thinking that is sustained and searching, restless, and even endless in its explorations, but without knowing where such wondering and meandering will lead, thus being responsive to the unforeseen and unexpected and so not prejudicing the outcome. Commitment, even religious commitment, is not thereby ruled out, as long as it promotes a questioning frame of mind, and accords value to skepticism and doubt. What the poet John Keats called 'negative capability' has a place in philosophy as much as in literature:

> It struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason… (Keats 1958: 193)

This capability for lingering in doubt is challenging and confronting to many, especially those with strongly held religious convictions. But philosophy is nothing if not challenging and confronting. Draper and Nichols, towards the end of their paper, make a series of recommendations as to how the discipline could be improved in light of their earlier diagnosis. Their final recommendation, which they say "is the hardest of all to follow," is to

> …make a conscious decision to accept genuine risk. True inquiry requires risk. This is why philosophical inquiry is aided by doubt… Apologetics… is very safe insofar as pursuing it is very unlikely to result in the apologist rejecting any of the central doctrines of the religious

community he or she serves. Philosophy should be riskier—the philosopher of religion must be prepared to abandon cherished beliefs. But with that risk comes [sic] greater opportunities for growth and discovery, and for freeing oneself from service to inflexible orthodoxy. (441–2)

In retrieving the questing and adventurous nature of philosophical inquiry, philosophers of religion will not only broaden the current debate around the problem of evil with a greater plurality of perspectives, but will also help drive the discussion away from conventional towards more creative paths. Beverley Clack, a contributor to this volume, has in earlier work defended a similar, 'aporetic' methodology: borrowing from the psychoanalytic model of therapy as a 'pathless path' or *aporia*, Clack (2007) envisages an approach to the problem of evil that sees it as a journey with no predetermined goal or end-point, "a journey where the road is strange and unknown." (207) This may involve, as happens in her own philosophical work, drawing upon the literary and creative arts for insights into evil and suffering (something rarely done in contemporary discussions), because "the best art challenges, forcing the viewer/reader to consider again the way in which they habitually see the world." (207–8) But it may also include creatively constructing speculative theories, experimenting with diverse myths, models, and metaphors of (e.g.) God and world, without necessarily subscribing to everything one puts to paper, but performing a kind of *epochē* or suspension of belief that gives one licence to imagine and explore. And so alongside Draper and Schellenberg's call for wider focus and plural standpoints, also vital is the question of *style*: ways of writing philosophy that go beyond the standard academic template, and which might for example be slow, meditative, open-ended, and essayistic (see Walker 2016), or (as with the present volume) dialogical and interactive in form.

4. The Dialogues

Despite the current preference in academic philosophy for the journal paper or the book-length treatise, the genre of the dialogue is beginning to make inroads and is proving popular with specialists and non-specialists alike. But in contrast with the philosophical dialogues of old, as represented by the sole-authored works of Plato, Berkeley, and Hume, a spate of more genuinely interactive dialogues has appeared, involving exchanges between various philosophers, each defending a distinct position around a vexing problem in philosophy (e.g., free will: Fischer et al. 2007) or philosophical theology (e.g., divine providence: Helseth et al. 2011). In an attempt to rejuvenate the discussion on the problem of evil, the dialogical form was selected to bring eight philosophers of religion together in critical but also considerate conversation. Each of the eight came to the discussion table with a history of extensive reflection and often influential publications on the problem of evil, and each came equipped with an interestingly different orientation and outlook, thus helping to generate a broad spectrum of views.

To make the dialogue process manageable, participants were divided into two groups, of four individuals each. The first group consists of John Bishop (naturalistic theism), Graham Oppy (secular naturalism), Eleonore Stump (Thomism), and N. N. Trakakis (anti-theodicy and idealism); the second group is made up of Beverley Clack (feminism), Andrew Gleeson (Wittgensteinianism), Yujin Nagasawa (standard Anselmian theism), and Terrence Tilley (praxis-based Christian theology). The parentheses are merely indicative of the broad frameworks the participants tended to work within, even if the frameworks themselves were not always at the forefront of their discussions or concerns. The basis of the pairings, however, was to enable creative and constructive discussion across these divergent schools of thought, while preserving enough commonality to avoid extreme clashes and misunderstandings. This, to be sure, is a fine balancing act, and it may not be feasible or even desirable to always avoid the kinds of disagreements and conflicts that are typical of philosophical disputes.

The dialogues began with each author preparing a 'Position Statement' providing a detailed overview of the perspective they favour on the problem of evil. These position papers were presented in abbreviated form at a workshop held at the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne campus, on 14–15 July, 2014.[4] During the workshop, participants were also invited to respond to each of the position papers (from their own group) and to field questions from the audience. These initial replies to the Position Statements were subsequently revised and included herein as 'Responses'. Finally, the Responses were circulated to the relevant recipients, so that authors could prepare a second round of replies, commenting upon each of the initial Responses from their group. (Each of these second responses has been collected under the heading of '*Reply to . . .*'.)

It is hoped that the essays and exchanges that follow will advance the precedent recently established by other philosophers of religion seeking to push the discipline in new and more promising directions. Such reorientation and renewal is particularly important with the problem of evil, where seemingly fruitless and interminable debates (over theodicy and 'skeptical theism', for example) have raised the need for a consideration of alternative, if not daring and 'riskier', ways of conceiving God's relationship to evil. At a time when God and violence, religion and extremism, are inextricably linked in the minds and politics of many, the need for a rigorous and nuanced understanding of divinity and evil that opens, or re-opens, lines of inquiry that have been unjustly dismissed or neglected is perhaps as great as it has ever been.[5]

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[4] The only exception was Yujin Nagasawa, who did not take part in the workshop, as he had yet to be enlisted to this project.

[5] I would like to thank the contributors to this volume for their feedback on an earlier draft of this Introduction.

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1

The Problem of Suffering

A Thomistic Approach

Eleonore Stump

The Nature of Suffering

Only the most naïve or tendentious among us would deny the extent and intensity of suffering in the world. Can one hold, consistently with the common view, that there is an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God? Some philosophers who were influential in the earlier twentieth-century discussion of the problem of evil answered this question in the negative and went so far as to claim that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God. But, as the subsequent philosophical discussion of the problem of evil has made clear, such a claim is much harder to support than its proponents originally supposed. The propositions:

(1) There is suffering in the world

and

(2) There is an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God

are not by themselves logically incompatible. At the very least, for a sound argument from evil against the existence of God, we need to add this premise:

(3) There is no morally sufficient reason for an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God to allow suffering in the world.

But this premise is eminently debatable. In fact, a theodicy can be thought of as an attempt to show this premise false by providing a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering.

The medieval tradition from Augustine onwards took God's providential governing of the world to be perplexing in certain respects, but it certainly supposed itself to have a religiously deep and morally satisfying account of God's reasons for allowing suffering. It is clear that there is a long tradition of philosophically sophisticated, biblically based theodicies in the West—and, of course, an equally long tradition of counter-arguments designed to rebut them. Within the medieval period, there is, naturally, a divergence of philosophical and theological opinions. Although the medieval period does not speak

with one voice, nonetheless, as regards theodicy, there is remarkable similarity among the views of such medievals as Augustine, Gregory the Great, Saadya Gaon, Aquinas, and others. In this chapter, I want to present the basic outlines of this medieval theodicy. Since Aquinas is the philosopher I know best among the medievals, I will present his thought as a representative medieval theodicy and a representative medieval account of God's reasons for allowing evil.

As regards the problem of evil, what is in need of justification is God's allowing the suffering of sentient creatures. In this chapter, I will consider the suffering not of all sentient creatures, but only of adult human beings who are mentally fully functional.[1] Considering the suffering of animals, infants, or adult human beings who are not fully functional mentally requires looking closely at the nature of their suffering; and this, in turn, requires careful consideration of the kind of subjective experience of which they are capable. But such issues are complicated, and considerations of space rule out addressing them at length here.[2] It seems to me not easy to rule out the possibility that the theodicy I discuss in this chapter might be extended to other sentient creatures.[3] Nonetheless, because it is not possible to do everything in one chapter, the discussion here is confined to the suffering of mentally fully functional adult human beings.

It is important to reflect on the problem. What is suffering? How are we to understand it? It cannot be adequately glossed just as pain. On the contrary, pain is neither necessary nor sufficient for human suffering. There can be great suffering in a human life even where there is no physical or psychological pain. There are, for example, non-painful neurological syndromes which render a patient unable to function on his or her own and also unable to be unhappy over that fact. On the other hand, there is also the physical pain of a long-distance runner who rejoices in his aches and pains, and who certainly would not think of his running as a suffering for him. So suffering is not to be equated with pain.

A better way to think about suffering is as a function of what a person cares about. Every human person has some care about what kind of person she is and about flourishing as that kind of person. There is an objective fact of the matter about what will make a human person flourish, however. And so there is an objective element in what a person cares about, too. It has to do with her being what she ought to be, in a sense which encompasses all her well-being, not just her moral good. Consequently, part of what it is for a human being to suffer is for her to be kept, to one degree or another, from flourishing, from being what she ought to be.

[1] I do not have a precise definition of what it is for an adult human being to be mentally fully functional. For the purposes of this project, I will assume only a rough rule of thumb: if an adult human being is appropriately held morally responsible for his actions and is appropriately the subject of the reactive attitudes, then he is within the bounds of the mentally fully functional.

[2] An indicator of the complexity of the issue even for human adults who are not mentally fully functional is the recent study showing neurological processing of semantic information on command by a patient who had been relegated to persistent vegetative status by external indicators (Owen et al. 2006).

[3] Because the heart of the theodicy at issue here has to do with interpersonal relationships, the development of this theodicy to sentient creatures other than mentally fully functional adult human beings depends on the extent to which these other creatures can participate in interpersonal relationships. For a suggestive essay on this subject, see Smuts (2001).

On the other hand, what we care about has a subjective element too, which does not have to do with our flourishing. This subjective element is something to which a person is committed but which is not essential to his flourishing and which may not even be compatible with it.[4] This is a matter of what we can call "the desires of the heart," to adopt a phrase from the Psalmist. The desires of the heart are what a person loses when he is heartbroken. It is not easy to give a crisp formulation of the notion of the desires of the heart. Perhaps we can say that a person's desire of the heart is a particular kind of commitment to a person or a project that matters greatly to him apart from his flourishing. If there is such a thing as a web of belief, with some beliefs peripheral and others central to a person's set of beliefs, perhaps there is also a web of desire. A desire of a person's heart is a desire which is at the centre of the web of desire for him. If he loses what he wants when his desire is at the centre of the web, then other things which he had wanted begin to lose their ability to attract him, because what he had most centrally wanted is gone.

And so we care not just about our own objective well-being. We care also about those things which are the desires of our hearts. Consequently, we can formulate the nature of suffering in terms of what we care about:

(S) A human being suffers when he is kept from being what he ought to be, or when he is kept from having the desires of his heart, or both.

When we consider what could justify God's allowing suffering, this is the understanding of suffering that will be at issue.

The Central Question

As it is generally understood by philosophers and theologians, the question posed to religious belief by the problem of evil is whether there is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil. In what follows, I will call this 'the central question'. In light of the preceding reflections regarding suffering, we can give the central question raised by the problem of evil a more specific formulation. If a person suffers when something undermines her being what she ought to be or having the desires of her heart or both, then a morally sufficient reason for allowing suffering must be something which somehow defeats the badness of suffering so understood.

We can therefore give the central question this preliminary formulation:

(C) Does God's allowing the evil a human being suffers contribute to that person's being able to be what she ought to be, or to her being able to have the desires of her heart; and is her suffering the best available means, in the circumstances,[5] to achieve those ends?

[4] Marilyn Adams (1999) makes a distinction which is at least related to the distinction I am after here. She says, "the value of a person's life may be assessed from the inside (in relation to that person's own goals, ideals, and choices) and from the outside (in relation to the aims, tastes, values, and preferences of others)... My notion is that for a person's life to be a great good to him/her on the whole, the external point of view (even if it is God's) is not sufficient." (145)

[5] The qualification 'in the circumstances' has to be included here because what constitutes the necessary or best possible means to an end depends on the context in which the means and end are situated. The

As I have proposed it, the central question obviously consists in two pairs of subsidiary questions, and it will be easier to handle the central question by considering the subsidiary questions one pair at a time.

These two questions are the first pair:

(CA1) Does God's allowing a person's suffering contribute to her being able to be what she ought to be?[6]

and

(CA2) Is a person's suffering the best available means, in the circumstances, for the sufferer to be able to be what she ought to be?

And these two questions are the second pair:

(C b1) Does God's allowing a person's suffering contribute to her being able to have the desires of her heart?

and

(C b2) Is a person's suffering the best available means, in the circumstances, for the sufferer to be able to have the desires of her heart?[7]

The Central Question and the Scale of Value

These questions, and the problem of evil in general, presuppose a scale of value in accordance with which the existence of suffering is judged at least *prima facie* inconsistent with the existence of a good God. And insofar as the problem of evil is an attack on the consistency of religious belief or the consistency of religious belief together with some uncontested empirical evidence, it is appropriate that the scale of value by which that consistency is judged be the scale of value embraced by the system of religious belief in question. It would make no difference to the argument over evil if it turned out, unsurprisingly enough, that the mix of religious beliefs with a scale of values

necessary or best possible means to harmony between a mother and her son is one thing for Gertrude and Hamlet while Hamlet's father is still living and another entirely after she participates in his murder.

[6] I put the question in this way, as distinct from asking whether a person whose suffering God has allowed is what she wants to be, to allow for free will. Insofar as any human person has free will, so that her will is in her own control, it is always possible for her *not* to be what she wants to be. That is because it is possible for a person to be divided within herself, so that whatever she is and wants to be, she is not what she wants to be with some other part of her conflicting desires and divided will. And to the extent to which her will is in her own control, its internal divisions will also be in her own control. So the central question is a question about whether God's allowing suffering enables the sufferer to have a benefit in virtue of the suffering, not whether God's allowing suffering automatically confers a benefit on the sufferer (although in virtue of conferring the ability to have a benefit, it automatically confers a benefit, to the extent to which the ability to have a benefit is itself a benefit). Therefore, the central question needs to be formulated in terms of the sufferer's being able to be what she wants to be, not in terms of her being what she wants to be.

[7] The phrase 'to be able to' has to be added because, since human beings have free will, God's allowing suffering cannot be guaranteed to have only one particular effect on the sufferer.

antithetical to those beliefs was inconsistent.[8] Because, in this chapter, I mean to present and defend Aquinas' theodicy, we can use his scale of value, which is representative of the medieval tradition as a whole.

Aquinas shares with other thinkers in the Christian tradition the conviction that personal relationship is the genus within which the greatest goods for human beings fall. On this conviction, the greatest good for human beings—the greatest flourishing of human beings—consists in personal relationships of a certain sort. For Aquinas, God is characterized by mind and will, and so on Aquinas' views God is a person, in our sense of the word 'person'.[9] A union of love with God is thus a personal relationship, too. On Aquinas' views, it is the greatest of personal relationships, and the greatest good for human beings is to be in a union of love with God. This is a shareable good, and so union with God is union with other persons also in union with God. The best thing for human beings is this shared union with God. The worst thing for human beings is to lack it forever.

So, for Aquinas, the scale of values for human beings has shared union with God as its intrinsic upper limit and the permanent absence of that union as its extrinsic lower limit. On this scale of value, then, a person's flourishing is a matter of her increasing closeness to God. Since this is so, we can refine our formulation of the central question further. We can reformulate the first pair of questions in terms of personal relationship with God or closeness to God.

And here we need to see that one person (Jerome, for example) does not have sole control over whether or not he is close to another person (Paula, for example). If Paula is unwilling to let Jerome be close to her, then Jerome's ability to be close to Paula is

[8] Marilyn Adams has been influential in calling to our attention the fact that religious believers have different standards of value from those of non-believers, and that this fact needs to be kept in mind in discussions of the problem of evil. She says, "Insofar as the highest human happiness is usually conceived of as involving some relation to the best good(s), and moral precepts direct humans to their individual and collective ends, different ontologies will produce different accounts of the human good and varying moral precepts." (1999: 12) And, as she goes on to point out, these different standards significantly affect our evaluation of whether or not the existence of evil in the world is compatible with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God. The different standards of moral good and the different understandings of a good human life will give us greatly varying views of whether or not there is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering. Insofar as the problem of evil is a challenge to the consistency of the beliefs of religious believers, however, it is obviously the standards and values of the religious believer that need to be taken into account in discussions of the problem. (Cf. also Adams 1999: 13)

[9] In Aquinas' terms, the point has to be put differently, of course; on the doctrine of the Trinity, in medieval terms, there are three persons in one God. But this is a technical sense of 'person', derived from Boethius' formulation, with 'substance' taken analogically: a person is an individual substance of a rational nature. Nonetheless, the technical sense as it is used in the doctrine of the Trinity is compatible with the claim that God is a person, in our sense of the word 'person'. There is just one will and one intellect in the triune God, on the traditional doctrines Aquinas accepts. Insofar as, in our sense of 'person', something having one mind and one will is a person, it is true to say that for Aquinas God is a person. Some readers will also want to object to the claim that for Aquinas God has a will and a mind, on the grounds that for Aquinas God is simple and therefore has no parts which can be distinguished from one another as mind is distinguished from will. But although it is true that Aquinas' God is simple, Aquinas himself talks about the intellect and the will of God. Formulating claims about God in order to bring the doctrine of simplicity to the fore requires so much clumsiness in locution that Aquinas himself regularly omits it. For defence of these and the other claims about Aquinas' views which I make in this section, see my *Aquinas* (Stump, 2003).

limited or inefficacious, no matter what Jerome chooses to do. This point holds even if it is God's closeness to Paula, rather than Jerome's, that is at issue. On Aquinas' worldview, God is always willing to be in union with each human person. And so the obstacle to closeness between God and any human person lies only in that human person. The obstacle has its source in a human person's unwillingness to let God be close to her.

We can therefore refine the formulation of the central question to reflect this scale of value and this way of understanding the requisite conditions for a person's being close to God, on Aquinas' view. We can recast the first subsidiary pair of questions in this way:

(C a1) Does God's allowing a person's suffering contribute to her willingness to let God be close to her?

and

(C a2) Is a person's suffering the best available means, in the circumstances, to help bring about her willingness to let God be close to her?

This pair of subsidiary questions (C a1 and a2) and the preceding pair (C b1 and b2) together constitute the central question which, on Aquinas' account, needs to be answered affirmatively for a successful theodicy.

In what follows, I will begin with the first pair (C a1 and a2) and then go on to consider what can be said about the second (C b1 and b2).

Suffering and Human Flourishing

For Aquinas, there is an affirmative answer to the central question of the problem of evil. The morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering is the role of suffering in the process which leads to union with God. Aquinas thinks of suffering as healing for those things disturbed in the psyches of post-Fall human beings which keep them from a willingness to let God be close to them; and so Aquinas often speaks of suffering as God's medicine for human beings. In this attitude, he is representative of a centuries-long medieval tradition. Augustine, for example, says,

> The Physician to whom we have unreservedly entrusted ourselves and from whom we have the promise of the present life and of the life to come—that Physician sees these things [hunger, thirst, and other bodily sufferings] as helpful remedies… He governs and guides us so that we may be consoled and exercised in this life and so that in the life to come we may be established and confirmed in eternal rest. (Augustine 1951: 168–9)

In his commentary on the Apostles' Creed, Aquinas himself says,

> If all the pain a human being suffers is from God [as Aquinas thinks it is], then he ought to bear it patiently, both because it is from God and because it is ordered towards good; for pains purge sins, bring evildoers to humility, and stimulate good people to love of God.[10]

[10] For an annotated translation of the text, see Ayo (1988). Although I have preferred to use my own translation, I found Ayo's helpful, and for this work I give citations both to the Latin translation, *Collationes Credo in Deum,* sec III (Ayo 1988: 40–2) and to Ayo's translation.

In his commentary on Thessalonians, Aquinas remarks on one part of the process he mentions in the commentary on the Apostles' Creed. He says,

> As water extinguishes a burning fire, so tribulations extinguish the force of concupiscent desires, so that human beings don't follow them at will…Therefore, [the Church] is not destroyed [by tribulations] but lifted up by them, and in the first place by the lifting up of the mind to God, as Gregory says: the evils which bear us down here drive us to go to God.[11]

For Aquinas, then, the morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering is the role of suffering in the process that leads to shared union with God.

We can begin the examination of his position by considering that on his position there is an affirmative answer to the first subsidiary pair of questions:

> (C a1) Does God's allowing a person's suffering contribute to her willingness to let God be close to her?

and

> (C a2) Is a person's suffering the best available means, in the circumstances, to help bring about her willingness to let God be close to her?

There are, of course, people who vehemently repudiate so much as the possibility of an affirmative answer to these questions. Their objection generally rests on a moral claim, namely, that there are some kinds of suffering which it is immoral to treat as a means to an end. Often enough, the heart of such an objection consists just in taking some particularly heart-wrenching example of suffering from the newspapers or other media, then challenging anyone to countenance that suffering as a means to any end.

But Aquinas would reject the typical presentation of such examples as incomplete or mistaken. That is because, as those examples are typically presented, the sufferer is described as suffering alone. Aquinas, however, believes that God is personally present, to one degree or another, to all those who suffer, so that they never suffer alone, whether or not they are aware of God's presence with them. God's presence does not alter the fact of the suffering, but it makes consolation available in the suffering, to the extent to which the sufferer is able and willing to receive it. So, for example, Aquinas says,

> People need to be supported in the evils that happen to them. And this is what consolation is, strictly speaking. Because if a person didn't have something in which his heart could rest when he is overcome with evils, he couldn't bear up [under them]. And so one person consoles another when he offers him some relief, in which he can rest in the midst of evils. And although in some evils one human being can take consolation and rest and support in another, nonetheless it is only God who consoles us in all [our] evils. (In II Cor 1.2)

[11] There is a translation of this commentary by Larcher and Duffy (1969). Although I have preferred to use my own translations, I found the Larcher and Duffy translation helpful, and I will give citations for this work and for the commentary on Philippians both to this translation and to the Latin translation (*Super ad Thessalonicenses I*, prologue; Larcher and Duffy 1969: 3).

Furthermore, on the typical presentation of heart-wrenching instances of evil, the sufferer is presented as more victimized, as less successful, than other people. But, for Aquinas, those who suffer the most are the persons who are already closer to God than other people. This is why the much earlier John Chrysostom, who is in the same medieval tradition of thought as Aquinas, says of people who are scandalized at the sight of human suffering: "They do not know that to have these sufferings is the privilege of those especially dear to God." (Chrysostom 1960: 165)

In the end, though, the most telling response to this objection lies in modern medical practice, which gives the lie to the objection's moral attitude. For the sake of a benefit which is small by Aquinas' standards—an increase in the degree of biological health, or even an increase in the duration of mere biological life—we are willing to subject human beings to almost any amount of suffering. It is hard to see, then, on what basis we would find it morally unthinkable to allow suffering for the sake of flourishing in union with God.

So the reflex visceral rejection of the possibility of any affirmative answer to (C a1) and (C a2) can be put to one side, in my view.

How, then, shall we go about trying to evaluate Aquinas' position that there is an affirmative answer to these questions?

The First Subsidiary Pair of Questions

The first subsidiary question, (C a1), is an empirical question about human psychology. It can therefore be answered either by reflection on our own experience and that of others, or else by empirical studies.

To my mind, reflection on our experience only supports Aquinas' position; but it is not necessary to expend time on this approach to the appraisal of (C a1), because, *mirabile dictu*, there are empirical studies of the topic. The study of the role of trauma in spiritual and moral regeneration is a recognized subdiscipline in psychology. Many empirical studies document what psychologists call 'adversarial growth'—thriving and perceived benefit, as the psychologists put it—produced in consequence of the experience of trauma and adversity.

One researcher, who studies what he calls 'quantum change', transformative experiences associated with trauma, explains such change in this way:

> One way of explaining quantum change experiences is that they represent . . . a turning point in the life journey where major change simply must occur because the person is unable or unwilling to continue in his or her present course. It is a point of desperation, a breaking point where 'something has to give'—and it does. The result is a new, dramatically reorganized identity . . . Strained and separate aspects of identity are reordered.
>
> (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 157)[12]

[12] I am grateful to Monica Stump for calling this work to my attention.

Another study which reviews the burgeoning literature in this area sums up the research it reviews this way:

> Positive changes following adversity have long been recognized in philosophy, literature, and religion . . . They have been reported empirically [by psychologists and other researchers] following chronic illness, heart attacks, breast cancer, bone marrow transplants, HIV and AIDS, rape and sexual assault, military combat, maritime disasters, plane crashes, tornadoes, shootings, bereavement, injury, recovery from substance addiction, and in the parents of children with disabilities . . . Studies of adversarial growth are an important area of research . . . [And from] an applied perspective, clinicians should be aware of the potential for positive change in their clients following trauma and adversity . . . [T]he facilitation of adversarial growth may be considered a legitimate therapeutic aim. (Linley and Joseph 2004: 11–12)[13]

To the extent to which the positive changes after trauma documented in such studies are integrative for the person undergoing the change, they also contribute to her being in a condition which allows God to be close to her.

But what about question (C a2), the question about suffering as the best means to the end valued? Clearly, neither reflection nor psychological studies can demonstrate that suffering is the best possible means in the particular circumstances of a particular person's life for bringing about this result. But that is because neither reflection nor psychological studies are sufficient to show what a particular person would have done in circumstances different from those that in fact obtained. Unlike (C a1), (C a2) is not in fact a question whose answer can be found through reflection or empirical research. That is because answering it requires knowing what a person would freely do in circumstances other than those that actually obtained, in order to evaluate the efficacy of suffering in leading a person to spiritual or psychological regeneration. Knowing this, however, requires what has come to be called 'middle knowledge'; and there is serious dispute over whether even God can have middle knowledge. As far as I am aware, no one has yet suggested that psychologists might have middle knowledge. But unless we can know what a person would have done in non-actual circumstances in which he did not suffer, we are not in a position to compare suffering with other things which might serve as a means to the same end in order to evaluate which means would have been better.

On the other hand, absence is a kind of evidence in this case. If there were better means of spiritual regeneration or psychological growth than suffering, one would expect a subdiscipline of psychology demonstrating the efficacy of these other means. Similarly, one would expect stories describing personal experience of growth and regeneration brought about by such means in the lives of people lacking suffering. The absence of these things—and our absence of surprise at the absence of these things—is evidence in favour of Aquinas' position.

Someone will surely protest at this point that suffering is associated with psychological disintegration, too; a person's suffering can also turn him away from flourishing and union with God. The researcher studying quantum change says that trauma can

[13] I am grateful to Monica Stump for calling my attention to this literature.

function "as a catalyst for…[the] reconceptualization of the self" (Miller and C'de Baca 2001: 158), but that "such reorganization [of the self] can also occur in negative as well as positive ways." (157) The putative protester's point is right, in my view, but it is not an objection to Aquinas' position. Aquinas takes human beings to have free will, and he argues at length that even in the giving of grace God does not act on a human will with efficient causation.[14] Since this is so, a sufferer can react to his suffering negatively rather than in ways which contribute to 'adversarial growth'. Suffering can contribute to spiritual regeneration and growth; but it cannot guarantee them. And so the mere occurrence of negative reactions to suffering is not by itself evidence against Aquinas' position.

Furthermore, it is also not an objection to Aquinas' position that sufferers often have no sense of spiritual growth or flourishing in virtue of their suffering, or that others around a sufferer are similarly unaware of such regeneration in the sufferer. The benefit which justifies God in allowing suffering is not translucent. Such a benefit is obviously more nearly like health than like pain: one can be mistaken in one's beliefs about whether or not one has it.

No doubt, there is a great deal more which could be said about the first pair of subsidiary questions; but I do not want to pursue them further, because, in my view, the real problem for Aquinas' position is posed by the second set of subsidiary questions.

The Desires of the Heart and Flourishing

The Psalmist says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps 37: 4–5). And yet if there is one thing that seems indisputable about suffering, it is that the evils human beings suffer can break the hearts of the sufferers. It seems incontestable that people, even people who trust in God, often fail to attain the desires of their hearts and are heartbroken because of that. Poverty, war, imprisonment, disease and disabilities, betrayal by intimate friends, estrangements from family, the deaths of loved ones—all these things and others at least as bad can rob a human person of the desires of her heart.

On Aquinas' view, however, all these heartbreaking things are also compatible with a human person's flourishing. That is because there can be closeness and personal presence between God and a human person even when the human person is afflicted with any of these sufferings, as confessional literature makes clear.

Consequently, even if we give Aquinas everything he wants concerning the relation between suffering and a person's flourishing, there still remains the problem of suffering stemming from the loss of the desires of one's heart.

So consider again the second pair of subsidiary questions:

(C b1) Does God's allowing a person's suffering contribute to her being able to have the desires of her heart?

[14] See the chapter on grace and free will in my *Aquinas* (Stump 2003).

and

(C b2) Is a person's suffering the best available means, in the circumstances, for the sufferer to be able to have the desires of her heart?

What shall we say about these questions? Contrary to the case as regards (C a1) and (C a2), it looks as if the answers to (C b1) and (C b2) are obviously 'no'.

We can take the great English poet John Milton as our test case here. Milton wanted to be a politically important promoter of Puritan causes; he had his heart set on the success of the Puritans and his own contribution to that success. It is as clear as anything ever gets in philosophy that Milton could have had his heart's desire as regards the Puritan cause at least as well without his suffering as with it. In fact, to the extent to which his suffering included heartbreak over the failure of the Puritan cause, his suffering is inimical to his heart's desire. He suffers because he is heartbroken.

If there is anything in Aquinas' theodicy which addresses this issue, it is too inchoate or tacit to be much help here. Nonetheless, if Aquinas' theodicy seems to founder on a case such as Milton's, Milton's case can also show us what could shore that theodicy up. A suggestion is all that is possible here; spelling that suggestion out fully would take more space than is available in this chapter. I will therefore conclude this part of the examination of the central question with just a suggestion borne of reflection on Milton's case.

The desires of a person's heart are desires for something which is not identical with or essential to that person's flourishing. In Milton's case, it is arguable that his heart's desire was inimical to his flourishing. He wanted to support the Puritan cause in some powerful way; and the particular way in which that heart's desire took form in him led him to give himself unstintingly to Puritan politics. The resulting administrative and political labour kept him from the leisure and the creativity needed for poetry. But, also arguably, Milton's flourishing was flourishing as a great poet, as an artist whose deep religious commitment found its proper expression in poetry of epic proportions.

However, given the explanation of suffering I argued for earlier, the problem for a person whose heart's desire is directly or indirectly inimical to his well-being is that he will suffer no matter what happens. Someone in Milton's case will be blocked from having his deepest desires, no matter what he attains, because those desires are in effect at odds with one another. What is to be done in such a case?

The answer is evident, I think. Since a person's well-being is an objective matter, the internal conflict in such a case can be overcome only by somehow bringing his heart's desires into harmony with his well-being. But this harmonization cannot be at the cost of his simply giving up his heart's desires, if it is to be a harmonization rather than simply an abandonment of those heart's desires. Clearly, this sort of harmonization will be a difficult matter.

In Milton's case, the precipitous Puritan fall from power cost Milton his position, his property, his social standing, and his security; he was left blind, impoverished, imperilled by his enemies, and scorned by the new Restoration society. In that condition,

he wrote virtually all of his greatest poetry, including the greater parts of *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. In his greatest suffering, he also somehow had his greatest flourishing.

But what about his heart's desire to promote the Puritan cause? He was heartbroken when the Puritan regime collapsed, and with it the Puritan hopes for a new Jerusalem on earth. In the fall of the Puritans, Milton lost what he had set his heart on—or so it seemed. And yet, consider the outcome. Did the seventeenth-century British Puritans have any partisan as powerful or appealing as Milton? If there was anyone who could give pause to people who found those Puritans objectionable, wasn't it Milton? It is hard not to suppose that, in the end, after the downfall of the Puritans, Milton became one of the most powerful promoters of the Puritan cause. In a sense, then, he did have his heart's desire, only not in the way he himself sought to have it, by participating as a functionary in the Puritan administration. Rather, he achieved it by the glory of his poetry. But chances are excellent that he would not have written that poetry if he had not suffered as he did in the period after the collapse of Puritan rule.

Milton's case thus suggests that a heart's desire can be pursued in more than one way. The way in which Milton sought his heart's desire made that desire inimical to Milton's own flourishing. But, as the outcome shows, it was possible for that desire to be fulfilled in a way different from the way in which Milton sought to fulfil it; and in that alternative way, the desire was harmonious with Milton's flourishing, not opposed to it. While the Puritans were in the political ascendancy, Milton put his poetry on hold, as relatively unimportant compared with politics. When the Puritans fell from power, Milton returned to poetry and found his true and rightful work there. His last great work, *Samson Agonistes*, is a particularly personal reflection on the nature of God's providence, but the problem of evil is at the centre of all his great poems written in this period. The suffering he endured after the Puritan fall, then, reshaped him in such a way that he not only flourished but also in that very flourishing had his heart's desire, reshaped but still recognizable as the same.

To prevent anyone's supposing that my test case is unrepresentative because Milton is both an extraordinary human being and also a believing Christian, it may be helpful to cite a case of a contemporary, non-believing, highly admirable, but not extraordinary mother of an autistic child. At the start of her book about that child, Clara Claiborne Park describes her life before Jessy, her fourth and last child, was born and grew into autism. She says of herself,

> I, who tell this story, was when… [Jessy, the fourth child] was born a typical college-bred housewife… I was like my friends in putting my full resources of intelligence and intuition into the task of bringing up my children… I had used to exhaustion the full abilities of a grown-up woman in overseeing the first years of these small humans, and I was terribly proud of what I had done. Anyone would have said—many people did say—that I had three lovely children… I was terribly proud to have produced three such lovely children… So much of pride had I invested in my bright and beautiful children and my great good luck.
>
> (Claiborne Park 1995: 15, 16, 29)

The desires of Claiborne Park's heart were her bright and beautiful children; when her fourth child was born, Claiborne Park yearned for her to be one more of the same sort. This child, too, she thought, "would grow and take her place in a family lovelier than anybody else's." (29) But the fourth child was eventually diagnosed with autism.

After years of struggle with the ravages of autism on a child and a family, Claiborne Park summed up her reflections on her suffering in this way:

> Our lives change and change us beyond anticipation. I do not forget the pain—it aches in a particular way when I look at Jessy's friends, some of them just her age, and allow myself for a moment to think of all she cannot be. But we cannot sift experience and take only the part that does not hurt us. Let me say simply and straight out that simple knowledge the whole world knows. I breathe like everyone else my century's thin, faithless air, and I do not want to be sentimental. But the blackest sentimentality of all is that *trahison des clercs* which will not recognize the good it has been given to understand because it is too simple. So, then: this experience we did not choose, which we would have given anything to avoid, has made us different, has made us better. Through it we have learned the lesson that no one studies willingly, the hard, slow lesson of Sophocles and Shakespeare—that one grows by suffering. And that too is Jessy's gift. I write now what fifteen years past I would still not have thought possible to write: that if today I were given the choice, to accept the experience, with everything that it entails, or to refuse the bitter largesse, I would have to stretch out my hands—because out of it has come, for all of us, an unimagined life. And I will not change the last word of the story. It is still love. (320)

Claiborne Park's excellent book shows that her flourishing included raising her family well but was not exhausted by that project; she also had it in her to write a superb book, which has taught and moved many people by sharing with them her experiences and her successes in child-raising, including the raising of an autistic child. But this flourishing would not have come to her without suffering. And, as she herself testifies in the book which constitutes part of her flourishing, in the alteration affected in her by suffering, by her heartbreak over not having the perfect children she wanted, she somehow found her heart's desire anyway, only in a way much different from that in which she had originally sought it.

Conclusion

So here is where matters stand. Aquinas' scale of value and his theodicy constitute for us a powerful, detailed response to the argument from evil. This response gives us a morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering, and it also explains why this reason is hard for us to see. Anecdotal evidence, reasoned reflection, and empirical research in psychology provide confirmation for it. Not everyone will be convinced by this confirmation, and there is plenty in Aquinas' worldview to dispute as well. But even so, the Thomistic response makes clear where we can and where we cannot profitably focus our disagreements.

Nothing in Aquinas' theodicy gives us much help with what is an important but largely neglected part of the problem of evil, namely, the suffering whose source is the

loss of the desires of the heart of the sufferer. In this chapter, I do not have the space to do more than suggest one way in which Aquinas' theodicy might be developed to accommodate this part of the problem. But the cases of Milton and Claiborne Park are suggestive in this regard. If this suggestion is to be turned into an element in a successful response to the problem of suffering, it will have to find a way to give an arguable affirmative answer to the second pair of subsidiary questions (C b1) and (C b2). It will have to develop Aquinas' theodicy in such a way as to support the claim that suffering which leaves a person heartbroken in fact is the best means for a person to have the desires of her heart. That aim sounds perilously paradoxical. But, as the stories of Milton and Claiborne Park suggest, suffering can shape a heart's desire so that, without losing its character as a heart's desire, it nonetheless is also somehow powerfully conducive to the desirer's flourishing.

But these are only suggestions; the work of turning them into a development of Aquinas' theodicy is for another project. For now, it is enough to have shown the power and depth of Aquinas' theodicy for that part of the problem of suffering on which he focused his attention.

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Response to Stump

John Bishop

The leading idea in Stump's approach to the problem of suffering is that suffering may enable us to achieve true flourishing, to be 'what we are meant to be'. The desires of our hearts may be refined and ultimately fulfilled through personal development that essentially includes suffering. Stump gives real-life examples of this kind of personal development, with her studies of Milton and of Clara Claiborne Park's experience of having an autistic child.

There is a problem with Stump's presentation of this leading idea, since at the outset she actually *defines* suffering—in her definition '(S)'—as 'kept from being what we ought to be', which renders self-contradictory her leading idea that suffering can enable us to become what we ought. Stump's point, I think, is to emphasize that suffering is not just physical or psychic pain, but includes experiences *that we interpret as* preventing us from being what we ought to be. Perhaps her definition (S) needs amendment, then, so that it says something like: a human being suffers when he is kept from being *what he thinks* he ought to be, or when he is kept from having *what he thinks* are the desires of his heart. As a definition of what suffering is, (S) still has some worrying implications even with this amendment—it implies, for example, that Christ did not suffer on the Cross.

Nevertheless, there surely is an important truth behind Stump's leading idea. Suffering can indeed lead to flourishing, to our becoming what we ought to be. As Stump mentions, there's a good deal of empirical research to show that 'adversarial' or 'post-traumatic' growth is a real and relatively common phenomenon: people can experience psychic or spiritual personal growth following trauma and the suffering of post-traumatic stress. Furthermore, the use of this idea in theodicy is well established: I think myself immediately of John Hick (1966) and his 'vale of soul-making' theodicy. And, as Stump makes clear, the idea that union with God is the supreme good in which we are fully what we ought to be, and that suffering may contribute to our achieving this supreme good by breaking down our natural egotistic fantasy of being in charge of our own lives and promoting our recognition of our closeness to God and utter dependence on him—these ideas are classic features of a Christian understanding of suffering as coming within the overall providence of God.

It is far from clear, however, that these classic Christian ideas about the goods that may be attained in and through suffering can be used to justify even the attribution of instrumental value to suffering, let alone a theodicy that articulates what a personal God's morally sufficient reason might conceivably be for permitting (or, indeed, causing) serious suffering.

I am not so much concerned with the problem posed by the fact that there's plenty of trauma and post-traumatic stress that never gives rise to post-traumatic growth, since

it may be that theodicists can deal with this problem by making a 'skeptical theist' move: apparently pointless suffering may, for all we know, be implicated in contributing to goods in ways that are clear to God but opaque to us.[15]

The really serious problem is that, from the supposed fact that certain sufferings are unavoidable if the sufferers are to attain authentic flourishing, it does not follow that a person with the relevant power would be justified in causing or permitting those sufferings in order to promote the flourishing. Now, Stump's 'Thomistic' approach clearly takes God to be a personal agent, supremely powerful and good (I believe one may reasonably doubt whether Aquinas himself accepts a metaphysics of God as a personal agent,[16] but I set that aside). Under such a conception of God, a certain kind of speculative theodicy is unavoidable: for all the suffering there is, there has to be a good reason, consistent with God's supreme goodness as a personal agent, for God to cause or permit that suffering. Stump's speculation about what that reason may be must therefore engage with familiar ethical doubts about whether one may cause or permit evil that good may come. And Stump does consider the objection that "there are some kinds of suffering which it is immoral to treat as a means to an end."

Stump offers two responses to this objection. First, she notes that Aquinas holds that God consoles us in all our evils. That may be true, but how does it meet the objection? Of course, one should, if one can, console sufferers whose suffering one could have prevented when one *is* morally justified in letting them suffer for the sake of an outweighing good. But the objection is that God *is not so justified* with respect to certain horrific sufferings, no matter how great the good at stake. Reference to God's consolation in the midst of suffering must therefore presuppose some other response to the objection.

And Stump provides one. The "most telling response to this objection," she says, is that "[f]or the sake of a benefit which is small by Aquinas' standards—an increase in the degree of biological health, or even an increase in the duration of mere biological life—we are willing to subject human beings to almost any amount of suffering."

I find it surprising that Stump thinks that this reply is "most telling," since it is a common moral objection to the tendency of high-tech medicine to strive officiously to keep people alive that we should *not* be willing to "subject human beings to almost any amount of suffering" in order to increase the duration of their biological life. So, if Stump's argument here is that, since we agree that it is morally acceptable to cause terrible suffering for the lower-ranking good of continued biological life, we should also agree that it is morally acceptable to do so for the sake of the supreme good, her argument won't succeed against the present objection, because the objector will simply reject the premise.

[15] See Wykstra (1984) for the paper that began the current debate about skeptical theism.

[16] Thomists hold a doctrine of divine simplicity that rules out God's counting as an instance of *any* kind, and hence would seem to exclude God's actually being 'a' person, however supreme. See, for example, David Burrell's (1998) discussion of divine 'simpleness'.

I suspect that Stump hasn't fully articulated the "most telling response" she actually has in mind. Perhaps her response amounts to the claim that the supreme good for the sake of which God permits horrific suffering is so incommensurably great that it secures a justification far in excess of the admittedly limited justification a finite agent might have for permitting preventable suffering. The analogy with what we accept in medical practice might then be that we are willing, within certain bounds, to inflict serious suffering to achieve outweighing finite goods, and so we can hardly object that God isn't justified by our own moral standards in permitting or causing even the most horrific sufferings humans experience for the sake of an infinitely outweighing higher good. We might want to sophisticate the account by noting that, since in our medical practice we set great store by informed consent, God is morally in the clear only if he too obtains that consent—and that might require appeal to the notion of 'virtual' consent, the consent a sufferer would have given had he understood the full picture from the vantage point of his enjoying the 'compensation' of ultimate participation in the supreme good.

Even then, however, it may be objected that no matter how great the ultimate good, if the means for achieving it involve (for example) permitting the torturing to death of an innocent child, it would not be morally permissible to achieve the ultimate good thereby. This is a serious moral objection, well expressed in the challenge Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov makes to his brother Alyosha—and endorsed in Alyosha's reply:

> "Imagine that you yourself are erecting the edifice of human fortune with the goal of, at the finale, making people happy, of at last giving them peace and quiet, but that in order to do it it would be necessary and unavoidable to torture to death only one tiny little creature, that same little child that beat its breast with its little fist, and on its unavenged tears to found that edifice, would you agree to be the architect on those conditions, tell me and tell me truly?"
>
> "No, I would not agree," Alyosha said quietly. (Dostoevsky 1993: 282)

Perhaps theodicists have resources that allow them to deal with this objection. My point now is only that I doubt that the considerations Stump advances entitle her to reject it, as she does, as a "reflex visceral rejection of the possibility" that a person's sufferings might contribute to her coming close to God. *Visceral* the objection may be, but that's no fault when fundamental moral values are at stake; *reflex* it decidedly is not. And, most importantly, what's being rejected is *not* the possibility that suffering might, through God's grace, enable the sufferer to be willing to let God come closer; rather, what's being rejected is the claim that this possibility could provide a supremely powerful personal agent with a morally adequate reason for permitting or causing such suffering in the first place. The intended lesson is plain—and it is one, I suggest, that Thomists will generally accept: to make it understandable, even in a limited way, how suffering and evil come under the providence of sovereign divine goodness, as the salvific message of the theistic traditions proclaims that they do, one must abandon the anthropomorphic metaphysics of divinity that takes God to be literally a personal agent with supreme controlling power over reality.

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Response to Stump

Graham Oppy

Eleonore Stump summarizes Aquinas' theodicy as follows: "The morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering is the role of suffering in the process which leads to shared union with God. Aquinas thinks of suffering as healing for those things disturbed in the psyches of post-Fall human beings which keeps them from willing to let God be close to them . . . suffering is God's medicine for human beings."

Stump anticipates a Violent Repudiation of this theodicy: "there are some kinds of suffering which it is immoral to treat as a means to an end." However, she thinks that this Violent Repudiation is met by a Telling Response: "[m]odern medical practice . . . gives the lie to this objection's moral attitude. For the sake of a benefit which is small by Aquinas' standards . . . we are willing to subject human beings to almost any amount of suffering."

I think that this allegedly Telling Response fails, because it ignores the official account of suffering that Stump has adopted: "(S): A human being suffers when he is kept from being what he ought to be, or when he is kept from having the desires of his heart, or both."

It is true that modern medical practice is willing to subject human beings to considerable amounts of *pain* for the sake of (what Aquinas might have taken to be) small benefits; but it is not true that modern medical practice (knowingly) *keeps people from being what they ought to be, or from having the desires of their hearts, or both*, for the sake of those (allegedly) small benefits. (Perhaps the desire of the heart of some terminally ill people is to die, and modern medical practice thwarts this desire. But (a) this is evidently a special case; and (b) even if it were not evidently a special case, it's not entirely clear that Catholics could, in good conscience, try to defend Aquinas by appeal to this consideration.)

So, I think, the Telling Response fails. But, in any case, it seems to me that the Violent Repudiation is not entirely on target. A much more significant tub-thumping objection

is that there are some kinds of suffering which simply cannot be construed as healing, or divine medicine, or the like. In particular, suffering which destroys a person's capacity to be what they ought to have been—or their capacity to have what their heart had desired—very often is not capable of construal as healing, or divine medicine, or the like. Maybe the theodicy is plausible for: hunger, thirst, mundane bodily suffering (pain), tribulations, and (maybe even) heart-wrenching examples from the newspapers. But, I say, it is not plausible for the kinds of suffering that seriously damage moral responsibility for action and full mental functionality.

Consider the following account of the typical effects of appalling torture:

> The most terrible, and intractable, legacy of torture is the killing of desire—that is, of curiosity, of the impulse for connection and meaning-making, of the capacity for mutuality, of the tolerance for ambiguity and ambivalence. For these patients, to know another mind is unbearable. To connect with another is irrelevant. They are entrapped in what was born(e) during their trauma, as they perpetuate the erasure of meaning, re-enact the dynamics of annihilation through sadomasochistic, narcissistic, paranoid, or self-deadening modes of relating, and mobilize their agency toward warding off mutuality, goodness, hope, and connection. In brief, they live to prove death. And it is this perversion of agency and desire that constitutes the deepest post-traumatic injury, and the most invisible and pernicious of human-rights violations.
>
> (Nguyen 2007: 57–8)

Here is a vignette—one of several from the just-cited article—which gives some indication of the sort of treatment that can lead to this kind of outcome:

> Marianne is a 22-year-old Senegalese refugee. When she was 19, Marianne was stopped on the road in the Casamance region. She was herded into a truck and sent to a detention camp, on the accusation of belonging to the opposition party. There, for 9 months, she was kept in a windowless cell, fed rotten food and minimal water, forced to urinate and defecate where she slept. Every day she was taken to the field to perform meaningless back-breaking labor. There would be intermittent interrogations and beatings, accompanied by the occasional gang rape, to extract information about her alleged opposition activities. (Nguyen 2007: 53)

It is simply *obscene* to think of Marianne's treatment as 'God's medicine'.

If this alternative Violent Repudiation stands, then we cannot plausibly claim that Aquinas' theodicy is buttressed by empirical studies of 'adversarial growth'. In response to the observation that suffering can lead to psychological disintegration and 'turning away from union with God', Stump offers the observation that since free sufferers can react negatively to their suffering, negative reactions to suffering are no evidence against Aquinas' position. But—setting aside what we might be tempted to say about such egregious blaming of victims—it seems *obviously false* to claim that victims *always* have a choice whether to respond positively to what happens to them (even if we restrict our attention to the case of victims who are initially fully mentally functional adult human beings). Where suffering seriously damages will and reason, victims frequently do not have a *choice* to respond positively to what happens to them (and, in particular, they do not have a choice to respond positively to what

happens to them in ways that reflect what they ought to have been and what were the desires of their hearts).

The remarks that I have just made should not be taken to suggest that there is nothing to be learned from the theodicy attributed to Aquinas. In particular, it seems to me to be true that, in cases where suffering does not cause the kind of damage to will and reason that destroys capacity for choice (in the ways described by Nguyen), it often enough turns out that we come to see suffering as something that, while we would not have chosen it for ourselves unbidden, is not a matter for retrospective regret.

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Response to Stump

N. N. Trakakis

Stump's theodicy is deeply marked by her lifelong engagement with the medieval tradition. Indeed, Stump speaks of medievals such as Augustine, Gregory the Great, Saadya Gaon, and Aquinas as sharing, in broad outline, a distinct vision of God's providential plan for the world, and in her position paper Stump seeks to distil some of the main features of this medieval theodicy from the work of Aquinas. But what Stump fails to recognize is the *historically contingent character* of the problem of evil. Were Aquinas, and the other premodern theologians cited by Stump, engaged in the same project as Stump and we are? I doubt it.

I don't wish to say much on this here, other than to refer to some perceptive comments made by Thomas Long in *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (2011). Long opens the second chapter of his book by outlining how Bart Ehrman (a specialist in New Testament and early Christianity, and professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) gave up belief in God as a result of finding the existence of God incompatible with the realities of suffering.[17] Long then invites an interesting thought experiment: suppose Ehrman lived in the Middle Ages, would he have responded in this way? Most likely not. But then, why has he reacted in this way now? Long states,

> If Ehrman had lived in the fourteenth century, his sense of injustice about suffering might have provoked him to prayerful lament, to ever-greater cries to heaven for God to come and save. But Ehrman lives on this side of modernity's ditch, and his crisis of faith leads him not to his

[17] Ehrman recounts this in his 2008 book, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*.

knees in prayer but to his mind in thinking things through rationally. A fourteenth-century mind would encounter terrible suffering and say, "This is from the hand of God. What is God *saying* to us?" A contemporary mind encounters suffering and asks, "How does the reality of this suffering fit into my worldview? How do the pieces of reality I think of as true fit together logically?" (23, emphasis in original)

If medievals, unlike moderns, did not regard suffering as even posing *prima facie* evidence against the existence of God, then Stump is not in fact continuing the medieval project of theodicy, for there was none.

Moving to the details of Stump's theodicy, I first wish to consider her response to the objection to treating suffering as a means to an end. Stump responds that the appeal usually made by the objector to "particularly heart-wrenching examples" is flawed because it doesn't take account of the fact, highlighted by Aquinas, that the sufferer never suffers alone, but always in the presence of God (whether the sufferer is aware of this or not). But how does this help? Let's consider one of these "heart-wrenching examples": a woman tortured and raped. The objector holds (and I would take the side of the objector here) that it would be morally unconscionable for God (or any moral agent, for that matter) to permit the woman to be raped for the sake of some greater benefit (even for a benefit that accrues to the woman). Stump replies: "But you have not taken into account the continued presence of God to that woman." How is that of any help? How could God's being present to this woman in any way lessen or eliminate the morally dubious nature of God's permission of the rape in the first place? To be honest, I find this somewhat bizarre—I hate to say it, but I am *stumped*! What reply can you give to someone who thinks that a mother is (morally) allowed or entitled to give her daughter over to a rapist, as long as the mother will be there later to look after and console her daughter? It's important not to domesticate suffering and especially not to glorify it, to think of it as a 'privilege', as a divinely bestowed gift, as a sign of divine favour or blessing, as the way things ought to be. No, suffering is always the condition of the fallen world, *not the way God wanted the world to be*.

Stump seeks to bolster her case by drawing an analogy with medical practice:

For the sake of a benefit which is small by Aquinas' standards—an increase in the degree of biological health, or even an increase in the duration of mere biological life—we are willing to subject human beings to almost any amount of suffering. It is hard to see, then, on what basis we would find it morally unthinkable to allow suffering for the sake of flourishing in union with God.

Analogies of this sort have become standard fare in the theodicy literature, but they strike me as evincing a lack of attention to the hideous nature of evil (or what Marilyn Adams calls 'horrendous evil'). No one would object to a medical procedure on the grounds that the suffering is being treated in instrumentalist fashion. But between a medical procedure and rape there is a world of difference. Only two important points of difference need be mentioned: (i) *consent*: the person undergoing the procedure, or their guardian, gives their consent, whereas the victim of torture and rape does not

consent to their suffering; and (ii) *degradation*: the person suffering at the hands of the surgeon, unlike the rape victim, is not degraded, dishonoured, and dehumanized in such a way that they are led to consider their life no longer worth living.

Regarding 'adversarial growth', this is a phenomenon few would deny (and empirical studies are not required to confirm it). However, the appeal to adversarial growth, as a solution to the problem of evil, is open to various objections (that repeat in many ways responses to Hick's similar appeal to 'soul-making').

Let's assume that, given our current 'fallen' condition (where we are, e.g., psychically fragmented and alienated from God), the harsh medicine of suffering is the best or only means for us to achieve healing and regeneration. But, as Paul Draper (2011) puts it, "one might ask why God caused or allowed me to be internally fragmented in the first place. Stump offers no answer to this question."

Even if great suffering and adversity often make possible great psychological or spiritual growth, this does not mean that God (or any moral agent) is morally justified in permitting someone to suffer *for the sake of* such growth or development. This problem also afflicts Stump's theodicy for 'heartbreak', for suffering resulting from the failure to obtain the desires of one's heart. For, again, even if (as Stump holds) great benefits may accrue to one as a result of the suffering flowing from heartbreak (e.g., Milton writes poetic masterpieces, Clairborne Park's love for her autistic child grows and deepens in unexpected ways), it remains to be shown that God was (morally) justified in allowing the suffering *in order to* secure the relevant benefits.

Further, as critics of Hick often pointed out, intense suffering is frequently destructive and demoralizing (for the sufferer themselves), effecting a breakdown rather than a breakthrough. The frequency and wide distribution of such negative effects seems to empirically falsify, or at least place some strain on, Stump's contention (in response to C a2) that we have little evidence to suggest that suffering is not the best means for producing personal growth and regeneration. As Draper (2011) has stated, "in the case of some sorts of suffering and/or some sorts of people, suffering *predictably* diminishes the sufferer, leading to worse psychological health and a decreased capacity for personal relationships" (emphasis in original).[18]

Stump is well aware of such a criticism, and replies by way of free will: regeneration will occur only if it is freely willed, and God does not wish to overrule or determine our wills. But now the *value* of free will comes into doubt: Is free will worth the price of the personal and spiritual degeneration following from some traumatic experience, one which might lead someone to taking their own life? (Think only of Sophie in *Sophie's Choice*.) Also, as Hasker (2011) observes, the appeal to free will in this context has the unfortunate result of 'blaming the victim': moral responsibility for the sufferer's failure to flourish lies with the sufferer himself (447, n18).

A similar difficulty might be raised against Stump's account of the desires of the heart. No doubt great personal (e.g., psychological, physical, financial) hardship is

[18] The same objection is raised by Hasker (2011: 447).

often the ground from which some of the best art has been created, and Stump is right to point to Milton here. But just as frequently, if not more so, suffering and adversity function as limitations and stumbling blocks, preventing artists from excelling in their work and fulfilling their dreams. As with the tendency to glorify suffering, so with the romantic notion of the tortured and suffering genius: a certain degree of skepticism is healthy. Creativity, and more broadly human flourishing, is often impeded and not furthered by suffering. Examples are legion, but think of artists trapped in terrible circumstances (addiction, war, destructive relationships, tedious jobs, etc.) which crush their creative spirit.

Here, as before, Stump might resort to the appeal to free will. But free will may be of little use, for in many cases the inability to rise above (or benefit from) one's adverse circumstances has little to do with one's personal choices. This is where Terrence Tilley's call for a redirection of the discussion towards systemic societal structures that make possible 'social evils' could usefully be heeded. Consider, for example, a young boy blessed with extraordinary intellectual talents, who, because he is born into a poor, rural community with few resources to nurture such talents, doesn't flourish in the way he could (or the way he desires to).

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Reply to Bishop

Eleonore Stump

I appreciate John Bishop's cultured and literate comments on my chapter, and I would like to begin my response with the issue with which he ends, an issue which he sums up with the much-quoted lines from Dostoyevsky. In that text, Ivan Karamazov asks his brother Alyosha whether Alyosha would be willing to give humankind happiness by torturing a child to death, and Alyosha answers softly that he wouldn't.

What makes Ivan's question to Alyosha emotionally moving is that the sufferer is an infant and the good in question is the happiness of all humanity except that

child, but the principle at issue remains the same even if we make the sufferer an adult and diminish somewhat the benefit the suffering provides. Even so modified, the question Ivan asks Alyosha comes basically to this: Is it morally permissible to allow a person to suffer for the sake of some good that goes primarily to someone other than the sufferer? The principle that it *is* permissible is one which some philosophers do accept, but I myself have rejected it with vehemence in all my work on the problem of evil. Instead, I have insisted that the work of theodicy be made harder by taking as a constraint the principle that the benefit justifying any allowing of suffering has to go primarily to the sufferer, and not to anyone else. And, in addition, I have also argued for the further constraint that in the case of suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter*, the benefit justifying allowing such suffering has to be a matter of warding off a greater harm for the sufferer, not just providing a greater good. So, contrary to what Bishop suggests, like Alyosha, I also have said, "I wouldn't," only I have said it fiercely, not softly.

With that issue addressed, I want to turn to the objection with which Bishop begins. He calls attention to a paradox which, in his view, vitiates the defence I argued for, namely, that on the account of suffering I give, it turns out to be self-contradictory that suffering can lead to flourishing, contrary to the claims in the defence I argued. But, as I explained in *Wandering in Darkness*, where I discussed it in detail, this apparent paradox threatens every theodicy and defence. I summarized my discussion of the apparent paradox in this way:

> Aquinas's theodicy resolves the apparent paradox that threatens any attempt at theodicy—that there seems to be nothing a person cares about more than what he has lost when he is broken, or heartbroken, in suffering—because Aquinas's theodicy relativizes the things a person cares about to different portions of that person's life, the this-worldly portion and the other-worldly portion in the afterlife. Without this sort of relativization, it is hard to see how the paradox could be resolved. If there is only one realm within which to consider benefits for a person, then it does seem difficult, or even impossible, to find anything that a person would (or could) care about more than his flourishing or his heart's desires. For this reason, if we insist that there be some response to the challenge of the argument from evil that does not make mention of the afterlife, in my view we consign such a response to failure. I take it that this is another way of affirming the point Aquinas himself emphasized, that the notion of an afterlife is central to any attempt at theodicy (or defense) that is to have a hope of being successful. From Aquinas's point of view, trying to understand the pattern of suffering in this world without reference to an afterlife is just as Martian as trying to understand the pattern of suffering in a hospital without reference to life outside the hospital and after the hospital time. (Stump 2010: 419–20)

Now Bishop may well feel that there is something inappropriate about adding considerations of an afterlife to discussions of the problem of evil, since so many people engaged in the discussion reject belief in an afterlife. But here it is important to remember the dialectic of the problem of evil.

The argument from evil is constructed as an attack on theism, and a defence is a response to that attack. Because this is what a defence is, the criteria for the success of a defence are a function of what the attack is. All the varying forms of the argument from evil aim at the same conclusion, namely, 'God does not exist'. And they also all share this feature: that conclusion is supposed to follow from some facts having to do with suffering. In its form as the evidential argument from evil, the attack attempts to reason to the non-existence of God not on the basis of a logical incompatibility between God and suffering but rather on the basis of an incompatibility between the existence of God and facts about suffering in this world. The idea is that even if there could be a God in some world containing suffering, there could not be a God in the actual world because of some facts about the suffering in the actual world.

But since this is what the argument from evil is, it should be clear that the attack constructed by means of the argument needs to use only premises that are not themselves points of dispute between theism and atheism. It would make no difference to theism if it turned out, unsurprisingly enough, that a mix of theistic beliefs with beliefs rejected by theists formed an inconsistent set. Suppose, for example, that the argument from evil included the claim that all suffering causes human beings to become ultimately more internally fragmented in psyche. This is a claim that theists will find incompatible with their beliefs about God. So the mix of this claim and theistic belief will in fact constitute an inconsistent set, but this fact will not trouble theists, who will reject the claim about the effects of suffering in human lives. So if the argument from evil is to have a chance of being successful, it cannot itself rest on controverted claims rejected by theists.

Or, to put the same point in a slightly different way, if the argument from evil relies on claims rejected by theists, then the argument shows not that something about suffering is incompatible with the existence of God, but that something about suffering *and* a controverted claim are incompatible with the existence of God. And in that case it is easy to save belief in the existence of God: just reject the controverted claim. Since the theist already rejects this claim, the lesson that he must reject it to preserve belief in the existence of God will not trouble him. For this reason, it is self-defeating for proponents of the argument of evil to take the argument to require rejecting belief in an afterlife.

And so the defence I argued for resolved the paradox Bishop points to by sketching a possible world in which there is both suffering and also an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God, and in which the loss of flourishing in the relatively short this-worldly portion of a sufferer's life is defeated by her flourishing in the everlasting portion of her life after death.

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Reply to Oppy

Eleonore Stump

I am grateful to Graham Oppy for his sensitive and engaged comments. In the short space available to me here, I can comment only briefly on two of the objections he raises.

First, Oppy rejects the medical analogy which has traditionally been employed in connection with theodicy and which I also adopted in the defence I argued for.

Oppy characterizes one way in which I use this analogy in these terms. There is a common objection to any kind of theodicy or defence which holds that there are some kinds of suffering that cannot be used as a means to an end, however good the end is. Oppy calls this objection "the Violent Repudiation" of theodicy and defence. In response to this kind of objection, I said that modern medical practice gives it the lie. Oppy calls this "a Telling Response," and he argues that it fails.

He thinks it fails because he supposes that, contrary to the Telling Response, in the interest of healing, modern medical practice does not cause suffering, on the understanding of suffering I adopted. On that understanding of suffering, a person's suffering consists in her being kept from flourishing or kept from the desires of her heart. On this understanding of suffering, Oppy thinks, the pain that modern medicine so frequently causes cannot be construed as suffering. And so, he concludes, the Telling Response fails.

But, to me at any rate, it seems clear that the effects of the attempts at healing by modern medicine are frequently suffering of exactly this sort. The debility, weakness, loss of function, cognitive impairment, and other such effects of chemotherapy, for example, do diminish the kind of human flourishing we care about, at least in the short run, but often enough permanently. And any ordinary human heart's desire—say, to continue at one's job at one's ordinary level of functioning or to care for one's children as one would like to do—can also be seriously set back by such treatments or permanently taken away. So it seems to me that Oppy's objection on this score is itself not telling.

Oppy's main objection to the defence I argued for, however, is that some kinds of suffering are so severe that they cannot plausibly be construed as leading to any kind of good and that supposing the sufferer has any choice in whether or not his suffering leads to good is a matter of blaming the victim. In my view, this objection of Oppy's has three parts.

First, Oppy thinks that, in virtue of their severity, some kinds of suffering can damage mental functioning and thereby impair moral agency. Consequently, suffering of this sort, Oppy thinks, cannot be construed as compatible with flourishing.

Secondly, he objects that, on my account, if suffering does not lead to healing, then the sufferer is to blame for not being healed; and this position strikes him as morally repugnant.

Thirdly, he supposes that if on my account suffering is meant to lead to healing, then it must be the case that God has chosen that suffering for that purpose, but this position also strikes him as unacceptable.

In response, I want to make clear, first, that I share Oppy's revulsion and distress over the severe suffering some human beings undergo at the hands of others. As I have tried to make clear in all my writing on the problem of evil, in my view, if one ever loses this revulsion and distress at suffering in the process of philosophizing, one will have lost one's humanity as well. With so much by way of preface, let me respond to Oppy's three parts in reverse order.

First, my position does not entail that God picks particular suffering to bring about—which is, in my view also, a repugnant position—but only that God does not stop all the suffering human beings produce. God permits suffering that has a chance of advancing the sufferer's flourishing, on one or another account of flourishing. And so what I have highlighted as the third part of Oppy's objection is right but it does not apply to the defence for which I argued.

Next, it is certainly not the case that on my view anyone who rejects the good that suffering might bring him is blameable for doing so. As many ethicists have pointed out, it is possible to attribute even a lamentable action or attitude to a person without supposing that that person is in any way reprovable for it. So to say that a person is responsible for his rejection of a good possible through suffering does not imply that he is culpable for it. It may be that a person who rejects it is not to be blamed for doing so but only to be loved the more for the suffering that he endures in this rejection itself.

Finally, with regard to the first part of Oppy's objection, it seems to me important to reflect on the nature of flourishing. Flourishing, on my account, is a matter of relationality, primarily with oneself and God, and secondarily then with other people, either now or in an afterlife. It is possible, on this account, to have irremediable biological and psychological damage and yet to have flourishing, greater flourishing, in fact, than is had by some of those others who have no similar damage. In my view, Sojourner Truth is an example of a human being in such a condition. The abuse to which she was subjected growing up in slavery is bound to have left her body with lasting damage, and the trauma of what she endured is certain to have left deep psychological scars as well. But her flourishing as a human being in relationship with God and in human community seems to me undeniable, as witnessed by the great honour in which she is rightly held.

So I certainly accept that some kinds of horrifying abuse can damage a person irremediably in body or mind. But even a person so damaged can flourish and live a highly admirable life. And this point applies even when the damage results in mental illness or impaired agency through brain dysfunction. It is a mistake (and one that those suffering with disability themselves energetically repudiate) to suppose that the damage to body or mind with which some disabled people must live renders them unable to live as well as other people.

It is important to see that if this were not so, if Oppy were not wrong on this score, then those healthy in body and mind among the middle and upper classes of the Western industrialized countries would have a monopoly on flourishing; and, to me at any rate, this is an unpalatable thing to say or think.

Reply to Trakakis

Eleonore Stump

I am grateful to Nick Trakakis for his comments and the sensitivity to contemporary sensibilities that they show. In the short space at my disposal, I will have to concentrate only on a few of the points he raises. Since some of Trakakis' concerns overlap with those of Graham Oppy, which I address in responding to Oppy's comments, I will leave those concerns to one side here.

First, Trakakis thinks that I am trying to present Aquinas' theodicy without realizing that the medievals did not see the problem of evil as we do. But here we need to remember the details of the argument from evil. The basic argument from evil tries to show that there is an inconsistency among these four propositions:

(1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is omniscient.
(3) God is perfectly good.
(4) There is suffering in the world.

So the presence of suffering in the world can challenge the existence of God, or alternatively it can challenge one of the divine attributes. While it is true that for medievals such as Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas the existence of suffering in the world did not call into question the existence of God, it did call into question God's providential goodness. And so there are not two different problems of evil, one addressed by the medievals and one of concern to us. Rather, there are two differing worldviews, the medieval one and the secular contemporary one, from within which thinkers approach the problem of evil and consider which of its apparently inconsistent propositions are the weakest. Finally, it is perhaps worth adding that I did not argue for the medieval worldview. I simply used it to construct a defence—not a theodicy—by sketching a possible world in which God and suffering coexist.

Next, Trakakis points out that the claim that God is present to those who suffer is no justification for God's allowing their suffering. This is certainly true; but the defence I argued for did not say otherwise. The claim that God is present can alter the *data* of suffering, but not its *justifiability*, which has to be argued for on other grounds. The argument for the justifiability of suffering depends on the kind of detailed drawing of connections between suffering and flourishing that I set forth in the defence I argued for in *Wandering in Darkness*.

There is a similar misunderstanding in Trakakis' claim that, on my view, God is justified in allowing suffering for the sake of adversarial growth, which is a good for the sufferer. What I actually say in *Wandering in Darkness* is this:

> In ordinary cases of suffering permitted or brought about by one person for the good of another, if the suffering is involuntary *simpliciter*, then one person who allows (or causes) the suffering of another is not justified simply in virtue of the suffering's contributing to some greater good for the sufferer, even if the suffering is a necessary means to this greater good . . . The connection of the involuntary suffering to the greater good of the [sufferer] is not enough to justify [someone] in bringing about such suffering . . . On the other hand . . . [w]hat we find morally unacceptable when the benefit for the suffering is a greater good we find morally admirable when it involves warding off a greater harm. On our ordinary moral intuitions . . . for suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter*, warding off a greater harm for a person is a morally acceptable reason for allowing suffering, if the suffering is the best or only means available in the circumstances to that end, but providing a greater good is not. (Stump, 2010: 392–3)

On the defence I argued for, then, what justifies God in allowing suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter* (and that is the suffering that concerns Trakakis) is not God's presence with the sufferer or adversarial growth for the sufferer, but rather the warding off of a greater harm for the sufferer, namely, irremediable and lasting psychic brokenness and radical isolation.

Next, quoting Paul Draper, Trakakis objects that "suffering *predictably* diminishes the sufferer, leading to worse psychological health and a decreased capacity for personal relationships." In my view, there are several problems with this claim. First, as I argued in *Wandering in Darkness*, a person's psychological health or brokenness is not transparent either to her or to those around her. Secondly, it is important to remember that what is at issue in the defence I argue for is primarily relationship with God, and only secondarily relationship with human beings. But a person's openness to relationship with God is even less transparent than her psychic health is. Thirdly, and most importantly, it is possible for a person to have spiritual health, openness to love, and joy in relationship with God, even when that person is irrevocably psychologically damaged through trauma. Consider Joseph Merrick, the so-called Elephant Man, or Harriet Tubman. These people suffered terribly at the hands of others, but they are held in great honour now because the richness of their spirits is luminous even through the lasting damage in their bodies and minds. So even if a person's suffering is severe enough to leave her irremediably broken in one way or another, this fact by itself does not mean that she is deprived of flourishing.

Finally, Trakakis calls attention to those whose native gifts are blighted through suffering caused by poverty or for some other reason. But here too, as I say in the defence I argued for, the suffering that human injustice causes to some people cannot take away from them their chance at flourishing. Sophie Scholl, a member of the White Rose resistance group in 1940s Germany, did not flourish in any ordinary human way, because the Nazis executed her when she was still just a very young woman. And yet

the narrative of her life has inspired people around the world and been the subject of books and films. It would take an ideologically hardy person to claim that her short life is not an example of human flourishing. To say so is not to validate the horrors that some human beings perpetrate on others. It is only to say that the human spirit is able to defy such injustice and shine in loveliness worth honouring even so.

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2

On Identifying the Problem of Evil and the Possibility of Its Theist Solution

John Bishop

The Foundational Problem of Evil

What is 'the problem of evil'? Philosophers have frequently distinguished different problems of evil—practical, pastoral, existential, theoretical, intellectual. It might thus seem misguided to suppose that there is such a thing as *the* problem of evil. But I disagree: we can and should identify a certain problem as *the* problem, or, at least, *the foundational* problem of evil. This is the problem of *dealing with, coping with*, or *coming to terms with* evil.

Philosophers who discuss 'the problem of evil' have also frequently elaborated on the meaning of evil, re-expressing the problem as one of pain or suffering, parsing it into the problems of moral and natural evil, or broadening the scope of 'evil' to include what might better be described as defects, such as the extent of human ignorance or the hiddenness of the divine. The idea that there is such a thing as 'the problem of evil' might thus seem misguided for the further reason that evil is not a unified proper kind but a catch-all for a variety of negative factors, each of which may present a different problem or set of problems. I believe, however, that we can and should identify a unified notion of evil as the object of the foundational problem of evil.

I have something quite specific in mind when I speak of dealing with, coping with, or coming to terms with evil. Consider the person who seeks to live a meaningful, happy, and worthwhile life, and recognizes that living well requires living virtuously—according to widely shared views about what that means. Now, there are many things that may interfere with a person's achieving this aim, and which people consciously recognize as obstacles to human fulfilment. These are evils. And the foundational problem of evil is to come to terms with the fact that there are evils in this sense.

Pains as such are not evils—not in the sense I am claiming as relevant to *the* foundational problem of evil. Certain kinds of painful experiences pose no threat at all to a

person's living well. Other kinds of painful suffering *are* seriously threatening—some so bad, as torturers well know, that a person's psychic integrity can be destroyed by them. Pains suffered by animals that are not persons are not evils either—not in my favoured sense. (I do not deny that *a* problem of animal suffering, or *a* problem of pain as such, may arise in certain contexts: I am claiming only that *the problem of evil I take to be foundational* is neither a problem of pain nor a problem that has as an instance the problem of animal suffering.)

Human beings are animals who come to be aware of evils—of obstacles, or what they take to be obstacles, to their living well. Thus, evils come to be a problem for lived human existence—an existential problem. This existential problem is experienced naïvely as the problem of dodging the obstacles. It becomes sophisticated, however, with the recognition that the obstacles cannot all be dodged. Even if occasional individuals did lead a charmed existence free of evil, they would not live free of the threat of evil. Humans, as a generality, do not escape evils. And, if our mortality is an evil—or, at least, presents itself as one in our experience—not one individual human escapes.

The fact that evils blight human lives—virtually all human lives to a greater or lesser degree—thus becomes a *higher-order* obstacle to living life well. An important feature of this higher-order evil is that it becomes apparent from a relatively other-regarding and impartial perspective. The naïve problem of trying to avoid evils is naturally focused on the self and significant others. But the more sophisticated problem of coming to terms with the evils to which all human life is vulnerable requires a sense that one's own meaningful and happy living cannot be screened off from the suffering of the many who do not live meaningful and happy lives. ("Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind.") And some people's experience of this sense of expanded involvement extends to (some) non-human animals: in this way, animal suffering may, after all, become implicated in the foundational problem of evil.

Coming to Terms with the Foundational Problem of Evil: The Role of Theist Faith

As I understand it, then, the foundational problem of evil is the existential problem of coping with the fact—'the fact of evil'—that human lives are beset, sometimes to a destructive extent, by actual and potential obstacles to their fulfilment. What do I mean by 'coping with' this 'fact of evil'? I mean that, in order to live well, a person needs to overcome natural dispositions that generate, from the recognition of the fact of evil, attitudes and behaviour that undermine fulfilling the goal of living happily and virtuously. One may, for example, experience despair in response to one's own suffering or the suffering of others. Or one may come to think that happiness is to be pursued without concern for virtue. Or one may resolutely adhere to virtue, yet abandon hope. All these possible responses to the fact of evil in one way or another undermine our living well. To avoid such responses (and others that also threaten our flourishing) is to come to terms with the fact of evil, and to resolve the foundational existential problem of evil.

How do people try to resolve this foundational problem of securing their commitment to living well despite the fact of evil? How do people manage to pursue with hope a meaningful and virtuous existence when they know the continuing history of failures in human fulfilment? Some people may simply have the right temperament: their responses to the fact of evil are fortunately not governed by dispositions to despair or withdraw into self-centred protectiveness. Of more philosophical interest, however, are attempts that include *cognitive commitments* to an overall view of reality that purports to make sense of the fact of evil while vindicating as worthwhile the pursuit of happiness in accordance with virtue. These more robust attempts rest on the idea that meeting the threat of evil with a courageous and hopeful commitment to living well is *the right response* to how reality is. The thought is that coping properly with evil does not finally depend on the contingencies of favourable circumstances and temperament. Rather, *it is grounded in the way things are*, so that anyone who properly grasps the reality of human existence in the world will recognize that pursuing happiness in accordance with virtue is *the right way* to frame all our living. Our vulnerability to destructive evil, from within as well as without, must be accepted clear-sightedly, but awareness of it may nevertheless belong to a total understanding of reality that makes rational continuing commitment to virtuous living and shows despairing and self-centred responses to evil to be mistaken.

I maintain that a complete philosophical (or reflective) ethics must take a stance on how, if at all, what I am here calling the foundational problem of evil may be resolved. The business of ethics is not exhausted by the articulation of practical ideals. A full answer to the question, 'How should we live?', also requires an account of reality *as favourable to* a steadfast and hopeful commitment to the articulated ethical ideals—otherwise the fulfilment of those ideals seems little more than a noble fantasy, unfit for adoption as an overriding end by those who 'live in the real world'. It is a major philosophical challenge to provide a satisfactory account of how reality could be 'favourable' to the ethical ideals in the required sense. I will not take up that challenge here, beyond recording my view that meeting it requires accepting a theist metaphysics or some near equivalent and noting that a defence of this view must resist the objection that theist metaphysics necessarily reduces virtuous commitment to an ultimate selfishness. My point now is that the fact of evil *tends to count against* the claim that 'reality is favourable to the ethical ideals', however that claim is properly articulated. Bad things happen to good people. Often enough, the wicked flourish. In a good many instances, it looks like folly to stick with the path of virtue.

Intellectual Problems of Evil . . .

Robust resolutions of the foundational existential problem of evil, then, posit an overall orientation towards reality that accepts the fact of evil yet makes rational the project of living well in accordance with virtue (according to a suitably wide consensus as to what that involves). Articulating a 'salvific' worldview that permits such a resolution

is challenge enough. If that challenge may be surmounted, there is then a further problem: *the very fact of evil with which we are potentially able to cope through accepting the postulated worldview tends (more or less strongly) to count against the worldview's being true*. Robust attempts to resolve the foundational existential problem of evil thus generate an *intellectual problem of evil*—a problem of understanding how a salvific worldview might reasonably be accepted given the fact of evil itself. And there are, of course, as many intellectual problems of evil as there are distinct salvific worldviews that reach some suitable threshold of intelligibility.

It could conceivably be that the intellectual problem of evil cannot be solved—not even for a single one of the salvific worldviews on offer. Then what I have called 'robust' resolution of the existential problem of evil will be unachievable: maintaining commitment to right ideals about how we should live will then become a matter of purely psychological and practical interest, as we seek to understand, and then promote, benign responses to evil that enable both sufferers and witnesses to suffering to go on living meaningful and virtuous lives. This will be so, at least, assuming that we do indeed continue to care about living well in the face of evil—and perhaps there will be no deep reason why we should retain this preference.

. . . and Their Providing the Context for the 'Argument from Evil'

At the core of the theist religious traditions is the affirmation of the truth of a salvific worldview. These traditions proclaim as welcome truth salvation-stories of God's saving action. If some version of such a theist worldview is to be accepted as reasonable, there must be a solution to the specific intellectual problem of evil generated by theism. This is the intellectual problem of evil on which Western philosophers have focused—indeed, this is the problem typically identified by Western philosophers as *the* problem of evil. This problem is aptly presented in the form of an argument—the Argument from Evil—whose most basic form is: If the God of theism exists, there is no evil; there is evil; hence it is not the case that the God of theism exists. The crucial first premise here is affirmed on the grounds that evil cannot belong to creation because of the divine perfections—in particular, omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness.

Unless this Argument is identified (as I have identified it) as expressing an intellectual problem arising from the theist attempt to resolve the foundational existential problem of evil, there is a tendency for philosophers to assume that the dialectical context for the Argument from Evil is simply the project of determining objectively, from a neutral starting point, whether it is possible, or likely, that God exists. This assumption ignores the functional role of belief in God as mediated through traditions resting on claims to revelation: belief in God functions to save believers from falling into despair or selfishness in the face of evil. There is, in other words, a certain kind of argument from evil *for* God's existence that can be expressed as follows: there is salvation from negative responses to evil only if God exists; there is (there must be!)

salvation; therefore, God exists. This is a practical argument, of course, resting on a felt imperative to accept an account of reality that grounds commitment to virtuous responses to evil. It indicates that the concern about how evil could be compatible with God's existence arises from the desire to accept an inherited tradition that affirms God's salvific self-revelation precisely because such acceptance is believed essential for coping properly with the fact of evil. The reflective (would-be) believer asks whether the salvation-story can possibly be true, and is rightly disturbed by the thought that the very existence of the evil from which salvation is sought shows that the story cannot be true. Believers who care about truth, then, must accept some solution to the intellectual problem of evil generated by theism. But they need not deny that, from a neutral starting point, the existence of evil—or of certain kinds or degrees of evil—renders it unlikely that the God of salvation could exist. Finding themselves in practical need of accepting a revelation-based proclamation of divine salvation in order to live well in the face of evil is manifestly not a neutral starting point, however!

This way of dialectically situating theism's intellectual problem of evil shows that the Argument from Evil that expresses it is at root a 'logical' rather than an 'evidential' one—to use a common (if not altogether apt) terminology. The fundamental problem is to explain how the fact of evil *can be logically consistent with* the reality of the God who saves. The fact of evil threatens the admissibility of accepting the theist salvation-story even as a story that *could* be true—it does not merely threaten it as unlikely to be true given our evidence. Relying as they do on inherited revelatory tradition, believers need not suppose that 'ordinary' evidence—evidence that is independent of anything claimed true by revelation—suffices to make it reasonable to accept the salvation-story. But it is vital to the rational integrity of their belief that believers in the salvation-story take that story to be logically coherent—and it will not be logically coherent if (as the 'logical' Argument from Evil maintains) the evil from which the story proclaims we are able to be saved could not possibly have existed if the God at the core of the story was indeed real.

There is, of course, a question whether appealing to revelation could ever make it reasonable to commit oneself to the truth of a salvation-story. Some argue that this commitment could be reasonable only given independent evidence that shows the alleged revelatory source to be reliable. Others defend taking an inherited salvation-story to be true as a faith-venture that goes beyond (though not against) what can be established by appeal to independent evidence—including independent evidence for the authenticity of the source. Defenders of commitment to theist salvation-stories will need to enter this debate: Is there adequate evidence for the reliability of (for example) the Christian sources of revelation, and does there need to be if faith in that salvation-story is to be reasonable? There will be no occasion for this debate about evidential support, however, if the Argument from Evil succeeds in establishing the logical impossibility of a theist salvation-story. Defenders of theism, then, have a prior need to rebut such an Argument. (The root intellectual problem of evil for theism, then, is to understand the consistency of God's reality and the reality of evil. If that root

problem can be resolved, there will remain a further intellectual problem only for 'evidentialist' theists who will need to explain how the fact of evil does not tip the balance of our overall evidence against God's being real.)

The Concept of God and Conceptions of the Divine

A significant benefit of the dialectical framing I have outlined for theism's intellectual problem of evil is its situating the concept of God in the context of salvific worldviews. The concept of God is thus clearly a *role* concept—the concept of that which plays a certain role in the context of a worldview that fulfils important functions in the form of life of the communities belonging to the tradition that proclaims it. A vital component of that role, evidently, is the role of saviour: God is the One who enables our properly coming to terms with the fact of evil. Another vital component of the role is that God is creator of all that exists, so that what exists does so ultimately because of the divine purpose. (God's purpose, God's creating, and God's saving are importantly interrelated.)

Though there is a unified concept of God, there can be different *conceptions* of *what it is* that occupies the God-role specified in that concept. Theist traditions proclaim God's reality as self-revealed, but our understanding of God has to be developed and necessarily remains incomplete. God's nature is incomprehensible—in the sense, not of being unintelligible, but of transcending finite understanding. Some resist altogether attempts to understand the divine, and others maintain that understanding can grasp only what God is not. If finite minds do choose to pursue positive understanding, however, they must expect any conception of God to be limited and open to correction and further development. (This situation is essentially no different from the pursuit of scientific knowledge generally: fallibilism applies as much in theology as in natural science.)

The Place of the Argument from Evil in Assessing Conceptions of the Divine

One important motivation for critically examining positive conceptions of God is the reflective (would-be) theist's need to resolve theism's root intellectual problem of evil. The doubt about how the God who saves from evil could be real given the existence of evil in the first place can be articulated *only relative to some more or less determinate positive conception of God*. Consequently, the attempt to resolve this doubt requires engaging with the question whether specific conceptions of God are adequate. The Argument from Evil can proceed only by presupposing some conception of God. Attempts to rebut it may keep within the conception presupposed—and may perhaps succeed. But theists have an important alternative: they may try *accepting* the Argument while arguing that its presupposed conception of God should be rejected as inadequate. The Argument from Evil might thus succeed without constituting an argument for outright atheism. Indeed, its success might serve as prolegomenon to a better positive articulation of the divine—though, of course, an intellectual problem of evil may also

arise for that new conception, but it will be, in its details, a different intellectual problem, and one that might prove more tractable.

The Personal OmniGod and the Dialectic of Response to the Argument from Evil

Let me give an account of how this dialectic plays out with respect to the conception of God typically assumed in presentations of the Argument from Evil in analytical philosophy of religion. That conception is of God as a supernatural immaterial personal agent, who has, *as personal attributes*, omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness (the 'personal omniGod' conception of the divine). With that conception presupposed, the proponent of the Argument from Evil argues that God is able to avoid any evil he desires to avoid (given his omnipotence) and desires to avoid any evil he can avoid (given his perfect goodness); therefore, God avoids all evil; but evil exists, hence God does not. This Argument seems easily rebutted. Desiring to avoid any evil one can is not entailed by perfect goodness, since there can be morally adequate reasons for causing evil (for instance, when evil must take place for some outweighing good to be achieved, or some worse evil to be avoided). The proponent of the Argument may, however, make the rejoinder that morally adequate reasons for causing or permitting evil necessarily arise from limitation and cannot therefore feature in explaining how infinite God can coexist with evil.

Personal omniGod theists must reply that even the Omnipotent Agent faces *logical* constraints, which may give rise to morally adequate reasons for causing or permitting evil. That reply can be sustained only by a substantive account of how an adequate 'excuse' for evil might in fact arise from logical constraints. The business of theodicy as the speculative construction of such 'excuses' is thus unavoidable for personal omniGod theists. They need not, of course, profess knowledge of God's actual reasons for causing or permitting evil, but they must explain how it could be that an omnipotent and perfectly good agent might have such a reason. That explanation can be given only by advancing hypotheses about what (for all we know) God's reasons for creating a world containing evils *could actually* be. This kind of speculative theodicy is thus dialectically essential to rebut the claim that the personal omniGod's having an adequate justification for causing or permitting evil is a logical impossibility—a claim that may plausibly enough be pressed by proponents of the 'logical' Argument from Evil.

The General Form of Speculative Theodicy, and the Appeal to 'Skeptical Theism'

These speculative theodicies have a common form: they display actual evils as logically implicated in outweighing 'higher' goods (or the avoidance of worse evils), either as logically necessary means to those goods, or else as their logically unavoidable side effects. And, crucially, these theodicies assume that an actual evil thus logically implicated in outweighing good is an evil that God as supreme agent is justified in permitting (or, indeed, causing and sustaining) even though he has the power to prevent it.

Some of these theodicies meet with a degree of success. For example, the 'free will' theodicy plausibly claims that 'moral' evils are unavoidable side effects of granting significant freedom of action to finite rational agents—freedom that is not only valuable in itself but essential for the emergence of other high-level goods, including the good of genuinely loving interpersonal relationships. Another theodicy—John Hick (1966) called it 'the vale of soul-making' theodicy—observes that suffering can be ennobling when met with courage and compassion; important goods would therefore be missing from a world lacking suffering. Arguably, fulfilment as a finite soul is inconceivable without properly coming to terms with suffering. Successfully resolving what I have described as the foundational existential problem of evil seems intrinsic to living well as a human being—and, as I have already noted, a practical argument from evil *for* God's existence may be built on this fact if belief in God is necessary for coping properly with evil (or, to put the point more strictly, for giving such competent coping with evil the status of a *right response to reality*).

Proponents of the logical Argument from Evil may concede that some such theodicies do succeed. They may yet press their case by focussing on *gratuitous* evils—that is, evils not logically implicated in outweighing goods. There certainly *seem* to be many of these. That some evils are *apparently* gratuitous is as far as one can go, however. Personal omniGod theists may therefore make the 'skeptical theist' reply (now widely regarded as the cutting edge of this debate) to the effect that the apparent pointlessness of some evils is just what would be expected if there is a personal omniGod, given the disparity between human knowledge of the good and God's knowledge of it.[1] This way of putting the skeptical theist reply risks serious theological difficulty if it is essential to theist religious traditions that God has revealed to humanity the nature of the supreme good. The notion that there may be facets of the good that are hidden from humanity sits very uneasily, in particular, with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. It is therefore preferable to make the skeptical theist reply by emphasizing that the personal omniGod may have knowledge of ways quite beyond human apprehension in which evils can be logically implicated in higher goods. Humans may, by divine grace, know the nature of the supreme good, but they are plausibly ignorant of the myriad ways in which that good is realized, including ways that necessarily implicate evils that from the human perspective seem quite pointless. From his position of ultimate control God sees clearly these evil-implicating paths to the good and endorses them when and only when so doing is consistent with his perfect goodness.

This more sensible version of skeptical theism essentially extends the reach of speculative theodicy to cover all actual evils. Once the possibility of God's having adequate reason to permit or cause evil is granted through recognizing how particular speculative theodicies may apply to certain kinds of evil, the remaining evils may

[1] Wykstra (1984) is the paper that began the current debate about skeptical theism. The contemporary estimate of the importance of this response is well illustrated by the fact that a whole section of an extensive recent collection on the problem of evil is devoted to 'Skeptical Responses' (McBrayer and Howard-Snyder 2013: part III).

be defended as consistent with God's supreme power and goodness by appealing to limitations in our knowledge of how evil may ultimately be logically implicated in realizing the supreme good. This skeptical theist strategy is not really at the cutting edge of the debate, however, since it ignores serious uneasiness about the underlying assumption on which speculative theodicy of this kind—and, *a fortiori*, its skeptical theist extension—must rest.

Theodicy's Uncomfortable Underlying Assumption

That assumption is that God 'trades off' evil for outweighing good—and one may indeed feel uneasy about accepting it. The fact that a certain evil produces an outweighing good that logically could not result without an evil of that kind does not by itself entail that an agent with the relevant control would be justified in causing or permitting that evil. The personal omniGod may be logically unable to produce certain great goods without also producing certain evils. But that is not enough to establish that having the ultimate responsibility for producing those evils would be consistent with God's perfect goodness—even if, on some applicable scale, those great goods have worth that outweighs the badness of the evils. A consequentialist ethics such as utilitarianism may support the needed inference, but theist moralities are typically skeptical of consequentialism, raising doubts about both the commensurability of good and evil and the assumption that even a supremely worthy end can justify evil means. If theists are reduced in reply to pleading that God causes evil that good may come, the logical Argument from Evil has been rebutted only at the cost of compromising distinctively theist morality.

There is a strand of 'anti-theodicy' that amplifies this complaint, suggesting that philosophers who even entertain divine justifications for horrific evils have allowed their moral responses to become corrupted.[2] The 'Ivan Karamazov' strategy of forcing attention on terrible evils—the torture of children, as in Ivan's own examples—carries much persuasive force. How could any sane person disagree that an agent who was able to prevent a child's being tortured but did not do so must be a monster? If the very notion of a justification for an agent's refraining from using available power to prevent such horrors is immoral, then there is a successful logical Argument from Evil—though one that is *relativized* to this strong moral judgement.

The Painful Dilemma Facing a Personal God

That strong moral judgement might be contested. If realizing the supreme good logically requires (for some reason beyond our imagining) a child's horrific suffering, wouldn't the Supreme Agent have failed in his overall responsibility for creation if he compassionately held back from allowing that suffering? Whether this is so is, in effect, the question Dostoevsky places into the mouth of Ivan addressing his brother Alyosha, who replies that he thinks a person standing in the place of the Deity could not permit

[2] This is the focus of Trakakis' Position Statement in this volume.

the torture of a child even if it were required to achieve the supreme good in creation. Nevertheless, God (under this 'Ultimate Controller' conception) faces a unique moral dilemma, if it is indeed the case that achieving the supreme good requires permitting horrific suffering. God seems to need, as its overall architect and producer, to 'factor in' to the plan of creation evils which his compassion must prevent him from sustaining.[3] If Alyosha's response to this dilemma is correct, the sensible inference is, I maintain, to conclude that the personal omniGod conception of divinity comes under such unbearable pressure that it needs to be rejected—and the theist will, of course, hope for a more adequate alternative. It seems possible, however, for tough-minded personal omniGod theists to stand their ground, and insist that God's unique situation as a personal agent renders justifiable decisions not to intervene in serious suffering that appear harsh and unbending from the human perspective.

Shifting Emphasis on to God's Vast Power to Save

Personal omniGod theists need not, perhaps, adopt this tough-minded approach. There is an apparent alternative, arguably more authentic to theist traditions of 'salvation history'. Theists may share the anti-theodicist's indignation, and protest that spinning speculative tales about the ultimate rationale for evil was always a bad idea, affording evil an unwarranted positive role when it is properly to be treated (as in classical theism) as a sheer privation, inherently null and meaningless. Thus, these theists may place emphasis, not on finding excuses for God's allowing evil, but rather on recognizing God's wonderful saving action in dealing with it. They will concede that coming to terms with evil does require an intellectual grasp of how evil can belong to the divine creation. But the sought-for explanation, they will affirm, has to do not with God's having excuses or justifications for evil, but with God's *overcoming evil with good*.[4]

What does God's 'overcoming evil with good' involve? Here is one vision of God's saving role: God does not merely 'balance off' evil with outweighing goods; rather, God is good to all people, showing them a care governed by their true interests and bringing about their ultimate fulfilment by defeating the destructive effects of their participation in evils during mortal life. This vision of divine salvation seems to require that God have the overall controlling power to achieve the complete defeat of evil, and the perfect goodness to desire that end. It seems also to require that damaged participants in suffering have a post-mortem existence in which they can be healed. Under this vision, then, it seems that human existence must transcend mortal history, and God must be the personal omniGod. (And, it is worth adding, if God *is* a supreme personal agent, there would be a defect in either his power or goodness if he could not provide for universal salvation—or, at least, the salvation of all who will freely accept it,

[3] For further discussion on this theme, see Bishop (1993). Peter Forrest (2007) seeks to resolve the dilemma by positing that God changes (through the kenosis of creation) from a primordial omnipotent creator who lacks moral perfection to a loving saviour who is no longer all-controlling.

[4] Here I have principally in mind the important work of Marilyn Adams, especially Adams (1999).

which, given the everlasting time during which God's insistent loving persuasion has to operate, will almost certainly amount to the salvation of all.)

The Inescapability of Theodicy

Apt as this emphasis on the divine saviour role may be, if it requires God to be an omnipotent agent—or, at least, a maximally powerful one—there is no escaping the intellectual problem generated by God's also being ultimately responsible for the existence of all the evils from which he finally saves all those hurt by them. Reflective personal omniGod theists thus *have no option* but to hold that there is an explanation consistent with God's perfect goodness for the presence of horrors such as child torture in God's creation. Their belief in God can contribute to resolving the existential problem of evil only if the truth of that belief is consistent with evil's existence. Their account of how God wonderfully overcomes horrors will therefore need to involve a speculative theodicy, otherwise there is no rebutting the assertion that *there would have been no such horrors in the first place* if there had existed an Ultimate Controller powerful and good enough to save us from them. It seems, then, that, although elements in authentic theist tradition express caution about theodicies that explain evil by speculatively constructing God's good reasons for allowing it, theists who hold the personal omniGod conception will inevitably be driven back into constructing just these kinds of theodicy.

A Normatively Relativized Logical Argument from Evil Against the Existence of the Personal OmniGod

Personal omniGod theists have to hold, then, that God's ability to bring ultimate good out of evil *justifies* his ultimate responsibility for permitting—and, indeed, sustaining—the existence of evil in his creation. God's resources for achieving the good are vast. Indeed, there may be no limit to the extent to which God can compensate those who suffer horrors and reform those who perpetrate them. The good in which all (or near enough all) ultimately participate through God's saving grace will thus *incommensurably* outweigh the evil undergone by participants in horrors. Nevertheless, there can be no eradicating history: a personal God is now, and forever will be, *ultimately* causally responsible for all actual horrors. God's interpersonal relationship with created persons caught up in these horrors is thus forever characterized by the feature that he was the ultimate author of the suffering from which he redeems them. But God's having such an interpersonal relationship with created persons arguably falls short of his perfect goodness. One may reasonably (if not indisputably) judge that a perfectly good personal agent would not allow himself to be, or become, thus related to created persons—given that refraining from doing so is within his power. *Relative to this reasonable normative ethical judgement*, then, the existence of horrors is logically inconsistent with the existence of the personal omniGod, no matter how fully such an agent exercises his vast resources for overcoming evil with good. These are my grounds for holding that there is a successful version of the 'logical'

Argument from Evil—though a version that is relative (a) to a particular conception of the nature of divinity (the conception of God as a personal agent with perfect moral goodness and omnipotence, or, at least, maximal, agential power) and (b) to a certain specific normative ethical judgement, which, though it might be disputed, would seem congenial to theists for whom the quality of interpersonal relationships is of focal ethical importance.[5]

Conclusion

My stance on the problem of evil, then, is that there is a foundational existential problem of properly dealing with evils in the sense of obstacles to living well in accordance with virtue. Worldviews that depict reality as favourable to the pursuit of the good, despite the existence of even the most horrifying forms of evil, play a significant role in grounding competent resolution of the foundational existential problem of evil. However, an intellectual problem of evil arises for those inclined to accept the truth of such a worldview—namely, the difficulty that the very existence of the evil from which it promises 'salvation' counts against the worldview's actually being true. This dialectic is readily discerned in relation to theist worldviews, and provides the proper context for the standard Argument from Evil (as opposed to a tendency to take the context to be the neutral investigation of the evidence for and against God's existence). The concept of God is, however, a *role* concept—while the role of saviour is most salient here, God's Creator role as both ultimate source and goal of all reality is essentially linked to it. There can be alternative conceptions, then, of what fills the God role. In my view, the Argument from Evil importantly contributes towards showing the *inadmissibility* of belief in God according to the 'personal omniGod' conception. Though that conception is the prevailing one (amongst analytical philosophers, anyway), the upshot is not outright atheism if the adequacy of some alternative conception of the theist God can be defended. While the articulation and defence of any such alternative is beyond my present scope, I have been keen to show how the perspective on the problem of evil articulated here brings the exploration and defence of alternative conceptions of God to the fore in the agenda of a philosopher-believer.[6]

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[5] For a fuller discussion of this version of the Argument from Evil, see Bishop and Perszyk (2011).

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Response to Bishop

Eleonore Stump

John Bishop's rich chapter is an interesting reflection on the structure of the philosophical discussion on the problem of evil in its many varieties, and it includes a fairly radical recommendation for a solution to the problem. I am largely in agreement with many of Bishop's reflections, which strike me as insightful, and I appreciate the many interesting questions Bishop raises. In these very short comments, I want to focus only on his metaphilosophical reflection on the nature of the problem of evil, because that is the issue that seems to me among the most innovative parts of his position.

This reflection has to do with the very nature of the problem of evil as Bishop understands it. Bishop frames his project this way:

> Philosophers have frequently distinguished different problems of evil—practical, pastoral, existential, theoretical, intellectual. It might thus seem misguided to suppose that there is such a thing as *the* problem of evil. But I disagree: we can and should identify a certain problem as *the* problem, or, at least, *the foundational* problem of evil. This is the problem of *dealing with, coping with*, or *coming to terms with* evil. (emphases in original)

He explains his own reformulation of the problem of evil this way:

> Consider the person who seeks to live a meaningful, happy, and worthwhile life, and recognizes that living well requires living virtuously—according to widely shared views about what that means. Now, there are many things that may interfere with a person's achieving this aim, and which people consciously recognize as obstacles to human fulfilment. These are evils. And the foundational problem of evil is to come to terms with the fact that there are evils in this sense.

As regards solutions to this problem of suffering, Bishop says,

Our vulnerability to destructive evil, from within as well as without, must be accepted clear-sightedly, but awareness of it may nevertheless belong to a total understanding of reality that makes rational continuing commitment to virtuous living and shows despairing and self-centred responses to evil to be mistaken.

On his view, then, the foundational problem of evil and the most basic need for a solution should be seen in this way:

One may . . . experience despair in response to one's own suffering or the suffering of others. Or one may come to think that happiness is to be pursued without concern for virtue. Or one may resolutely adhere to virtue, yet abandon hope. All these possible responses to the fact of evil in one way or another undermine our living well. To avoid such responses (and others that also threaten our flourishing) is to come to terms with the fact of evil, and to resolve the foundational existential problem of evil.

So Bishop is trying to call our attention to what he sees as a largely neglected but very important feature of the problem of evil. And if he is right, his reformulation of the problem of evil makes an important contribution to the discussion of this problem. In effect, Bishop is raising a question about what the implications are for an understanding of human life if all attempts to find some morally sufficient reason that would justify God's allowing suffering fail.

Here is Bishop's own answer to that question:

Successfully resolving what I have described as the foundational existential problem of evil seems intrinsic to living well as a human being—and . . . a practical argument from evil *for* God's existence may be built on this fact if belief in God is necessary for coping properly with evil . . . (emphasis in original)

Bishop himself wants to build this practical argument for God's existence by altering the conception of God with which we start, so that the problem of trying to construct an acceptable theodicy doesn't so much as arise. His alteration of the traditional theistic concept of God is substantial and seems at least difficult to reconcile with a long, well-established tradition in all three major monotheisms. So, for Bishop's project to be successful, the pressure to accept his reformulation of the problem and his approach to a solution needs to be great.

Now, on Bishop's reformulation of the problem of evil, the failure to solve the problem means that one does not live a good life, or a meaningful life, or a life worth living. On Bishop's view, if there is no solution to the problem of evil, then, for every person whose life includes serious suffering, there is no point to his suffering. Therefore, if there is no solution to the problem of evil, no one lives well. But if a person does not live well—and if, in addition, he knows that he does not live well because he knows that there is no solution to the problem of evil—then his life is not a good for him. He would have been better off if he had died at birth or had never been born; and part of what makes life bad for him is that he knows that this is so.

But is this conclusion right?

It seems that there is some *prima facie* reason for thinking that it is not. Consider a person who does not believe that there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good. Suppose that this person also believes that there is a great deal of suffering in the world. Suppose, in fact, that this person has seen one of his most beloved friends put to death unjustly by his own community, in ways that were only destructive to the community and not outweighed by any good that this person could see. And now suppose that this person also believes that living a virtuous life is of paramount importance and that virtue is its own reward. Call this person 'Plato'. Is there really no description of Plato's life that makes that life a good for him? Suppose that Plato does succeed in living virtuously and that he gives his life to virtuous activity that is meaningful for him. Is it really true that Plato would have been better off if he had died at birth? Is it really implausible that Plato himself might have supposed his life is a good for him? And isn't there some evidence in Plato's willingness to keep living, rather than commit suicide, that Plato does think his life is a good for him in spite of the fact that Plato supposes that there is gratuitous suffering in the world?

If a person adds to his belief that there is gratuitous suffering in the world a philosophy such as Plato's, it is not easy to see why such a person would consider that his life is not worth living just because there is gratuitous suffering in the world. He might instead admire himself for living a virtuous life even so, or he might take himself to be honoured by living a tragic life. Cases of this sort seem to me to undermine Bishop's point, and historical examples of people who have such positions and live in accordance with them are not hard to find. Plato is one such example. Hume seems to me to be another. It seems to me that it would be hard to make a convincing case that neither Plato nor Hume had a life worth living.

But if one can live well even when one lives in a world with gratuitous suffering and one believes that one does, then what becomes of Bishop's project and approach to the problem of evil? Can it still maintain its conclusion that some alternate non-theodicist solution to the foundational problem of evil has to be found?

Response to Bishop

Graham Oppy

The logical argument from evil defended in Bishop's chapter says (a) that the following set of claims is logically inconsistent, and (b) that all of these claims are accepted by perfect being theists (or, perhaps better, that all of these claims belong to best formulations of perfect being theism):

(1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is omniscient.
(3) God is perfectly good.

(4) God is the ultimate creator of everything else.
(5) There is suffering (of kind K).
(6) If an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being is the ultimate creator of a universe in which there are persons who endure suffering (of kind K), then that being is available to those persons to redeem their suffering.
(7) No being, who is the ultimate creator of a universe in which there are persons who endure suffering (of kind K) for which that being is (subsequently) available to those persons as redeemer, is perfectly good.

The key question to ask about the argument is whether it is true that (7) is accepted by perfect being theists. I doubt it. In fact, Bishop doubts it, too; indeed, he allows that perfect being theists might perfectly rationally reject (7). But, if that's right, then it seems to me that this logical argument from evil fails in the one task that it is properly intended to accomplish: it fails to make any difficulty at all for perfect being theists.

In his chapter, Bishop does not provide any articulation or defence of his preferred alternative to 'personal omniGod' theism. However, we are free to imagine that there are fully articulated best versions of 'personal omniGod' theism and Bishop's preferred alternative. Let us call these competing theories T_O and T_B. We shall suppose that (1)–(6) all belong to T_O, but that (7) does not belong to T_O. And we shall suppose that, while (5)–(7) belongs to T_B, at least one of (1)–(4) does not belong to T_B. Clearly, on these assumptions, the fact that (1)–(7) form an inconsistent set creates no more difficulty for T_O than it does for T_B. When we mix claims, some of which belong to T_O and not to T_B, and some of which belong to T_B and not to T_O, in the formation of an inconsistent set of sentences, the outcome is plainly symmetrical in its consequences for the two theories.

Perhaps some may be tempted to reply that those who accept T_O *ought* also to accept (7). But why? After all, adding (7) to T_O leads to inconsistency! Bishop himself says only that one may "reasonably (if not indisputably)" accept (7), and that (7) "would seem congenial to theists for whom the quality of interpersonal relationships is of focal ethical importance." But, even if, *all else being equal*, theists for whom the quality of interpersonal relationships is of focal ethical importance have reason to prefer (7) to its denial, the truth of this observation contributes (more or less) nothing towards establishing that there is all-things-considered reason for theists to prefer T_B to T_O.

If one of T_B or T_O is inconsistent, then there is a derivation that establishes this fact. If we have not yet produced a derivation of the requisite kind, then we cannot reasonably insist that considerations about inconsistency give us a reason to prefer one of T_B and T_O to the other. The only remaining question, then, is whether one of T_B or T_O is theoretically more virtuous than the other: theoretically simpler (because ontologically less committing, or ideologically less committing, or the like), more explanatorily powerful, more accurately predictive, more concordant with established knowledge, more unified, and so forth—or, at any rate, higher scoring on an appropriate weighting of all of these theoretical virtues. Acceptance that, *all else being equal*, theists for whom the

quality of interpersonal relationships is of focal ethical importance have reason to prefer (7) to its denial simply would not carry us any significant distance towards establishing that T_B is more theoretically virtuous than T_O. On the contrary: prior belief that T_O is more theoretically virtuous than T_B will plainly suffice to underwrite rejection of (7) for those who accept T_O, even if they also accept that, *all else being equal*, theists for whom the quality of interpersonal relationships is of focal ethical importance have reason to prefer (7) to its denial. Moreover, those who accept T_O are hardly short of further considerations to advance in defence of the rejection of (7): it is not as if it is blindingly obvious that, *all else being equal*, theists for whom the quality of interpersonal relationships is of focal ethical importance do have reason to prefer (7) to its denial.

I think that (7) is trivially true, because I think that it is impossible that there be a creator of universes. I also think that it is necessarily true that there are none but natural causes involving none but natural entities. Imagine a fully articulated best version of my view: T_N. Since I am committed to T_N, I am committed to the claim that T_N is better than T_O and T_B. Since I do not claim to be able to show that T_O and T_B are inconsistent, I am committed to the claim that T_N is theoretically more virtuous than T_O and T_B. While it may be—as Bishop insists—that T_B is no more ontologically committing than T_N, it is clear—to me, anyway—that T_B is more ideologically committing than T_N. Moreover—as I see it—T_B certainly scores no better than T_N on any of the other theoretical virtues. So—unsurprisingly—by my lights it does indeed turn out that T_N is more theoretically virtuous than T_B and T_O.[7]

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Response to Bishop

N. N. Trakakis

I agree with Bishop that an argument from evil may be accepted as providing support for atheism, but only with respect to a certain way of understanding God. Arguments from evil, then, might make an important contribution to theism by divesting theists of defective, even idolatrous, conceptions of God. One such inadequate conception of the divine, according to Bishop, is 'personal omniGod theism'. Although I am sympathetic to Bishop's rejection of the omniGod, I don't think he has accurately presented the dialectical situation personal omniGod theists face with respect to the problem of evil.

[7] The most detailed spelling out—to date—of how things look by my lights is in Oppy (2013).

In Bishop's view, "the business of theodicy is . . . unavoidable for personal omniGod theists" when presented with a Logical Argument from Evil—that is, an argument purporting to show that the existence of the omniGod is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. Such theists in such circumstances, states Bishop, are called upon to develop a 'speculative theodicy', where this means "advancing hypotheses about what (for all we know) God's reasons for creating a world containing evils *could actually* be" (emphasis in original).

But is this an accurate representation of the dialectic, *with respect to Logical Arguments from Evil*? First, only a *defence*, rather than a theodicy (even a theodicy of a speculative sort), seems required to rebut a Logical Argument. Admittedly, the distinction between a 'defence' and a 'theodicy' is fraught with various problems, giving rise to all manner of confusions. But let's say that, roughly speaking, a defence aims to identify *possible* reasons as to why God permits evil, in a way that renders the existence of God and the existence of evil logically compossible; while a theodicy elucidates *plausible* reasons as to why God permits evil, where 'plausibility' amounts to an account which is 'true for all we know' or (as van Inwagen prefers) 'there is no reason to think it false'.[8] Another way to put this is by saying that both a defence and a theodicy depict a possible world in which God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil to exist—but whereas a defence claims this only to be a possible world, a theodicy claims that it is the actual world, or a world close to the actual world. (There is also a more modest notion of 'defence', involving only the attempt to defeat or undercut an argument from evil, without seeking to delineate even any possible reasons as to why God permits evil.) Given that Logical Arguments from Evil seek to show that a world in which both God and evil exist is logically impossible, would not a theodicy be overkill? Wouldn't a defence be enough?

Secondly, even this much might not be necessary in order to defeat a Logical Argument. The theist need not go to the trouble of *identifying* possible reasons for God's permission of evil—that is, the theist need not say, or be able to say, what these reasons are or consist in. The theist need only hold that *it is possible that there are reasons beyond our ken for God's permission of evil*—and how could such a minimal claim be rejected? This, of course, is the skeptical theist strategy, now employed to counteract the Logical Argument from Evil. As this indicates, if we are concerned with the *Logical* Argument from Evil, it is comparatively easy to defeat such an argument; conversely, the standards for success that proponents of such arguments must meet are fairly high. I wonder, therefore, whether Bishop is asking too much of himself in developing the argument from evil along logical lines.

However, if we accept Bishop's construal of the Logical Argument (which he briefly summarizes towards the end of his Position Statement), then we must contend with certain moral facts pertaining to what it means to be in right relationship with another

[8] It is important, however, not to conflate the project of theodicy with van Inwagen's notion of a 'defence' in the context of the evidential problem of evil. I thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

person. These are moral facts or judgements, according to Bishop, which render it impossible for there to be any morally sufficient reasons for God's permission of evil. In that case, however, the skeptical theist strategy might have to be abandoned, for there are things we *do* know which rule out the appeal to unknown goods. But now the debate moves on to considerations of an ethical nature, rather than to the development and evaluation of theodicies.

Towards the close of his position paper, Bishop offers a succinct version of what he calls "a normatively relativized logical Argument from Evil against the existence of the personal omniGod." Again, there is much here that I am sympathetic with, but the argument—at least as it was presented in Bishop's chapter—remains tantalizingly brief. In particular, there is a significant step in the argument which is made deftly but too quickly. This is the step from (1) God's being ultimately causally responsible for some person's undergoing some horrendous evil, to (2a) God's goodness is compromised, and/or (2b) God's relationship with the suffering person is forever compromised or defective, perhaps even ruined. (In the last main section of his Position Statement, Bishop seems to infer only (2a) from (1), but I suspect he would also want to infer (2b) from (1), given his focus on interpersonal relationships.) It seems generally true that an agent's being causally responsible for another person's suffering is not sufficient in itself to impugn the (moral) goodness of that agent or to (morally) compromise the relationship between the agent and the sufferer. But then why is such a general principle false in the specific case of the omniGod's permission of horrendous human suffering? There may well be some way to justify the inferences Bishop makes, but I think more work needs to be done to make it clear how exactly the goodness of God, and also divine-human relations, are imperilled by the mere fact of God's being the ultimate source of evil.

Reply to Stump

John Bishop

In her response, Eleonore Stump attributes to me (in effect) the following "innovative" argument: a person's failure to solve the problem of evil (on my "reformulation" of it) entails that his or her life is not "a good life, or a meaningful life, or a life worth living"; the problem of evil cannot be solved if God is understood as the personal omniGod; the problem of evil can be solved (at least in prospect) on a suitably "altered" conception of God; therefore, if people are to live lives worth living, they must adhere to a suitably altered conception of God. Stump observes that the first premise is laughably false, though she is too polite to put it that way. To take just one counterexample, Plato witnessed his beloved teacher put to death unjustly and had no solution to the problem of evil, but did not on that account fail to have a life worth living. Stump concludes with this rhetorical question: "But if one can live well even when one lives in a world with gratuitous suffering and one believes that one does, . . . [can Bishop] still maintain [his]

conclusion that some alternate non-theodicist solution to the foundational problem of evil has to be found?"

I confess to some consternation at having such a wrong-headed argument attributed to me. All I can do in reply is restate my position, in the hope of achieving greater clarity in its communication.

I did not intend to 'reformulate' the problem of evil, standardly understood as the problem of defending the reasonableness of belief in the personal omniGod while accepting the reality of evil. Rather, I wanted to place that intellectual problem in the context of what I called the 'foundational' problem of evil, which is the existential problem of coming to terms with evils in the sense of obstacles to living well in accordance with virtue. In response to the question of how people try to resolve that existential problem, I remarked that "some people may simply have the right temperament: their responses to the fact of evil are fortunately not governed by dispositions to despair or withdraw into self-centred protectiveness." I thus acknowledge (as surely anyone must?) that people can live meaningful, worthwhile—and, indeed, courageously virtuous—lives while being fully aware of gratuitous suffering yet without being able to explain how the world (which, anyway, they need not even be thinking of as a divine creation) contains such suffering.

I went on to say that what is especially philosophically interesting is the role that people's worldviews play in attempting to interpret the facts about evil consistently with the rationality and meaningfulness of pursuing happiness in accordance with virtue. The interesting question is whether, the contingencies of temperament apart, one has good reason to hold that "meeting the threat of evil with a courageous and hopeful commitment to living [virtuously] is *the right response* to how reality is" (emphasis in original). Theist worldviews (if they hold true) provide good reason to maintain hopeful virtuous living in the face of evil. But other, non-theist, religious worldviews have the same feature—as do some worldviews not usually classified as religious. Plato's worldview is a case in point: to abandon virtue is to damage one's own soul. Socrates went to his death lamenting the harm that his unjust accusers had done to themselves. Plato, then, had cognitive commitments that made rational hopeful and virtuous living in the face of undeserved suffering, but those commitments gave no occasion for concern with the problem of evil that affects theism. (Platonic notions of the sovereignty of the Good may generate a somewhat analogous problem, however. As for Stump's other counterexample—Hume—he himself had the right temperament for maintaining hopeful virtuous living in the face of evil, and took the philosophical position that such a natural 'sentimental' endowment was all that could reasonably be expected for resolving the foundational existential problem of evil.)

Insofar as I was being 'innovative' (or, at least, not simply following the pack), it was in emphasizing that the standard, intellectual, problem of evil must be framed within the role theism plays in cognitively supporting some people's resolution of the existential problem of evil. There's a nice irony in the reflection that the God who saves from evil couldn't (or probably doesn't) exist, given the existence of the evil in the first place.

I reviewed the state of play in theists' attempts to deal with this standard problem of evil, and mentioned—without developing the argument very far—the contention that there is a 'normatively relativized' argument from evil that succeeds in showing belief in God, according to the standard personal omniGod conception, to be unreasonable (see Bishop and Perszyk 2011). I think that personal omniGod theists have to provide speculative theodicies, though they may also deploy a 'skeptical theist' move by appealing to cognitive limitations to postulate divine justifications for evils that seem gratuitous. I grant that theodicy has a good measure of success, but I believe it requires that God ultimately defeats evil through bringing those who suffer it into the great good of eternal relationship with him. But, then, I submit, God's inescapable original responsibility for causing the evil renders essentially imperfect the kind of relationship he will have with those whose horrendous suffering he first sustains and then wonderfully redeems.

Friends of the personal omniGod may simply report that they do not share that intuition. Fair enough. For theists who find they do share it—who sense something morally 'off' in the idea of an all-controlling Person who is responsible for causing horrendous suffering and then for 'compensating' for it with eternal happiness—the task is to consider alternatives to the prevailing anthropomorphic conception of God as an omnipotent morally perfect personal agent. When they interrogate the "long, well-established tradition in all three major monotheisms" to which Stump appeals, I suspect they will find plenty of material supporting the conclusion that, when it comes to understanding the divine (rather than using facilitative divine imagery), belief that God is a personal agent is to be rejected.[9]

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Reply to Oppy

John Bishop

I begin with a point about Graham Oppy's use of the term 'perfect being theism'. I take it that Oppy is referring to the same, contemporarily standard, interpretation of theism that I refer to as 'personal omniGod theism'—that God is a personal being who is (1) omnipotent, (2) omniscient, (3) perfectly good, and (4) the ultimate creator of

[9] For a recent discussion of the problem of evil from a classical theist perspective that rejects the claim that God is a person, see Davies (2006)—the paragraph straddling pp.61–2 makes this rejection absolutely clear.

everything else. These are the first four propositions in the list of seven around which Oppy constructs his discussion. The remaining three are as follows:

(5) There is suffering (of kind K).
(6) If an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being is the ultimate creator of a universe in which there are persons who endure suffering (of kind K), then that being is available to those persons to redeem their suffering.
(7) No being, who is the ultimate creator of the universe in which there are persons who endure suffering (of kind K) for which that being is (subsequently) available to those persons as redeemer, is perfectly good.

Oppy's propositions do not, at any point, explicitly include the claim that God is a person or personal being. But, if the claim that propositions (1)–(7) form a logically inconsistent set is to be a fair rendition of the Bishop-Perszyk argument, then the assumption must implicitly be made that God is a person, and that his perfect goodness is (or includes) perfection in the kind of goodness that pertains to persons. There could, more than just in principle, be a *non-personal* conception of God as both ultimate creator and redeemer of suffering, and that conception might belong to perfect being theology if the criterion is satisfaction of Anselm's formula as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-conceived. Though it is now widely assumed that satisfying Anselm's formula entails being the personal omniGod (or at least near enough to it[10]), this entailment is by no means evident, nor, I think, would it have been to Anselm. It is arguable that *a* person, however powerful and good, could not be such that nothing greater than it (*qua* being) could be conceived—for example, on the grounds that to be an instance of personhood (or indeed, of any kind) is to exhibit 'composition' of essence and existence with its inherent dependence on a cause of that essence's instantiation.[11]

Unless God's goodness is assumed to be of the kind a good personal agent possesses, and unless God is thought of as a person who interacts with other (created) persons, the basis for accepting the truth of proposition (7) falls away. Now, it is evident that personal omniGod theists face a problem arising from the inconsistency of (1)–(7) only if they have reason to accept the truth of proposition (7). That, indeed, is what is signalled by describing this version of the Argument from Evil as 'normatively relativized'. Oppy observes that personal omniGod theists who endorse 'T_O'—Oppy's label for the theory that endorses propositions (1)–(6)—may reject the truth of (7), holding that God does redeem the suffering for which he is ultimately responsible and yet remains perfectly good. This is so even for personal omniGod theists "for whom the

[10] Yujin Nagasawa (2008) has argued that a personal Anselmian God need not be strictly omnipotent, just maximally powerful. The existence of such a God would still be challenged by an Argument from Evil.

[11] I refer here to the classical doctrine of divine simplicity. For a discussion, see Burrell (1998). My intention here is not to defend that doctrine, but only to appeal to it as evidence for the claim that personal omniGod theism does not follow straightforwardly from accepting Anselm's formula.

quality of interpersonal relationships is of focal ethical importance," who may seek to argue that theistic ethics of right relationship do *not* imply that a person who redeems suffering he has himself caused must, in virtue of those actions, be in a less than perfect overall relationship with the sufferers. As my reply to Trakakis also makes clear, I accept that further argument is needed to persuade those who do not share the key ethical stance on which the Bishop-Perszyk normatively relativized Argument from Evil relies—or even to enable them to see why one might reasonably adopt that stance. In fact, it is only the weaker goal here that I care about: my aim is not to show that personal omniGod theism ought rationally to be rejected, but only to show that one can have reasonable grounds for rejecting it while remaining committed to theism and hence (in the spirit of *fides quaerens intellectum*) pursuing alternative understandings of the divine.

Oppy claims that, even if, all things considered, theists who endorse an ethic of right relationship have reason to accept that proposition (7) is true, "the truth of this observation contributes (more or less) nothing towards establishing that there is all-things-considered reason for theists to prefer T_B to T_O," where 'T_B' designates my own preferred alternative to personal omniGod theism. That is unsurprisingly true, given that T_B is not (at least here) on the table as an articulated theory. But it does follow that theists who have reason to accept that (7) is true (and who seek to avoid inconsistency in their beliefs) cannot rest content with affirming all of the six propositions that belong to T_O—not, anyway, if they actually commit themselves to (7)'s truth.

In further collaborative work with Perszyk, I have attempted to articulate T_B, as a 'euteleological' conception of divinity under which to say that reality is a divine creation is to say that it has the supreme good as its *inherent* ultimate end or *telos*, and exists only because that supreme good is actually realized (see Bishop and Perszyk 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). This T_B has no place for supernatural beings, so it is naturalist in that sense, but it is surely more ontologically committing than Oppy's own T_N, according to which "there are none but natural causes involving none but natural entities." No doubt it is also more 'ideologically committing'—though I could not say precisely what Oppy means by that notion. *Any* theist worldview will be ontologically less parsimonious than T_N. It is my impression, however, that the key 'theoretical virtue' of theism fails to get properly noticed by a philosopher focused on Oppy's list of theoretical virtues—explanatory power, accurate predictiveness, concordance with established knowledge, unity, simplicity "and so forth." That virtue is the provision of an overall cognitive orientation for coming to terms with evil as an obstacle to living well in accordance with (moral) virtue. It is the virtue of supporting a resolution of what I have called the foundational existential problem of evil. That support involves, not so much a metaphysical *explanation* of reality (do we anyway need any more *explanation* than natural science can afford?), but rather a metaphysical *posit* that reality is hospitable to hopeful virtuous living. T_B, like any interpretation of theism, thus affirms the ultimate sovereignty of the good, something quite out of T_N's league.

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Reply to Trakakis

John Bishop

Nick Trakakis questions the accuracy of my presentation of the dialectical situation of personal omniGod theists when challenged by the 'Logical' Argument from Evil.

I argue that personal omniGod theists must provide a 'speculative theodicy', and Trakakis' first point is that—as famously urged by Alvin Plantinga—only a 'defence' is required. To avoid a purely semantic disagreement, it seems wise to state what is required without using either contested term. (My use of 'speculative theodicy' was intended to avoid the 'theodicy versus defence' issue, by deleting from 'theodicy' any implication that it theorizes about what God's evil-justifying reasons actually are. But Trakakis no doubt follows a common enough usage in taking 'theodicy' to connote 'plausible' reasons why God permits evil which 'we have no reason to think false', and I agree that what's dialectically required is not as strong as that.) My position is that the personal omniGod theist needs to advance hypotheses about what, for all we know, God's reasons for creating a world containing evils could in fact be. The hypothesized reasons must not be excluded by anything we know, and they need only be reasons that it is possible for God to have.

Why do I think the personal omniGod theist needs to advance such hypotheses? I can best explain by responding to Trakakis' second point. He asks why the theist needs to identify even possible reasons why God permits evil, when it surely suffices to hold only that there possibly are such reasons, albeit beyond our ken. In response to this familiar point, I place a less familiar emphasis on the *prima facie* plausibility that

morally adequate reasons for causing or permitting evils can arise only for agents limited in power. Until that presumption is rebutted, it may reasonably be claimed that necessarily no adequate reasons for causing or allowing evil can arise for an omnipotent agent. The only available response is to show how there can possibly arise, even for omnipotence, morally good reasons for allowing or causing evil (e.g., for the sake of outweighing good). And how may that be shown without identifying at least a possible reason of this kind? Some substantive hypotheses about God's possible reasons are needed. As is well known, these will rest on accepting that omnipotent agency is subject to logical limitations. But accepting that point alone is not enough, I believe: one needs to show how purely logical limitations could provide omnipotent agency with moral justifications for causing or permitting evil.

An appeal to morally adequate divine reasons unknown to us may still be part of the mix, however. Although it will not suffice for theists to claim only that God has adequate reasons whose content we do not (and maybe could not) know—for then they have no answer to the claim that we do not know any such reasons just because there necessarily cannot be any—once some substantive theodicies (or defences) are in place to cover certain kinds of evils, it may then be reasonable to accept that God has adequate but to us unknown reasons for permitting other evils not within the scope of those theodicies (defences).

Given that there are theodicies which meet with some success (e.g., some evils surely are covered by a Free Will theodicy/defence?), it follows that personal omni-God theists have a satisfactory reply to the Logical Argument from Evil—but only provided evil's being logically implicated in outweighing good suffices for a morally perfect agent to be justified in causing or permitting it. That moral claim may be contested. "Now," Trakakis says, "the debate moves on to considerations of an ethical nature, rather than to the development and evaluation of theodicies." I reject Trakakis' implied contrast here. A theodicy (defence) hypothesizes about what God's morally adequate reasons for permitting or causing (certain kinds of) evils may possibly be and the evaluation of such hypotheses must intrinsically involve "considerations of an ethical nature."

Theists generally resist purely utilitarian ethics, holding that agents who allow suffering that good may come must ensure that the sufferers are not treated merely instrumentally but are respected as 'ends-in-themselves'. As Marilyn Adams (1999) argues, God has remarkable resources for 'defeating' evil: in light of the incommensurable good of eternal relationship with God into which he can bring both sufferers and perpetrators of horrendous evils, respect for their personhood is assured whatever the details of the reasons which justified God in causing or permitting the evils in the first place. The particular 'normatively relativized' argument from evil that Ken Perszyk and I have proposed, however, holds that it is ethically required of God, not only to respect persons caught up in evil as ends-in-themselves, but also to act in such a way that he can be related to them in perfectly loving interpersonal relationship. We think it reasonable to hold that, given God's ineliminable causal role as ultimately personally

responsible for all horrendous suffering, God cannot avoid undermining the attainment of ideally loving personal relationship with created persons, whatever he does by way of compensation for the suffering.

Trakakis observes that it is "generally true that an agent's being causally responsible for another person's suffering is not sufficient in itself . . . to (morally) compromise the relationship between the agent and the sufferer," and asks why the personal omniGod's causal responsibility for suffering should be thought to be morally compromising in this way. This is an excellent question. I am not confident of the details of a satisfactory answer. But I feel sure that an unbearable tension arises between God as a person who is perfect as a member of the moral community to which created persons belong and God's status as the omnipotent Creator *ex nihilo*. One way to draw attention to the tension is to note that for a person in our moral community to 'play God' is for that person to fall short of ideal relationship with other persons, yet if God, the Creator *ex nihilo*, is a person who shares moral community with created persons God necessarily cannot avoid 'playing God'. (The key claim of the Bishop-Perszyk argument—namely, that whatever the personal omniGod does to defeat horrendous suffering, his overall relationship with those sufferers is ineradicably tainted—gives a more specific characterization of this tension. One way to support the truth of this claim would be to show that the personal omniGod's behaviour is sufficiently analogous to Munchausen syndrome, where a person causes others harm in order to display his power to save them. This analogy is controversial, however, and it should prove fruitful to pursue the argument further.[12]) There is, of course, the obvious option of responding to this tension by denying that the Creator *ex nihilo* is a member of our moral community. That denial is fully justified, I believe. But I maintain that it cannot coherently be made while retaining the view that God is, literally and metaphysically, a person in the same sense that human persons are—not, anyway, without losing any grip on what it could mean to say of the Person who is God that he is perfectly good.

References

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Plantinga, Alvin. (2004). "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'." In *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, edited by Peter van Inwagen, 1–25. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

[12] The place to start is with the interesting discussion in Plantinga (2004).

3

Problems of Evil

Graham Oppy

This chapter is a very broad-brush introduction to my way of thinking about problems of evil. While I note some of the places in which my views are controversial, I attempt neither justification nor defence. I shall say little about *arguments* from evil; some of what I have to say on that topic is said in Oppy (2013a), (2017a), and (2017b). I begin with an account of worldviews, and the proper ways to go about comparing and assessing worldviews.

3.1 Worldviews

In theory, worldviews are *comprehensive* accounts of our world and our place within that world. In practice, what I shall call 'worldviews' are merely gestures towards worldviews properly so-called; what I shall henceforth call 'worldviews' are accounts that fall well short of being comprehensive.

Suppose that we model a worldview as a set of sentences in a natural language (e.g., English). We can think of the worldview that is modelled as the logical closure of the given set of sentences. But, for any set of sentences that models a consistent worldview, there will be sentences S for which it is true that neither S nor ~S belongs to the logical closure of that set of sentences. In practice, this will be true for sentences that already belong to the natural language; in theory, we can appeal to merely possible extensions of the vocabulary of our natural language.

Perhaps we should rather say that worldviews are comprehensive *fundamental* accounts of our world and our place within that world. However, it is not clear that this would mark an advance: for why should we suppose that current natural languages are adequate for the formulation of all claims that would figure in any comprehensive fundamental account of our world and our place within that world? Given the expressive incompleteness of current natural languages, we may as well pretend that worldviews *are* comprehensive accounts of our world and our place within that world.

3.2 Variety of Worldviews

Given that worldviews are comprehensive accounts of our world and our place within that world, there are very many distinct worldviews. There are religious worldviews:

Buddhist worldviews, Christian worldviews, Daoist worldviews, Hindu worldviews, Jain worldviews, Jewish worldviews, Muslim worldviews, Shinto worldviews, Sikh worldviews, and so on. There are also worldviews that are, at best, marginally religious: Confucian worldviews, many traditional indigenous worldviews, and so forth. And there are non-religious worldviews: humanistic worldviews, naturalistic worldviews, materialistic worldviews, and the like.

Moreover, the diversity that we see at one level of description of worldviews is replicated at lower levels. Among Christian worldviews, there are Eastern Orthodox worldviews, Catholic worldviews, Protestant worldviews, Restorationist worldviews, and other assorted worldviews, e.g., those associated with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church, the Anglican Church, and so on. Among Protestant worldviews, there are Anabaptist worldviews, Baptist worldviews, Pentacostalist worldviews, Adventist worldviews, Lutheran worldviews, Calvinist worldviews, and other assorted worldviews such as those associated with Methodism, Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, and so forth. And so on.

Given the diversity of worldviews, it is obvious that no worldview commands the assent of a significant proportion of the population of the world. For any entertained worldview, that worldview is not the worldview of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the earth. Of course, if we appeal to higher-level kinds, then there are kinds of worldviews that command the assent of significant proportions of the world's population—e.g., it is plausible to claim that a significant majority of people have a *religious* worldview. But the comparison and evaluation of worldviews at higher levels seems evidently intractable: e.g., how could anyone seriously hope to argue that, simply as such, non-religious worldviews are better than alternatives?

3.3 Questions about Worldviews

Comparison and evaluation of worldviews is central to philosophy of religion. Of course, religions are more than religious worldviews: religions 'include' people, behaviours, practices, institutions, histories, documents, artefacts, and so on. And there are philosophical questions to be asked about the 'included' people, behaviours, practices, institutions, histories, documents, artefacts, and so forth. Moreover, similar points can be made about worldviews that are non-religious or, at best, marginally religious: these worldviews are also 'associated' with people, behaviours, practices, institutions, histories, documents, artefacts, and the like; and there are philosophical questions to be asked about these 'associated' people, behaviours, practices, institutions, histories, documents, artefacts, etc. But, alongside philosophical questions about people, behaviours, practices, institutions, histories, documents, artefacts, and so forth, there are philosophical questions about worldviews that deservedly occupy a central place in philosophy of religion.

Given the diversity of worldviews, it is natural to ask whether some are better than others. Is there one among the worldviews currently entertained that is true? Are there some among the worldviews currently entertained that are closer to the truth

than other worldviews currently entertained? Is there one among the worldviews currently entertained that is uniquely epistemically justified? Are there some among the worldviews currently entertained that are better epistemically justified than other worldviews currently entertained? Is there one among the worldviews currently entertained that explains all of the relevant data better than any other worldview currently entertained? Are there some among the worldviews currently entertained that explain all of the relevant data better than any other worldviews currently entertained? And so forth.

3.4 Assessment of Worldviews

Since we model worldviews as theories, we can subsume questions about the comparison and evaluation of worldviews under questions about the comparison and evaluation of theories. There is, of course, no agreement about how theories should be compared and evaluated. Many favour Bayesian methods. However, it seems to me that, at least in the kind of case presently before us, Bayesian methods are intractable: in particular, there is no acceptable, tractable method for assigning prior probabilities to theories. Given the intractability of Bayesian methods, it seems reasonable to me to seek an alternative method, couched in terms of the assaying of theoretical virtues. I shall provide a very sketchy outline of my preferred account in the following section.

Given the sheer diversity of worldviews, one might hope to reduce the task of comparison and evaluation by treating worldviews in groups, or collections, or packages. Equivalently, given the sheer diversity of worldviews, one might hope to reduce the task of comparison and evaluation by treating 'abbreviated' worldviews, in which particular sub-views are put forward for evaluation. However, as we shall see, while some parts of the proper process of evaluation of worldviews can accommodate this kind of 'abbreviation', there are other parts of the proper process of evaluation of worldviews that cannot accommodate this kind of 'abbreviation'.

3.5 Three Stages of Assessment

There are three stages in the proper comparative evaluation of worldviews.

1. *Articulation*: The first stage is the formulation of worldviews as articulated theories. If there is to be genuine comparative evaluation of worldviews, then we need to formulate all of the to-be-compared worldviews to the same level of detail, and with the same degree of care.
2. *Internal Evaluation*: The second stage is the determination of which worldviews fail on their own terms. On the one hand, worldviews may be inconsistent; on the other hand, worldviews may be inconsistent with data. The paradigm case—and, in the eyes of some theorists, the only case—is logical inconsistency.
3. *Comparative Evaluation*: The third stage of assessment is the determination of which worldview (if any) that survives the second stage of assessment is most virtuous: which worldview scores best on an appropriate weighting of theoretical

commitments—ontological commitments, ideological commitments—explanation of data, predictive accuracy, fit with well-established knowledge or well-established theory, and so forth.

Each of these stages of assessment merits some further comment.

The significance of the first stage of assessment is hard to exaggerate. If we do not compare and assess *best* formulations of competing worldviews—formulations made with the same level of care to the same level of detail—then our comparison and assessment are almost certainly going to be worthless. If we compare our own carefully formulated detailed worldviews with carelessly and sketchily formulated competitors, it is London to a brick that we shall arrive at the conclusion that our own worldviews are to be preferred. But it is obvious that any such performances are empty, and remains so no matter how much others who share our own worldviews congratulate us on our achievements.

If a worldview fails on its own terms as a result of logical inconsistency, then it will be possible to give a logical demonstration of this failure. Moreover, in any interesting case, it will be possible to give a logical demonstration of the logical inconsistency of a worldview if it is possible to give a logical demonstration of some key thesis that is rejected by the failed worldview from claims all of which belong to that failed worldview. As I have just noted, it is controversial whether there are other kinds of inconsistency that can cause worldviews to fail on their own terms. Some may think that there are cases of probabilistic inconsistency, or explanatory inconsistency, or the like that, while they are not cases of logical inconsistency, are nonetheless cases in which worldviews fail on their own terms. If there are interesting cases of this kind then, I suppose, there are analogous connections between establishing the non-logical inconsistency of the worldview and giving a successful non-logical argument for a key thesis that is rejected by the failed worldview. For the purposes of the present discussion, I shall take no stance on the question whether there can be successful 'non-logical' arguments.

In order to compare and assess properly articulated worldviews that survive internal evaluation, we may need to have a method forweighting theoretical virtues. In cases where one worldview *dominates* another—i.e., in cases where, for each of the theoretical virtues, a given worldview scores better than another—we need no further method in order to arrive at the conclusion that we should prefer the dominating worldview. But in the remaining cases—i.e., in cases where one worldview scores better than a second on some of the theoretical virtues, but worse than that second on other theoretical virtues—it is clear that some further method is required. It is no easy matter to provide such a method; there is certainly no current agreement about how to weight theoretical virtues.

3.6 Data and Established Theory

There is a decision to be made about our use of the term 'data'. On the one hand, we might think of our data as something that is independent of our worldviews.

On the other hand, we might think of our data as the claims that are common to all of the worldviews that are being assessed. If we suppose that data is something independent of worldview, then we shall say that worldviews fail on their own terms when they are inconsistent or inconsistent with data (as we have said). If, on the other hand, we suppose that data is that part of worldviews that is common to all, then we shall say that worldviews fail on their own terms when they are inconsistent; but we shall add that worldviews can be inconsistent in those subparts that do not contain data.

There is also a decision to be made about how to handle other well-established domains of knowledge. It is fairly standard to suppose that 'fit with well-established knowledge' or 'fit with well-established theory' is one of the most significant theoretical virtues. For the purposes of evaluation of worldviews, we might suppose—or perhaps stipulate—that 'data' includes well-established knowledge and well-established theory. However, if we proceed in this way, then the assessment of 'fit with well-established knowledge' or 'fit with well-established theory' will be part of the 'internal evaluation' of worldviews; and, moreover, we cannot then simply suppose that data are just the claims that are common to all of the worldviews being assessed.

The neatest solution, I think, is to insist that only claims that are common to the worldviews in question are data. Insofar as well-established knowledge or well-established theory is common to the worldviews in question, it counts as data; insofar as well-established knowledge or well-established theory is not common to the worldviews in question, it is taken into account only when we reach the stage of comparative evaluation.

3.7 Theism and Naturalism (Best Formulations)

Suppose that we are interested in comparing theistic worldviews with naturalistic worldviews. Since there are substantive differences between distinct theistic worldviews, and substantive differences between distinct naturalistic worldviews, the most that we can hope to do, in a single comparative step, is to compare one sufficiently well-worked-out theistic worldview with one sufficiently well-worked-out naturalistic worldview. The most important thing is that we should have *best* formulations of theistic and naturalistic worldviews worked out to the same level of detail, and to whatever level of detail is appropriate for the purposes of our comparison.

I shall suppose, for the purposes of future discussion, that *naturalism* says, at least, that causal reality is natural reality: there are none but natural causes involving none but natural entities. And I shall similarly suppose that *theism* says, at least, that God is the supernatural cause of natural reality (and perhaps of further supernatural domains as well).

These brief characterizations capture what I take to be an important truth about naturalism and theism. First, there are no *entities* in which naturalists believe but theists do not; but there are entities in which theists believe but naturalists do not—at

least God, and perhaps also angels, demons, and so forth. Secondly, there are no *events* in which naturalists believe but theists do not; but there are events in which theists believe but naturalists do not—God's creation of the natural world, God's acting in the history of the natural world, perhaps angels and demons acting in the history of the natural world, and so on.

Of course, it should not be immediately assumed that this important truth about naturalism and theism points to an all-things-considered reason to prefer naturalism to theism. The additional entities that are postulated by theism might pay their way because they lead to better explanations of data, or improved predictions, or better fit with other established theory, or unification of fundamental principles, or the like. However, if all else is equal—i.e., if, on all other considerations, theism manages nothing better than a tie with naturalism—then there is, indeed, all-things-considered reason to prefer naturalism to theism.

3.8 Simplicity

The important truth about naturalism and theism discussed in the previous section may be restated as the claim that naturalism is *simpler* than theism. Naturalism says that there is nothing but the natural world, and that the natural world instantiates none but natural properties. (For the purposes of this accounting, 'topic neutral' properties are stipulated to count as natural properties.) Theism says that there is more on each count: there is more than the natural world, and there are instantiated properties that do not figure among the natural properties. On point of both ontological and ideological commitments, theism has more commitments than naturalism has.

Perhaps some might be moved to complain that this accounting fails to pay proper heed to the doctrine of divine simplicity. On a rough and ready understanding of that doctrine, it entails both that it is not really correct to say that God is an additional 'thing' and that it is not really correct to say that the divine attributes are additional 'properties'. Setting aside worries about the coherence of the doctrine of divine simplicity—even in this rough and ready formulation—there are at least two lines of reply. First, even if we grant that God has *sui generis* ontological standing, it remains that case that God has *some* ontological standing; and so it remains the case that there is an ontological cost to be added to the theoretical balance sheet. Secondly, in most interesting cases, there are many *other* entities and properties that theism adds to the natural entities and natural properties of a corresponding naturalism: angels, demons, miracles, and so forth. Even if God added nothing to the theoretical balance sheet, it would still typically be the case that, on point of both ontological and ideological commitments, theism has more commitments than naturalism has.

3.9 'Evil'

In the literature about 'problems of evil', there is some discussion about alleged connotations of the word 'evil'. According to some, 'evil' is an expression that has no proper

use in non-theistic worldviews: for, according to those who defend this view, something is evil if and only if it is contrary to the will of God, or the like. Moreover, according to some, the fact that 'evil' is an expression that has no proper use in non-theistic worldviews somehow insulates theistic worldviews from objections involving considerations about evil. I see at least three difficulties for this claim.

First, even if it were necessarily true that something is evil if it is contrary to the will of God, that would not establish that use of the word 'evil' carries the connotation that the things to which the word applies are contrary to the will of God. Common usage could—and, indeed, surely does—establish that 'evil' can be a synonym for words like 'bad', 'harmful', and the like; and these words plainly do not carry any connotation that the things to which they apply are contrary to the will of God.

Secondly, even if it were true that the word 'evil' does carry the connotation that the things to which the word applies are contrary to the will of God, that would make no difference to the second stage in the comparison and evaluation of worldviews. If theism fails on its own terms because it is committed to making logically contradictory claims about God and evil, then it fails on its own terms even though the word 'evil' carries the connotation that the things to which the word applies are contrary to the will of God.

Thirdly, even if it were true that the word 'evil' does carry the connotation that the things to which the word applies are contrary to the will of God, we could simply recast the subject matter of our discussion in terms of *suffering*. In particular, when we come to the third stage in the comparison of worldviews, we can ask whether theism or naturalism gives a better explanation of the data concerning the distribution of suffering and flourishing in our universe. In asking this question, we can carry over taxonomy familiar from discussions of evil: e.g., that there is (moral) suffering that is caused, at least in part, by human agency; and that there is (natural) suffering that is not caused, even in part, by human agency. Moreover, in asking this question, it is clear that we can carry over all of the responses and distinctions made familiar in discussions couched in terms of 'evil': e.g., we can distinguish cases of horrendous suffering from more minor cases of suffering; and we can suppose that considerations about free will might go at least some way towards explaining why there are cases of (moral) suffering caused, at least in part, by human agency.

3.10 Internal Defeat

The question whether considerations about evil lead to the internal defeat of either theism or naturalism is intimately connected to the question whether there is a successful argument from evil that defeats either theism or naturalism.

I take it to be obvious on its face that there is no argument from evil that defeats naturalism. If there were to be such an argument, then it would be an argument that contained a *non-redundant* premise about the distribution of evil in the universe: that there is evil, or that there is moral evil, or that there is natural evil, or that there is a lot of evil, or that there is a lot of moral evil, or that there is a lot of natural evil, or that there is horrendous evil, or that there is horrendous moral evil, or that there is horrendous

natural evil, or that there is a lot of horrendous evil, or that there is a lot of horrendous moral evil, or that there is a lot of horrendous natural evil, or the like. But how could a claim like one of these be a *non-redundant* premise in a successful argument against naturalism?

I anticipate some may object that there are conditions that must be satisfied in order for there to be a distribution of evil in the universe: for example, that there must be creatures that are capable of suffering. If it turns out that naturalism can give no consistent account of the presence in the universe of creatures that are capable of suffering, wouldn't that be an argument from evil that defeats naturalism? Not at all! If it turns out that the claim that there are living organisms capable of suffering is inconsistent with other naturalistic principles then, while naturalism will be defeated, claims about the distribution of evil in the universe will not be *non-redundant* premises in arguments that exhibit that contradiction.

By way of contrast, it is not obvious on its face that there is no argument from evil that defeats theism. It is *conceivable* that fully articulated theistic worldviews are rendered inconsistent by claims about the distribution of evil in our universe. Consequently, it is *conceivable* that there are successful arguments from evil—containing non-redundant premises about the distribution of evil in our universe—which exhibit the relevant inconsistencies. Moreover, it seems unlikely that one could hope to respond to the thought, that fully articulated theistic worldviews are rendered inconsistent by claims about the distribution of evil in our universe, by giving a demonstration of the consistency of one or more fully articulated theistic worldviews. After all, on the one hand, it is doubtful whether we could construct even one fully articulated theistic worldview; and, on the other hand, there are severe limitations on our ability to prove that theories are consistent.

However, I think that it is quite clear that no one has yet produced an argument which shows that our current best partially articulated theistic worldviews are rendered inconsistent by claims about the distribution of evil in our universe. When we examine extant arguments from evil, we always find that the (perhaps merely alleged) contradictions involve claims that theists can—and typically do—reasonably reject.

Mackie (1955) derived a contradiction involving the claims that there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do and that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can; but, in agreement with Plantinga (1974), theists invariably reject one or both of these claims. Rowe (1979) derived a contradiction involving the claims that there are instances of intense suffering that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse and that an omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse; but theists invariably reject one or both of these claims (with most rejecting at least the first).

I anticipate that some may insist that, while theists do reject key claims in arguments that would otherwise show that their theism is contradictory, there are costs involved

in the rejection of these claims. I agree that there may be costs involved in the rejection of these claims; but I do not agree that this is an objection to what I have just said. We are here considering whether best formulations of theism are subject to internal defeat; it should not be surprising that best formulations of theism avoid internal defeat, though perhaps at the cost of some loss of overall theoretical virtue. Of course, whether there *is* loss of overall theoretical virtue is a question for the third stage of comparison, to which we now turn.

3.11 Comparison

It is not a straightforward matter to assess the bearing that considerations about evil have on the determination of the comparative theoretical virtues of theism and naturalism. Ultimately, determination of the comparative theoretical virtues of theories is a global matter: what counts is which theory does better overall, on an appropriate weighting of theoretical commitment, explanation of data, predictive accuracy, fit with established knowledge, and so forth. In particular, then, when it comes to questions about data, what matters is which theory does better at explaining *total* data. However, it does not follow—at least not immediately—that *no* interest attaches to the question what difference data about the distribution of suffering and flourishing in the universe makes to the assessment of the comparative overall virtue of theism and naturalism.

A natural first thought is that, in order to make a serious comparison of the explanatory powers of—the goodness of the explanations of data offered by—competing theories, we shall need to make a piecewise comparison of the theories over an appropriate partition of the total data. If we are to compare the performance of two theories against a large amount of data, then we must be able to assess each of the theories, against portions of that data, for such things as consistency with the data, goodness of explanation of the data, and so forth. But, if we are able to compare the performance of two theories against portions of a large amount of data, then, at least in principle, we should also be able to trace out dependencies between particular theoretical commitments of those theories and particular portions of that total data.

Roughly speaking, it seems to me that, while there are no particular theoretical commitments of naturalism that are keyed to data concerning the distribution of suffering and flourishing in our universe, there may be particular theoretical commitments of theism that are keyed to data concerning the distribution of suffering and flourishing in our universe.

On the one hand, there is no natural—non-gerrymandered—sub-theory of naturalism that prompts questions, or worries, or issues related to the distribution of suffering or flourishing in our universe. On naturalistic accounts of the origins and evolution of life on earth, there is nothing surprising about the distribution of suffering and flourishing across the surface of the earth. In particular, there are no theoretical commitments of naturalism—no ontological or ideological commitments of naturalism—that are keyed to the data about the distribution of suffering and flourishing across the surface of

the earth; there are no special hypotheses that naturalists introduce to accommodate or to explain the distribution of suffering and flourishing across the surface of the earth.

On the other hand, it is pretty much universally recognized that the same is not true for theism. In this case, there may be natural—non-gerrymandered—sub-theories that do prompt questions, or worries, or issues that are related to the distribution of suffering and flourishing in our universe, and, in particular, to the distribution of suffering and flourishing across the surface of the earth. If we suppose—as theists typically do—that, in the beginning, there was nothing but a perfect being—omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and so forth—and if everything else is the creation of that perfect being, then what explains the presence of evil in our universe? If we suppose—as theists typically do—that God exercises strong providential control over everything that happens and that God would prefer that we do not suffer, then why is it that we suffer as we do?

Furthermore, it is pretty much universally recognized that there may be theoretical commitments of theistic worldviews that are keyed to the distribution of suffering in our universe. Some theists suppose that the distribution of horrendous natural evil in our universe is a consequence of the activities of demons and other malign supernatural agents; and, for these theists, the main reason for supposing that there *are* demons and other malign supernatural agents is that this supposition *explains* the distribution of horrendous natural evil in our universe. Some theists suppose that God's permission of the distribution of horrendous moral evil that is found in our universe is, in part, due to God's recognition that there are goods beyond our ken whose obtaining depends upon there being an at least relevantly similar distribution of horrendous moral evil; and, for these theists, the main reason for supposing that there *are* goods beyond our ken whose obtaining depends upon there being an at least relevantly similar distribution of horrendous moral evil is that this supposition *explains* God's permission of the distribution of horrendous moral evil in our universe.

Of course, it does not follow, from the fact that in *some* theistic worldviews there are theoretical commitments that are keyed to the (explanation of the) distribution of suffering in our universe, that in *all* theistic worldviews there are theoretical commitments that are keyed to the (explanation of the) distribution of suffering in our universe. While the popularity among theists of the enterprise of constructing theodicies does suggest that there is widespread recognition that theistic worldviews should provide answers to questions or worries about the distribution of suffering in our universe and God's involvement in and attitude towards that distribution, it remains open to theists to claim that those answers can be provided without appealing to any theoretical commitments that are keyed to the provision of those answers. For all that has been said so far, it is at least conceivable that there are theistic worldviews in which there are no theoretical commitments for which it is true that the sole reason—or even the major reason—that theists have for taking on those commitments concerns their role in the explanation of the distribution of suffering in our universe.

If, for example, the main reason for supposing that there are demons and other malign supernatural agents has nothing to do with the explanation of the distribution of horrendous natural evil in our universe, then—it might be supposed—the invocation, of the activities of demons and other malign supernatural agents in the explanation of the distribution of horrendous natural evil in our universe, can be taken to mark no greater theoretical commitment for theism than is incurred by naturalism in the latter's explanation of the distribution of horrendous natural evil in our universe. If, to take another example, the main reason, for supposing that there are goods beyond our ken whose obtaining depends upon there being a distribution of horrendous moral evil relevantly similar to the actual distribution of horrendous moral evil in our universe, has nothing to do with the explanation of the distribution of horrendous moral evil in our universe, then—it might be supposed—the invocation, of goods beyond our ken whose obtaining depends upon there being a distribution of horrendous moral evil relevantly similar to the actual distribution of horrendous moral evil in our universe, can be taken to mark no greater theoretical commitment for theism than is incurred by naturalism in the latter's explanation of the distribution of horrendous moral evil in our universe.

There are two cases to be distinguished. On the one hand, it may be that there are theoretical commitments directly attributable to theistic explanation of the distribution of evils in our universe. In this case, we can say that there is a good sense in which the distribution of evils in our universe favours naturalism over theism: *all else being equal*, these additional theoretical commitments would constitute a reason to prefer naturalism to theism. On the other hand, it may be that there are no theoretical commitments directly attributable to theistic explanation of the distribution of evils in our universe. In this case, we can only say that the distribution of evils in our universe favours neither naturalism over theism nor theism over naturalism: *all else being equal*, the distribution of evil in our universe constitutes neither a reason to prefer naturalism to theism nor a reason to prefer theism to naturalism.

Of course, as we noted earlier, *all else being equal*, the greater simplicity of naturalism does provide a reason to prefer it to theism. If, setting aside considerations about the distribution of evil in our universe, theism and naturalism are tied on all considerations other than simplicity, then, taking considerations about the distribution of evil in our universe into account would still yield the result that there is all-things-considered reason to prefer naturalism to theism.

While this last point is obvious, it is one that some—perhaps even many—theists have ignored. Some—perhaps even many—theists have claimed that considerations about the distribution of evil in our universe constitute the sole reason for so much as suspecting that there might be best non-theistic worldviews that are superior to best theistic worldviews. However, this assessment seems to me to be wildly mistaken. If there is no other domain on which theism has an explanatory advantage then—as I have just argued—naturalism's superiority to theism is established even if there are theistic explanations of the distribution of evil in our universe that incur no 'additional'

theoretical commitments. Moreover, while I cannot hope to argue for this here, it seems to me that *naturalists* can quite reasonably believe that there is no other domain on which theism has an explanatory advantage over naturalism. (I set out some of the case for this last claim in Oppy 2013b.)

3.12 Concluding Remarks

I have long insisted that many theorists—both theists and naturalists—greatly overestimate the significance of considerations concerning the distribution of evil in our universe for the evaluation of the comparative theoretical virtues of theism and naturalism. While I am tempted to think that, in fact, theists do typically incur 'additional' theoretical commitments because of the explanations they give of the distribution of evil in our universe—and while I assume that this is so in the relevant section of Oppy (2013b)—I do not think that it really matters whether I am right or wrong about this. Moreover, and more importantly, I do not think that there is much to be gained from arguing over this point: whether theists typically incur 'additional' theoretical commitments because of the explanations that they give of the distribution of evil in our universe has no special significance for either the second ('internal') or third ('comparative') stages of the assessment of best formulations of theistic and naturalistic worldviews.

One final observation: while I have said no one has yet produced an argument which shows that our current best partially articulated theistic worldviews are rendered inconsistent by claims about the distribution of evil in our universe, I have not said that we may reasonably suppose that no one will ever produce an argument which shows that our current best partially articulated theistic worldviews are rendered inconsistent by claims about the distribution of evil in our universe. I think that it remains an open question whether theists will ever provide a satisfying explanation of the emergence of imperfection from perfection that is posited in their theories; but I also think that it remains an open question whether naturalists will ever be able to demonstrate that there is an inconsistency in theories which posit that imperfection emerges from perfection.

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Response to Oppy

Eleonore Stump

In my view, Graham Oppy's paper deepens the discussion of the problem of evil, and I agree with much in his position. In these short comments, I want to reflect on what strikes me as most innovative about his position and to raise a few questions for discussion.

Oppy formulates the context for discussions of the problem of evil this way:

> Given the diversity of worldviews, it is natural to ask whether some are better than others. Is there one among the worldviews currently entertained that is true? . . . Is there one among the worldviews currently entertained that is uniquely epistemically justified? . . . Is there one among the worldviews currently entertained that explains all of the relevant data better than any other worldview currently entertained? . . . And so forth.

To see what is innovative about Oppy's approaching the problem of evil in this way, it may be helpful to say something about the forms of the argument from evil. All the varying forms of the argument aim at the same conclusion, namely, 'God does not exist'. And they also all share this feature: that conclusion is supposed to follow from some facts having to do with suffering. It is something about suffering in particular—as distinct, say, from something about the divine attributes or something about the nature of goodness or something about human free will—that is supposed to demonstrate that God does not exist. What differentiates varying arguments from evil are the different ways in which they use suffering to support the conclusion that God does not exist.

Before Alvin Plantinga formulated the free-will defence, the most influential argument from evil tried to show that God does not exist on the basis of the claims that there is evil in the world and that the existence of God and the existence of evil are logically incompatible. *No* possible world that contains evil could also be a world that contains God.

It was widely believed that Plantinga's free-will defence undermines the argument from evil in this form. In consequence, the argument was reformulated as the evidential argument from evil. The evidential argument from evil attempted to reason to the non-existence of God on the basis of an incompatibility between the existence of God and facts about the kind and extent of suffering in the actual world. In this version of the

argument from evil, a crucial premise is this: There is no morally sufficient reason for an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God to allow all of the suffering that there is in the actual world.

This version of the argument from evil is a lot harder to defend against, but then it is also a lot harder to support. In fact, it has turned out to be remarkably difficult to adjudicate the controversy over the evidential argument from evil. That is because any theodicy or defence—and any argument against a theodicy or defence—is embedded in a worldview that includes ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics, as well as scientific and theological claims. And so, Oppy argues, to adjudicate the controversy over the evidential argument from evil we need in fact to examine competing worldviews. The attack on theism constituted by the argument from evil can be evaluated only by comparing whole worldviews.

This is a relatively new approach to the problem of evil. On Oppy's way of thinking about the problem of evil, one needs to examine naturalism and theism as rival candidates for a grand unifying theory of everything; and one then needs to maintain that naturalism is the better worldview of the two because it gives a more plausible or more probable or more simple or less surprising explanation of the actual world, given that there is suffering in the world.

In my view, this is a promising approach, but it also raises some challenging questions for Oppy.

First, what are the explananda for the competing worldviews? Are they just the deliverances of science? Or do they also include such things as awe at beauty and the yearning desire to share that sensed beauty with someone else? What about the heart-melting genius of Mozart's music, the overwhelming self-sacrifice of Maximilian Kolbe, or the fear of being abandoned to loneliness in sickness and the wish for tender care in dying? Are they also part of the explananda? And if we cannot agree on the explananda, by what methodology will we adjudicate disputes over rival candidates?

Secondly, what are the criteria for evaluation of competing worldviews and how shall we understand these criteria?

Oppy takes simplicity to be one such criterion, but this very criterion shows the nature of the difficulty here. Philosophy of science has made us familiar with the problems accompanying any attempt to take simplicity as a criterion for judging competing theories.

To begin with, what makes a theory simple? Is a theory simple in virtue of having only a small number of laws? In virtue of postulating only a small number of entities? In virtue of postulating only entities and laws that are themselves simple? And what makes an entity or a law simple?

Furthermore, what makes one theory simpler than another? If one theory postulates more laws but fewer entities than another theory that postulates fewer laws but more entities, which is the simpler theory? If one theory postulates many laws and many entities but leaves nothing unexplained, is it a simpler theory than one which has fewer laws and fewer entities but also has a number of unexplained brute facts?

And how are we to weigh simplicity against other virtues of a theory? A theory could be simple but dead wrong, because the phenomena it is attempting to describe are themselves complicated. Here we can remember that earlier competing theories of the nature of light were very simple by comparison with quantum mechanics, for example. According to contemporary descriptions of quantum mechanics, quantum mechanics tells us that light is both a wave and a particle, that a particle can be both decayed and not decayed, that a cat can be both alive and dead, and that particles at opposite ends of the universe can be entangled, so that they operate in tandem even when there is no possibility of a signal passing between them. Surely, this is a very complicated theory of light, much less simple than its earlier competitors. But, according to contemporary physics, the complicated theory is right (or more nearly right), and the earlier, simpler theories are false.

So Oppy's position seems to me entirely correct in its focus on worldviews. But the evaluation and comparison of worldviews looks challenging. At any rate, his approach calls for more discussion of the nature of the explananda and the standards for evaluative comparison of worldviews than we have so far.

Response to Oppy

John Bishop

Oppy distinguishes three stages in the assessment of worldviews—articulation, internal evaluation, and comparative evaluation. His main conclusion is that considerations concerning evil play less of a role than often supposed in the comparative evaluation of theist and naturalist worldviews. That conclusion presupposes as available for comparison at least partial 'best articulations' of both theism and naturalism. It also presupposes that both theism and naturalism pass scrutiny at the second stage of internal evaluation—that they are both internally coherent, in other words. And Oppy thinks that considerations about evil do not come to the fore here either, since theism is widely acknowledged to survive the challenge from the 'Logical' Argument from Evil.

Assessing theism in comparison with naturalism, then, will depend, Oppy thinks, on "which worldview scores best on an appropriate weighting of theoretical commitments . . . explanation of data, predictive accuracy, fit with well-established knowledge or well-established theory, and so forth." *If* theism and naturalism are tied in all other relevant respects, then "the greater simplicity of naturalism does provide a reason to prefer it to theism," and Oppy leaves it open whether this sufficient condition for preferring naturalism is met. But his conditional claim seems clearly correct: theism *is* committed to a richer ontology than naturalism, where naturalism is understood as *scientific* naturalism, the view that there is no more to reality than described in even notionally completed scientific theory.

Theist traditions appeal to *revelation* for their belief in divine reality as transcending 'purely natural' reality, and it seems to me that theists' acceptance of such revelations, though arguably reasonable on their own terms, cannot be made rationally compelling from some neutral common ground shared with naturalists. I will not argue for that claim here,[1] but I will observe that it gives me reason for agreeing with Oppy's judgement that "*naturalists* can quite reasonably believe that there is no other domain on which theism has an explanatory advantage over naturalism" (emphasis in original).[2] The point may be put this way: theism may potentially exceed naturalism in explanatory virtues only through its articulating an understanding of self-revealing divine reality that is a datum naturalism may reasonably discount from its perspective, since naturalist explanations *are* available for a datum that may not be discounted, namely that (some) humans *believe* in self-revealing divine reality.

There may be 'friendly' naturalists who make a parallel concession to the effect that *theists, from their revelation-accommodating perspective*, can quite reasonably believe that theism's extended ontological commitments provide needed explanations that give it the advantage over naturalism. But there remain 'crusading' naturalists who seek to show that theist commitment is unreasonable, and some of them may retain the ambition of supporting the stronger claim that the unreasonableness of theism arises from a failure of internal coherence, rather than merely from appeals to revelation that cannot be independently evidentially certified. As Oppy notes in his 'final observation', we are not in a position to scotch this ambition entirely, though his last sentence suggests that he thinks that, if there is to be a demonstration of the internal incoherence of theism, it will arise from its commitment to "the emergence of imperfection from perfection" rather than simply from facts about the distribution of evil.

As matters stand, however, Oppy's view is that "no one has yet produced an argument which shows that our current best partially articulated theistic worldviews are rendered inconsistent by claims about the distribution of evil in our universe." That claim seems right to me—but, then, I have in mind something different from the standard 'personal omniGod' account as the referent for 'our current best partially articulated theist worldview'. I agree that theism *in general* is not rendered inconsistent by claims about evil. But I think that there *are* arguments for the conclusion that a theist worldview *that assumes the personal omniGod conception of divinity* is internally incoherent—relative, at least, to certain moral stances which it seems reasonable (though perhaps not obligatory) for theists to accept. Those who go under the banner of 'antitheodicy' advance just such a 'normatively relativized' Logical Argument from Evil: some evils are such that it is morally offensive to hold that they may be 'justified' as belonging to a consciously chosen plan for achieving ultimate good that could be carried out by a

[1] In Bishop (2007: 68–76) I discuss the thesis of the 'evidential ambiguity of theism' from which the claim just made follows, and later explain how this thesis might hold as a matter of principle (141–5).

[2] In his Position Statement, Oppy does not argue for the truth of this judgement, but refers to "some of the case" in favour of it as set out in Oppy (2013).

perfectly good agent.[3] These arguments may be resisted, of course, by rejecting the moral stance on which they rest. But, if they are accepted, they show only that, insofar as theist worldviews endorse that stance, they may not understand God as a supremely powerful agent with the kind of goodness that pertains to personal agents in our moral community, but must rather hold some different understanding of divinity.

It seems to me, then, that, though it is well founded on its own terms, there is something misleading about Oppy's downplaying of 'problems of evil' for the choice between theism and naturalism at the level of the comparative evaluation of all-encompassing worldviews. For, considerations about evil are directly relevant to the question of practical commitment to a salvific theist worldview that resolves the 'existential' problem of evil by enabling us to cope with evil, both within and without. Or, rather, considerations about evil *become* relevant from the perspective of those who reflect on whether their 'saving' faith is justifiable. From that perspective, of *fides quaerens intellectum*, assurance is needed of the internal coherence of the theist faith-stance. How can trust in God for salvation from evil cohere with what the believer must take to be the fact that evil can come to exist only under ultimate divine sovereignty? And, furthermore, what understanding of divinity is it that enables such a coherent understanding? Satisfactory answers to these questions are by no means apparent: we must strive to find them. If one believes, as I do, that no satisfactory explanation of evil can be provided that fits with key theist values under the anthropomorphic personal omniGod conception, the possibility of rationally justifiable commitment to theism rests on there being some alternative conception of divinity under which an acceptable explanation of evil (or, theodicy) is available. I hope and believe that such an alternative conception can be articulated and shown to be religiously viable.[4] But, while it remains possible that no suitably paired viable God-conception and theodicy can be found, considerations about evil might yet prove decisive in motivating the rejection of theism. That is enough, I think, to keep 'problems of evil' at centre stage when it comes to choosing for or against theism.

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[3] For further discussion of such normatively relativized arguments, see Bishop and Perszyk (2011).

[4] For an indication of such an alternative, and its standing in relation to the problem of evil, see Bishop and Perszyk (2016).

Response to Oppy

N. N. Trakakis

I will make three points by way of response to Graham Oppy's paper.

(1) I wonder whether Oppy's requirement that the *best* formulation of a worldview be put forward for assessment and comparison stands in tension with the separation, tacitly endorsed in section 3.3 of Oppy's chapter, of worldviews from the socio-cultural contexts in which they are embedded. The articulation of the best formulation of a religious worldview will, I gather, require a *thick description* of the religion—specifically, a thick description of the beliefs of the religion and of the reasons given by proponents of that religion in support of those beliefs, where (following Timothy Knepper) 'religious reason-giving' is construed broadly so as to include "both formal and informal acts of reason-giving, both the grounds and ends of reason-giving, both the ideas that populate reason-giving and the theories that reason-giving supports, both the authors and audiences of reason-giving, both the proponents and opponents of reason-giving, and the cultural contexts and historical trajectories of reason-giving." (Knepper 2013: 15) But if it is necessary to provide thick descriptions of reason-giving (in this broad sense of 'reason-giving'), then detailed and indeed historically sensitive and hermeneutically nuanced accounts of a religious worldview cannot bypass the various people, behaviours, practices, institutions, histories, documents, artefacts, and the like that the worldview is 'associated' with—for only in that way will the beliefs be properly understood and accurately or fairly presented, thus avoiding the creation of 'straw men'. This has, I suspect, become an ingrained problem with the way in which philosophy of religion is practiced. As Knepper has recently pointed out, philosophers of religion have for some time now been overly preoccupied with the task of evaluation *at the expense of description and comparison*. Knepper even concludes: "It is probably therefore the case that, given the current state of philosophy of religion, evaluation ought to be largely suspended until thick descriptions and formal comparisons can be produced." (21) I would not go so far as to counsel the temporary suspension of evaluation, but Knepper's advice does indicate the urgency of the problem.

(2) Oppy seeks "to compare one sufficiently well-worked-out theistic worldview with one sufficiently well-worked-out naturalistic worldview," and he goes on to define theism and naturalism as follows: "I shall suppose . . . that *naturalism* says, at least, that causal reality is natural reality: there are none but natural causes involving none but natural entities. And I shall similarly suppose that *theism* says, at least, that God is the supernatural cause of natural reality (and perhaps of further supernatural domains as well)" (emphases in original).

But are we presented here with a "sufficiently well-worked-out theistic worldview"? This is important because it may end up skewing the results of the comparative evaluation. Take, for example, a form of theism that is developed along the idealist

lines I sketch in my Position Statement. On this view, the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal of all existence is the 'Absolute', variously defined across idealist systems but usually regarded as wholly unconditioned or ontologically independent and purely mental or spiritual in nature. Suppose we also follow idealist traditions such as the Hindu school of Advaita Vedanta in postulating an absolute monism, according to which the common experience of plurality is misleading insofar as it masks the underlying unity of reality, where at the deepest level every person, as also every material object, is identical with the Absolute or Brahman.

Now, if it is something like this form of theism that is under consideration, then it follows, *contra* Oppy, that:

(i) There are entities and events in which naturalists believe but theists do not. In fact, everything that the naturalist believes, the theist denies—e.g., the naturalist believes that there are tables, chairs, birds, rivers, etc., while the theist rejects all these as 'appearances' only.
(ii) Naturalism is not simpler than theism. Insofar as this form of theism is committed to monism, and naturalism is not, theism is obviously committed to far fewer things or items than naturalism.

(3) In section 3.10 Oppy writes: "I take it to be obvious on its face that there is no argument from evil that defeats naturalism." Arguments, however, have been put forward on the basis of evil *in support of* theism—and hence, by extension, against naturalism. Interestingly, it appears that it was the existence of evil that first led C. S. Lewis to abandon belief in God, and it was the existence of evil that led him later to return to belief in God.

This argument from evil is often formulated by way of the idea that evil (or morality, more generally) is an objective feature of the world, and that this is something that can be accounted for in a theistic worldview but not in a naturalistic worldview. But even if we follow Oppy in recasting the discussion in terms of *suffering* (or the distribution of suffering and flourishing in our world), the argument for theism can similarly be recast. Suffering is assumed to have some moral value, specifically, negative moral value (it is intrinsically bad)—otherwise, the common belief that suffering ought to be prevented, all other things being equal, would be unintelligible (whether from a theistic or a naturalistic perspective). However, the moral value suffering is thought to have must be *objective* in nature, in the sense that it has that value independently of what people think or perceive. Now, the objectivity of moral values is something that can be accommodated by a theistic worldview, but not by a naturalistic worldview. (The point can also be made with reference to the notion of 'flourishing'. This term has a normative dimension, as it refers to or suggests 'the way things *ought* to be', thus raising the question of the source and objectivity of this 'obligatoriness'.) The argument therefore concludes that, given the existence of evil (as an objective moral category), theism is more likely to be true than naturalism.

If this line of argument is sound, then it is not correct to say, as Oppy does (in section 3.11) that "On naturalistic accounts of the origins and evolution of life on earth, there is nothing surprising about the distribution of suffering and flourishing across the surface of the earth." If the notions of suffering and flourishing presuppose objective moral values, then if we accept the foregoing theistic argument from evil, the existence of suffering and flourishing would be highly surprising in a naturalistic worldview—in fact, their existence would be rationally inexplicable.

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Reply to Stump

Graham Oppy

I agree with Eleonore Stump that the evaluation and comparison of worldviews is challenging. In fact, I think that each of the three steps in worldview assessment that I identify—articulation, internal scrutiny, and external comparison—is very challenging. Moreover, I think that, because we have made so little progress on the first step, we are not well placed to advance to the second and third steps. At the very least, anything at the second and third steps is highly provisional.

I also agree with Stump that there are hard questions about (a) the explananda for competing worldviews, and (b) the criteria for evaluation of competing worldviews.

I hold that *at least* everything that is agreed between two worldviews that are being compared falls into the class of potential explananda. (I say 'potential' explananda because it may be that some of the things on which there is agreement are treated as primitives in one or both of the worldviews up for comparison.)

I assume that explananda are claims; I make no restrictions at all on the content of those claims. I expect that the explananda will include commonsense and scientific descriptive claims; but they will also include normative claims about the kinds of things that Stump mentions: actions, emotions, desires, hopes, characters, artworks, and so forth. (It may help to have a look at Oppy 2013 to get a sense of the range of claims that would be in play as potential explananda in comparisons of theistic and naturalistic worldviews. Of course, the competing worldviews in Oppy 2013 are only given very superficial formulations; but, even at those quite superficial levels of formulation, there is an enormous range of descriptive and normative data that is up for explanation.)

When we compare two worldviews, we expect that each will explain claims that the other worldview rejects. I'm very tempted to add to what I've said so far that a

worldview gains no comparative advantage by explaining claims that other worldviews reject. (It is, perhaps, worth recalling here that a worldview *may* fall into inconsistency in its explanation of claims that other worldviews reject; and it is, perhaps, also worth recalling here that a worldview *may* incur supernumerary commitments in its explanation of claims that other worldviews reject. A worldview may be comparatively *disadvantaged* by explaining claims that other worldviews reject.)

One advantage of proceeding in this way is that we get a quick answer to Stump's question about adjudicating disputes about candidate explananda: once we've properly articulated the worldviews that we are comparing, we can immediately 'read off' the relevant potential explananda. Perhaps it might seem that proceeding in this way gives hostage to 'skeptical' worldviews: if you reject all claims, then you incur no commitments and have nothing to explain. But it is not possible to reject all claims; even the most committed skeptics accept a vast range of claims about how things appear to them, and about what words and sentences mean, and about how they feel, and so forth. If they treat all of those claims as primitives, then they end up with a vast range of primitive commitments—to appearances, meanings, feelings, and so forth—that, at the very least, does not obviously provide a better theory than one that postulates other entities as explainers of those appearances, meanings, feelings, and so forth.

While I agree that there are hard questions about simplicity, I think that matters are probably not quite as bad as Stump supposes. On the kind of view of explanatory virtues that I favour, we should think of theory choice as a matter of finding an optimal trade-off between simplicity and explanatory success. If a theory does not succeed in explaining data, then it is simply not a successful overall theory (no matter how useful it may be in limited domains in which it does explain data). However, if two theories both successfully explain data, but one is simpler than the other—because, say, all is equal except that one theory postulates fewer entities than the other—then the simpler theory is to be preferred. (Intuitively, this is because our data gives us no reason to believe in the additional entities that are postulated by the more complicated theory.)

If—as Stump surmises—there are several dimensions to simplicity, so that a theory T1 can be simpler than a theory T2 in one respect, but more complicated than theory T2 in some other respect, then it is an open question whether we sometimes end up with incommensurable theories: theories for which there just is no saying that one is better than another. But, even if we do sometimes have incommensurable theories, it certainly doesn't follow immediately that we *always* have incommensurable theories. No matter how many independent dimensions there are to theory choice, we can always decide between theories that agree on all but one of the independent dimensions. (In Oppy 2013 I sketch a case for the claim that theism and naturalism are equal on every dimension of theoretical virtue but one: what separates them is that naturalism postulates fewer kinds of entities (and fewer entities). I don't claim that the case that I sketch is compelling; however, I do think that it suggests a way in which one might think that an application of the framework that I have outlined will actually bear fruit.)

Despite that last parenthetical observation, I do not think that the most important part of my view concerns the prospects for actually deciding between competing worldviews. While scrutiny and comparison are undeniably difficult, it is important not to lose sight of the difficulties involved in articulation. In particular, if you are serious about improving your own worldview by comparing it with the worldviews of others, then you first need to engage in the very difficult task of trying to understand the worldviews of others. That task, I think, requires a kind of imaginative sympathy that is very hard to achieve; but, if we are unable to achieve that kind of imaginative sympathy, then it is very hard to believe that we can be well positioned to assess our own worldviews against the worldviews of others.

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Reply to Bishop

Graham Oppy

John Bishop says that there is something misleading about my downplaying of considerations about evil in the comparative evaluation of theism and naturalism. In his view, those who believe in a 'personal omniGod' are committed to an inconsistent set of claims about that 'personal omniGod' and evil. I am not convinced that he is right about this. What I would like to see—but have not yet seen—is a set of claims that satisfies the following two conditions: (i) the set of claims is inconsistent, and (ii) each of the claims in the set is accepted by those who believe in the 'personal omniGod'.

Bishop is careful to insist that the inconsistent set of claims to which he adverts includes some moral claims that it is reasonable—though not perhaps obligatory—for 'personal omniGod' theists to accept. In asking for the specification of a set of claims, I am expecting to be presented with a set of claims that includes the moral claims to which Bishop adverts. If it turns out that those moral claims are ones that 'personal omniGod' theists typically accept, then those claims will not loom large in the subsequent assessment of the (allegedly) inconsistent set of claims. However, if it turns out that those moral claims are ones that 'personal omniGod' theists typically reject, then that in itself will be a condition that suffices to defeat the claim that Bishop makes on behalf of his 'normatively relativized logical argument from evil'.

Bishop suggests that the following claim is central to his 'normatively relativized logical argument from evil': "some evils are such that it is morally offensive to hold that they may be 'justified' as belonging to a consciously chosen plan for achieving ultimate

good that could be carried out by a perfectly good agent." I think that anyone who is willing to accept this claim will also be prepared to accept the following claim:

> (1) There are evils for which the following is true: if those evils were part of a consciously chosen plan carried out by an omnipotent and omniscient agent with the aim of achieving ultimate good, then that agent would be properly deserving of the most severe moral condemnation (and so would not be perfectly good).

But there are no believers in the 'personal omniGod' who accept (1). So, I think, there are no believers in the 'personal omniGod' who accept that there are evils of which it is morally offensive to hold that they may be 'justified' as belonging to a consciously chosen plan for achieving ultimate good that could be carried out by a perfectly good agent.

Perhaps it will be replied that, while 'personal omniGod' theists will clearly be committed to denying (1), many of them will be committed to other claims that are inconsistent with denying (1). But that brings us back to the same kind of challenge that I issued a few paragraphs back: what I would like to see—but have not yet seen—is a set of claims that includes (1) and that satisfies the following two conditions: (i) the set of claims is inconsistent, and (ii) each of the claims in the set is accepted by those who believe in the 'personal omniGod'.

I think that there is a serious methodological issue here that is too often ignored by philosophers and, in particular, by philosophers of religion. If you wish to allege that there is an inconsistency in an opposing view then, I think, you have a responsibility to exhibit the (alleged) inconsistency in a way that makes the (alleged) inconsistency manifest. Furthermore, the reason why you have this responsibility is that it is only by making the (alleged) inconsistency manifest that you make it possible for others to check that the (allegedly) inconsistent claims really are all claims that are accepted by those whom you are alleging have inconsistent views. It is very easy to construct manifest inconsistencies by mixing together claims that belong to competing worldviews—but the exhibition of those kinds of manifest inconsistencies does nothing to advance the assessment of the merits of competing worldviews.

Despite what I have just said, I do not deny that Bishop can 'motivate' his search for alternatives to 'personal omniGod' theism by appealing to (1). Given that he accepts that there are evils for which it is true that if those evils were part of a consciously chosen plan carried out by an omnipotent and omniscient agent with the aim of achieving ultimate good then that agent would be properly deserving of the most severe moral condemnation (and so would not be perfectly good), he cannot consistently be a 'personal omniGod' theist. However, his motivating claim, properly understood, is not that 'personal omniGod' theism is inconsistent; rather, his motivating claim, properly understood, is that 'personal omniGod' theism is inconsistent with claims that he accepts but that 'personal omniGod' theists reject.

Of course, there is nothing that I have written so far that commits me to the claim that 'personal omniGod' theism is consistent. The history of philosophy tells us that we

can be surprised by discoveries of inconsistency in views that we took to be consistent. But since we already know that 'personal omniGod' theists reject the claim that there are evils for which it is true that if those evils were part of a consciously chosen plan carried out by an omnipotent and omniscient agent with the aim of achieving ultimate good then that agent would be properly deserving of the most severe moral condemnation (and so would not be perfectly good), we already know that there is no inconsistency in 'personal omniGod' theism that involves that claim.

Reply to Trakakis

Graham Oppy

Re (1): I agree with the point that Nick Trakakis makes about the relative neglect of description in contemporary philosophy of religion. I'm happy to see how evaluation turns out when the views compared are given comparably detailed descriptions—but I'm also happy to suppose that there is always a 'provisional' element in evaluation. (For more on these themes, see Oppy 2013, 2014a, 2015, 2016, 2017.)

Re (2): Suppose that we compare naturalism with idealistic theism, where idealistic theism says that "the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal of all existence is . . . wholly unconditioned or ontologically independent and purely mental or spiritual in nature . . . at the deepest level every person, as also every material object, is identical with" that ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal. Trakakis suggests that (a) there are entities and events in which naturalists believe but idealist theists do not; yet (b) naturalism is not simpler than theism. I do not accept that this is a correct application of the procedure that I outlined.

Taken literally, the account of idealistic theism is inconsistent with data; but the method I presented does not proceed to the stage of evaluation if theories that are inconsistent with data are put forward for comparison. It is data that, for example, I am not Nick Trakakis. But, if Nick Trakakis is *identical* with the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal, and Graham Oppy is *identical* with the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal, then it follows that Nick Trakakis is *identical* with Graham Oppy.

No doubt it will be said that this problem can be removed with more careful formulation. Perhaps so. But it is worth noting that the account of idealistic theism adverts to 'levels': it says that 'at the deepest level' every person is identical with the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal. If we allow similarly loose play, we can take naturalism to say that, at the deepest level, every person is identical with ultimate natural reality. As noted already, we don't literally mean 'identical'; perhaps we mean 'supervenes upon', or 'is constituted by', or 'is a part of', or the like. But now, if we compare the two theories, it is *not* true that idealistic theism is obviously committed to less than naturalism. When it comes to tables, chairs, rivers, etc., the two views are on a par with respect to the 'fundamentality' of these entities. In order to make progress on

these questions, we need to advance to more accurate and careful descriptions of the competing theories. (I discuss questions about the fundamentality of God at much greater length in Oppy 2014b.)

A further observation that is perhaps worth making is that the simplicity of theories is not just a matter of ontological commitments; there must also be some reckoning of ideological commitments. If two theories postulate the same ontology, but the primitive predicates of one theory properly contain the primitive predicates of the other, then—all else being equal—the second theory is better than the first. So, even if it were granted that naturalism postulates more entities than idealistic theism, that would not immediately decide the question about simplicity.

Re (3): It seems to me that the objectivity of moral values is no more problematic on naturalism than it is on theism. Let's suppose, to fix ideas, that God is morally good. Furthermore, let's accept that it is objectively true that God is morally good. Now, let's ask: in what does this *objectivity* consist? That's a hard question! A plausible response is that we have run up against a theoretical primitive: it's primitively true that it is an objective matter that God is morally good. Suppose that's right. Consider some more mundane fact about goodness—e.g., that such-and-such an act by so-and-so is morally good. Let's accept that it is objectively true that the act in question is morally good. In what does this objectivity consist? Again, that's a hard question, but we can give the same answer that we gave before. We've run up against a theoretical primitive: it's primitively true that it's an objective matter that the act in question is morally good. What was good enough for the theist is good enough for the naturalist.

Because theoretical primitives are theoretical costs, we should not accept primitivism about anything lightly. But we should also accept that, on any comprehensive theory, there are many theoretical primitives. When we look more closely, perhaps we shall find satisfying accounts on which the objectivity of the moral goodness of God is not a theoretical primitive for theists. Perhaps, too, when we look more closely, we shall find satisfying accounts on which the objectivity of the moral goodness of actions and characters is not a theoretical primitive for naturalists. Indeed, when we look more closely—for all that has been argued so far—we shall find that the objectivity of the moral goodness of actions and characters poses less of a problem for naturalists than the objectivity of the moral goodness of God poses for theists. (If you are inclined to object that the objectivity of God's moral goodness derives from the objectivity of God's moral perfection, then you should take the preceding discussion to have been framed in terms of the objectivity of God's moral perfection.)

A further observation that is perhaps worth making here is that if we follow Trakakis in glossing objectivity as 'independence from what people think or perceive', then it is hard to see why the objectivity of God's moral goodness is any less problematic than the objectivity of mundane cases of moral goodness. In both cases, it is we theorists who are making a judgement about the objectivity of normative predication. What difference can it make to the question of *objectivity* whether the normative predication is of God or of mundane acts and characters?

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4

Anti-theodicy

N. N. Trakakis

> Not only does one train the Christian mob from childhood on to pray constantly; one also tries continually to persuade them of the supreme necessity of prayer by promising its sure fulfillment. And one has piled up such a heap of reasons for comfort in misfortune . . . that we might be sorry in the end that we cannot lose a father or a mother a week . . . It might be very interesting to compare all this with the faith of the Greeks . . . For them, misfortune was misfortune, pain was pain.
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> G.W.F. Hegel[1]

4.1 From Theodicy to Anti-theodicy

The problem of evil often strikes people as *irresolvable*. No adequate or convincing solution to the problem seems forthcoming, and this despite numerous and often sophisticated attempts over the centuries and from highly trained and gifted philosophers and theologians. There is, of course, one ready way out: atheism, the rejection of the existence of God. But this is perhaps better construed as a repudiation of the terms within which the problem is set out, rather than an attempt to answer the problem on its own terms. For the problem of evil, as ordinarily expressed, concerns the question of how to reconcile the existence of God with the existence of evil. This, no doubt, is a major simplification, since the problem of evil is complex, ramifying into a wide variety of distinct problems: logical, evidential, theoretical, pastoral, and often subspecies thereof. But here, for the time being, I am taking matters at a very rudimentary level, and speaking only to a certain impulse that I suspect drives much thinking on this topic, my own included. There is a degree of frustration and disappointment, even anguish and hopelessness, that attends the search for a plausible response to the problem of evil, one that would not result in having to relinquish belief in God, or in denying or suppressing the facts and phenomenology regarding the presence and pervasiveness of evil in the world. A structural parallel can be discerned with the

[1] Quoted in Kaufmann (1972: 66–7). The passage is from Hegel's Tübingen essay of 1793.

search for a persuasive proof for the existence of God: no matter how watertight the chain of reasoning might appear, one can always find a loophole (e.g., a questionable assumption, premise, or inference). And it's not as though the search and discovery of such loopholes is merely the product of the all-too-human perversity of taking delight in picking apart the ideas and arguments of one's opponent. More often than not, the loopholes are really there: one wishes they weren't, one frantically seeks to cover them over, but nothing seems to work and one's cherished proof is left in tatters. A similar fate befalls purported solutions to the problem of evil.[2]

If we weren't seeking an answer to an intellectual problem, or if we weren't preoccupied with looking for answers to life's Great Questions, and were instead playing a sports match—let's say tennis—then what would we be left to think? Suppose that the two top seeded tennis players, at the time of writing Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, are never able to complete a match, where 'completion' of a match would consist in one competitor's emerging victorious after a reasonable amount of time (say, within two days—the longest tennis match in history, as it happens, ran to eleven hours and five minutes, over three days). Suppose, further, that what Nadal and Djokovic themselves face is replicated in nearly every tennis match across the globe, played at any time by any others, whether professional or amateur. What would we conclude about such a bizarre state of affairs? The only reasonable conclusion to be drawn, I would think, is that there is something deeply amiss with the formal rules of the game. At least some of the regulations governing tennis matches would need to be modified or jettisoned in such a way as to allow for clear victories within a fairly quick period of time. Otherwise, tennis would be a fool's game, with a 'no-win' guaranteed for every player. What fun, or popular appeal, could there be in that?

If we are in a similar predicament with the problem of evil, with all solutions on offer proving to be fundamentally flawed, then we might be prompted to question some of the 'rules of the game'. In this case, the 'rules' would relate to such things as the categories or concepts involved in the formulation of the problem, and the broader scheme, principles, and presuppositions without which the problem could not even be conceived. Perhaps these need to be reconsidered and developed anew. Perhaps, for example, we cannot simply assume that we know what we are talking about when we speak of 'God': there are countless conceptions of God, even within (let alone beyond) the Abrahamic faiths, and we need to be precise about the one we have in mind and how exactly it is to be understood—for example, are we assuming that God has libertarian free will? Or that God has middle knowledge? Or that God acts unilaterally in the world to perform miracles? Or that God suffers in something like the way we undergo suffering? Perhaps once we subject the 'rules of the Problem of Evil game' to thorough scrutiny, we are

[2] As John Cottingham (2009: 150) recognizes, "The opponents of theism may devise ever more dramatic presentations of the problem of evil, and its defenders construct ever more ingenious rebuttals, but one has the sense that neither side in the argument has any real expectation of changing their opponent's mind, and that in the end they are succeeding in doing little more than upsetting each other."

enabled to see our way past traditional and 'pat' answers, and to a way of reconciling God and evil that we had previously overlooked. That, at least, is my gambit.

This also describes, in a rough way, how I got to be where I am now. I came to my first (relatively) independent philosophical study of the problem of evil as a doctoral student who had by that stage few settled opinions about the nature and existence of God. After three years of intensive research, focusing on the evidential arguments from evil developed by William Rowe, I arrived at the conclusion that various recent theistic attempts to resolve the problem—including the skeptical theist response, and free will and soul-making theodicies—fail to provide a satisfactory answer (at least with respect to certain types of evil). Absent any countervailing evidence in support of theistic belief, or without any good reason for continuing to uphold theism, "the only rational course of action left for the theist to take is to abandon theism and convert to atheism." (Trakakis 2007: 341) That was my conclusion to *The God Beyond Belief*, a title indebted to an inspired comment from Rowe's celebrated 1979 paper, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism":

> In the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, the idea that none of this suffering could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without thereby losing a greater good or permitting an evil at least as bad seems an extraordinary, absurd idea, quite beyond our belief. (338)

Rowe's almost instinctive reaction of incredulity about the claims theodicists are wont to make (we might dub it, after Harry Frankfurt, a 'bullshit detector') has proven to be an invaluable resource in my journey through the thickets of evil. What Rowe is contesting, and I with him still, is the strategy of reconciling God with evil by making appeal to greater goods, whether known or unknown, said to be yoked in some necessary but unfortunate way to the myriad evils of the world. Even if some evils can be accounted for, what almost always gets placed in the mystery category are the 'hard cases', those involving 'horrendous evil', the kind of evil that threatens to dehumanize the victim and strip their life of dignity and value. One instantly thinks in this context of the child abuse stories recounted by Ivan in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (bk V, sec 4: 'Mutiny'), and of such atrocities as the Holocaust of 1939–45 and the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides. Confronted by such evils, I have always been inclined to agree with Plantinga's honest admission that "most of the attempts to explain why God permits evil—theodicies, as we might call them—seem to me shallow, tepid, and ultimately frivolous." (quoted in Phillips 2001: 150)

This sparked, upon the completion of my doctoral research, a venture toward (what were then, in my case) relatively uncharted lands which seemed to promise alternative and more fruitful ways of understanding and resolving the problem of evil. One of these lands was the field of so-called Continental philosophy of religion, where I encountered innovative and challenging, albeit initially alien and bewildering, approaches to the problem. To properly appreciate such approaches, rather than to caricature them and swiftly dismiss them (as I found analytic colleagues often doing, my past self among

them), required nothing less than a reconsideration of the nature, norms, and goals of philosophy itself—in other words, an exploration of 'metaphilosophy' (to which I will return later). Alongside forays into modern Freiburg and postmodern Paris, I was also tempted into the lush fields of Swansea, dominated by D. Z. Phillips' Wittgensteinian school. Although I am no longer attracted to Phillips' interpretation of religious discourse, his handling of the problem of evil—passionate and insightful, but rarely accorded the seriousness it deserves—has inspired me to pursue a new path, helping in the process to light up somewhat my 'wandering in darkness' (to borrow from Stump's wonderful title).

This new path, or position, I call 'anti-theodicy'. If a theodicy, to paraphrase John Milton, consists in a justification of the ways of God to man, or more precisely a reasonable or plausible justification of God's permission of evil (which it typically seeks to achieve by delineating what might be, or what are likely to be, God's purposes for allowing evil, these purposes being in effect the greater goods for the sake of which God allows evil), then an anti-theodicy is the refusal and rejection of any such justifications. But to appreciate the radicality of the anti-theodicy view, it is necessary to distinguish it from two positions or strategies with which it might easily be confused. One of these is a response commonly made when presented with a theodicy, and involves the attempt to refute the theodicy by demonstrating its limitations in accounting for a specific range of evils. One might seek to show, for example, that the good of free will is not in fact so great as to outweigh the horrific evil it has made possible; or, one might try to show that the purported connection between natural evil and 'soul-making' is not a necessary or unavoidable one. These strategies leave open the possibility of rectifying or supplementing the theodicy in certain ways so as to remedy the deficiencies that have been identified. On the anti-theodicy view, by contrast, no remedy is available or possible, other than the fundamental one of abandoning the entire enterprise of theodicy-construction. A second position is the currently fashionable one of 'skeptical theism'. According to the skeptical theist, there are indeed goods secured by God's permission of evil; it is just that, given our limitations as finite and sinful creatures, these goods are unlikely to be within our ken, at least for the duration of our earthly lives. To quote Plantinga once again: "Why suppose that if God *does* have a reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know?" (1974: 10, emphasis in original) The anti-theodicist, however, opposes skeptical theism as much as theodicy itself, for the very idea of God-justifying goods (whether within our ken or not) is repudiated. For the anti-theodicist, no matter how much more we come to learn about, say, God's intentions or the workings of the world, this will make little difference in helping us to resolve the problem of evil. The problem, in other words, runs much deeper than a mere lack of epistemic access or information.

The radical nature of the anti-theodicy position is indicated by Phillips' remark, in "Theism without Theodicy," that: "I am not an antitheist, like J. L. Mackie, whose opposition is expressed within a theodicist framework. I want to probe the character of that framework." (2001: 146) For Phillips, the 'character of the theodical framework'

becomes evident by attending to the distinctive *language* of theodicy. This is a language which, in Phillips' view, enshrines significant confusions about (e.g.) the kind of being God is and God's relation to human suffering. Earlier in the same paper, Phillips asked: "But what if the confusion [in the ways in which theodicy speaks about God and suffering] is in this very language? Again and again in the history of philosophy, problems can only be dealt with by rejecting the language in which they are posed." (145) This is a highly significant point, alluding to the need mentioned earlier of questioning 'the rules of the game' when faced with endless stalemates. Phillips also makes this point by endorsing Charles Hartshorne's comment that, "Confusion in the posing of a question generates confusion in the answering of it." (see Phillips 2001: 153)[3] However, here as elsewhere Phillips' greatest indebtedness is to Wittgenstein, in this instance to the Wittgensteinian idea that a great number of traditional philosophical problems are the result of some deep kind of muddle or confusion arising largely from misunderstanding of the workings of language, and the aim of philosophy should be to free us of these confusions. Phillips' anti-theodicy is therefore developed within a broader understanding of the nature and function of religious language, which has come to be called (by critics, not by Phillips himself) 'non-realist'. On this view, one that is heavily influenced by the later Wittgenstein, religion constitutes a 'form of life' (or mode of social life) that is expressed in a variety of distinctive 'language games' that cannot be assimilated or modeled on the empirical, fact-stating language games of the sciences (Phillips 2001: 152–5). Fortunately, much of what Phillips has to say against theodicy can be divorced from his account of religious language, so that one need not agree entirely with his understanding of the 'grammar of God' to endorse at least some of his anti-theodical views.

Apart from Phillips and Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion (such as R. F. Holland and Andrew Gleeson), the anti-theodicy position is rarely found within analytic circles. One has to look to the work of theologians and Continental philosophers to find sympathetic treatments, or even any treatment at all, of the view (with significant contributions from this area coming from Kenneth Surin and Terrence Tilley). Not surprisingly, Jewish writers such as Emil Fackenheim and Emmanuel Levinas have also been active in discussions on anti-theodicy, as they seek to put the shards of their religious heritage back together after it was shattered by the Holocaust. Indeed, my use of the term 'anti-theodicy' is borrowed from Zachary Braiterman, who in *(God) After Auschwitz* defines anti-theodicy as "any religious response to the problem of evil whose proponents refuse to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the relationship between God and suffering." (1998: 31) I might add, however, that even though I follow Braiterman in construing anti-theodicy as a specifically *religious* response to the problem of evil, I regard anti-theodicy as open also to those of a non-theist, and even non-religious, persuasion (whose goal would typically be that of demonstrating the falsity or irrationality of theistic belief given the facts of evil).

[3] The quotation is from Hartshorne (1966): 202.

One way, then, of expressing the anti-theodicy view is by saying that the attempt to reconcile God and evil enshrined in such projects as theodicy-construction and skeptical theism is inherently flawed—that is to say, these projects are by their very nature defective. These are defects that might attach to certain presuppositions, framing principles or categories and ways of thought, and they might be defects that are moral, metaphysical, or conceptual in character. A typical anti-theodical claim, for example, is that theodicy subverts aspects of morality or specific moral concepts we would not wish to do without. One such concept is that of 'evil', and it is sometimes argued that certain streams in theodicy trivialize and diminish the reality and horror of evil, and thus surreptitiously end up altering, if not disfiguring or destroying, our moral compass. A common theodical stream of this kind is that which posits an eschatology that is said to compensate for earthly sufferings in such a way as to render these sufferings trivial by comparison. A similar anti-theodical view concerns the category of 'gratuitous evil'—evil that is pointless, in the sense of serving no greater good, and perhaps also unredeemable, in the sense that nothing can outweigh or 'defeat' it (in the Chisholmian understanding of 'defeat'). In denying that such a category can ever be instantiated in actuality, the theodicist (according to this anti-theodicist critique) is denying a lamentable but incontrovertible datum of human experience. This is why Voltaire, in his notorious *Candide* (1759), can easily make the theodicist Pangloss appear ridiculous, given that the latter grossly misrepresents and distorts the true (gratuitous and horrific) nature of much suffering.

It is also sometimes held that the theodicist's position of rejecting even the possibility of gratuitous evil—of holding, in other words, that every evil is always connected to a greater good and that we ought to believe (or can come to know) this to be so—has the objectionable consequence of reducing us to an attitude of passivity and fatalism in the face of evil. For why fight to eradicate evil if evil is a necessary or unavoidable part or byproduct of God's providential plan for the world? The teleological or instrumentalist conception of evil presupposed in theodicies, where evil is permitted by God *for the sake of* some higher end, is also open to the Kantian criticism that it negates the inherent worth and dignity of persons by treating them as mere means to some end, rather than as ends in themselves. Phillips expresses this point by saying that theodicy undermines our usual (non-instrumental) way of relating to those who are undergoing some suffering (Phillips 2001: 148, 'first bee sting'). To highlight this, Phillips concentrates on theodicies which make appeal to the good of moral responsibility, and schematizes the line of reasoning employed in such theodicies as follows: "Suffering prompts moral responsibility. That people are morally responsible is a good thing. Therefore, this justifies the suffering." But, as Phillips pointedly and humorously remarks, such thinking is subject to a *reductio*: "The argument leads to a grotesque inversion of moral relations to the sufferings of others. Instead of our concern being directed towards the suffering, the suffering is said to have its point in the concern. It would have the Good Samaritan saying, 'Thank you, God, for another opportunity for my moral development'." (148)

The foregoing anti-theodical views are largely, or at least partly, moral in nature, in that they concentrate on features of our moral language and practice, or the phenomenology of our moral experience. (But, contrary to a common misconception, they are not moral criticisms of a personal sort: anti-theodicy is not a matter of casting high-sounding aspersions on the moral integrity of theodicists.) Anti-theodicy, however, involves much more than a purely moral critique, and has an important (albeit neglected) methodological and metaphysical component.

Methodologically, the ways in which the problem of evil is often formulated and discussed may require reconsideration, and this quickly leads down the metaphilosophical path, where the relationship between theodicy and certain practices of philosophy is made explicit and perhaps put in question. Relevant here is the customary distinction between the 'theoretical problem of evil' and the 'practical problem of evil': typically, the theoretical problem is understood as the intellectual matter of determining the rationality or truth of theistic belief in light of the facts about evil, while the practical problem concerns the existential and experiential difficulties evil creates for love and trust toward God (or the difficulties in combating evil and alleviating suffering). Theodicists usually uphold a distinction of this sort, and they see themselves as addressing the theoretical problem of evil only—the practical problem is regarded as the business of priests and healthcare workers. Anti-theodicists, however, question the legitimacy and value of this distinction, and call instead for a holistic approach that takes in the intellectual and existential aspects of evil at the same time, without drawing a sharp contrast between the two. Andrew Gleeson, for example, has argued that the moral and existential seriousness of concrete cases of evil is easily missed or mishandled by the impersonal methodology characteristic of contemporary analytic discussions on the problem of evil, driven as it is by (e.g.) technical skills such as logical reasoning and precision, and the adoption of a neutral and objective stance (in the manner of an 'ideal observer'). When examining evil, according to Gleeson, due weight also needs to be given to existential or personal modes of thought, which allow for appeals to conscience and compassion, to personal testimony, and to insights from literature and the arts (2012: see especially 44–8).[4] Beverley Clack has similarly highlighted the importance of turning to the literary and creative arts for insights into evil, and this because "the best art challenges, forcing the viewer/reader to consider again the way in which they habitually see the world." (2007: 207–8)[5] Like Gleeson, Clack holds that the "detached, bureaucratic language" of theodicy, and artificial dichotomies such as that between the theoretical and practical problems of evil, serve only to distort and misrepresent "the reality and force of the experience of evil." (2007: 200)

[4] For a recent sympathetic treatment of anti-theodicy which takes seriously the testimony of survivors of horrific evil, see Admirand (2012).

[5] Eleonore Stump's recent work has also highlighted the importance of narrative or 'second-person' accounts in responding to the problem of evil (though, in Stump's case, this is done with a view to developing a theodicy, not eschewing the practice of theodicy). See Stump (2010).

A relevant question to ask here is: Is personal and passionate investment in the outcome of a philosophical problem always an impediment, or can it sometimes be an asset, even a necessity? In seeking to reclaim the personal and subjective point of view, and in particular the lived experience of suffering, anti-theodicists such as Gleeson and Clack may even be thought of as continuing or extending the Anselmian 'faith seeking understanding' tradition: those who employ such a method assume (or at least hope) that exploring issues and questions from an existentially committed perspective might be compared to looking through night-vision binoculars: such a standpoint enables us to see more of what is genuinely there, things we would otherwise have failed to notice.

In addition to methodology, anti-theodicy also has an important metaphysical dimension, addressing the nature of reality, especially the nature of the divine reality. The remainder of this paper will be given over to a brief exploration of this aspect of anti-theodicy.

4.2 From God to the Absolute

Anti-theodicy, at least as I conceive it, is not principally a moral or methodological critique; it is, first and foremost, a metaphysical thesis concerning the nature of God and, by extension, of ultimate reality. The starting point is evil, especially instances of horrendous evil: if this is what the world is like, and supposing it is created and governed by God, then what kind of God could that be? Anthropomorphic conceptions of God—such as that posited by 'perfect being theology', where God looks very much like an invisible human being, albeit one inflated into infinite proportions: "the biggest thing around," as David Burrell (2004: 220) puts it—might be questionable on many grounds, but our awareness of horrors renders such ideas of God particularly problematic. For, if a good and loving parent would not permit their child to be abused and tortured to death, and if the love and goodness of God is much like that of human beings, only infinitely greater, then how could God allow his creatures to suffer horribly? We seem to be left with no analogy at all between human love and divine love, but only an equivocation that renders God's love baffling and frightening, if not cruel and deplorable.

In light of these difficulties, we do well to rethink and, if necessary, revise and reject the ideas about God we have inherited from our religious traditions, and seek to bring them into line with our experience and knowledge of evil. This kind of strategy, Beverley Clack has observed, reverses the procedure traditionally employed by theists in discussions on the problem of evil. The traditional approach is to attempt to render evil consistent with preconceived ideas about God and the world, an approach (as Clack notes) that risks stretching and mutilating our language regarding evil and suffering (2007: 199). An alternative and more productive procedure is to begin instead with the reality or phenomenology of evil and allow this to "shape how we subsequently understand the nature of things." (Clack 2007: 205) Kenneth Surin makes a similar proposal in *Theology and the Problem of Evil*: "If anything is Christianity's primary concern with regard to what took place at Auschwitz…it is,

rather, to allow itself to be reinterpreted, to be 'ruptured', by the pattern of events at Auschwitz." (1986: 124) On this view, as Surin states, "the Christian message will now be the *interpretandum*, the history of Auschwitz the *interpretans*." (*ibid.* 123)

The moral, then, of the problem of evil may well be that we have got God wrong (or: we have got the wrong god). This gives rise to a difficult but exciting challenge in speculative metaphysics, one which contemporary philosophers have shied away from: specifically, to construct models of God, or the divine, that remain true to the realities of evil while also avoiding the pitfalls of anthropomorphism (and preferably without renouncing a commitment to divine providence—that is, the idea of God's being actively involved in, and lovingly governing, the world). There is, to be sure, a plethora of such models, and it is unfortunate that the debate on the problem of evil continues to be largely ensconced within a narrow theistic framework (what Rowe called 'restricted standard theism') that is unrepresentative of this diversity. Consider, for example, the Thomist notion of God as 'pure act' and *ipsum esse subsistens* (subsistent being itself); or the process reconceptualization of divine power as persuasive, not coercive, thus rejecting the 'monarchical' model of God found in classical theism (where God, as 'ruling Caesar', exercises coercive control over every detail of our historical trajectory);[6] or, moving further away from traditional theism, the pantheist identification of God with the world or all-there-is, and the Advaita ('non-dual') Vedanta view of Brahman as the supreme (singular and featureless) reality.

A close Western analogue of the Hindu Advaita school is the idealist movement in German and British philosophy from the late 18th century to the early 20th century. The centrepiece of the comprehensive metaphysical systems elaborated by the likes of Hegel and Bradley[7] was the notion of 'the Absolute', that which has an unconditioned existence (not conditioned by, or dependent upon, anything else), usually conceived as mental or spiritual in nature, so that matter or the physical world is only an appearance to or expression of mind. Often, this view is conjoined with substance monism, the claim that there are no separate things, that reality is one or a unified whole. Although idealism is rarely endorsed or even debated in philosophy nowadays, it was a worldview advocated by the greatest minds of the time, and it was often regarded (by its proponents) as a vindication of religion (or at least Christianity), particularly after the attacks from Darwinism and biblical criticism in the 19th century.[8] Additionally, and more importantly for present purposes, idealism enables a way of thinking about

[6] See David Ray Griffin in his exchange with Phillips, in Davis (2001: 164–5), where Griffin holds that the process view avoids the anthropomorphism inherent in the traditional theistic picture of God as "having the power to control worldly events." (165).

[7] It is curious that Bradley himself did not draw any connections between his idealist philosophy and the very similar outlook of Advaita Vedanta. (A similar point is made by Sprigge 1998: 214.) Nevertheless, others have gone on to make connections, and as Leslie Armour has noted, "Bradley has had a continuous, if never dominant, influence in India." (1996: 8).

[8] This is not to say, however, that idealists rejected these scholarly and scientific developments; more often than not they embraced them and sought to reconcile them with their religious outlook. See Mander (2011: 546).

ultimate divine reality that circumvents the 'evils of theodicy' (to borrow from another book title, this time Terrence Tilley's), thus expressing continuity with the anti-theodicy position adumbrated earlier.

What, then, becomes of the problem of evil when ultimate reality is conceived in idealist (and monist) terms? In the dualistic outlook of standard Christian theism, evil in the created world poses a serious threat to the perfect goodness of a Creator who is separate from the world and creates it *ex nihilo*. Now, by way of contrast, consider the very different metaphysical perspective of F. H. Bradley. It is reported, by one who knew him well, that Bradley was "an intensely religious man, in the sense of a man whose whole life and thought was permeated by a conviction of the reality of the unseen things and a supreme devotion to them." (Taylor 1925: 9)[9] This unseen but ultimate, unconditioned reality Bradley called the 'Absolute', and he is said to have been to led to his conception of the Absolute in part by "a kind of personal experience of a higher unity which in another context might have made him one of the world's revered religious mystics." (Candlish and Basile 2013: section 6)[10] Traces of such a religious, or at least non-conceptual and immediate, experience are evident in the second half (Book II) of Bradley's 1893 *magnum opus*, *Appearance and Reality*, where Bradley sought to show that the Absolute, or reality as it truly is as opposed to how it appears to us to be, is an all-embracing and harmonious Whole, the totality of all things (without being a mere aggregate of them) that consists in a single, seamless, timeless, and inconceivably rich 'experience' (in a broad sense of the term, so as to encompass feeling, thought, and volition). This is a version of *monism* (all is one, or in Bradley's case: a one-in-many[11]) as well as of *idealism* (reality is mental or mind-like), and specifically of *absolute* idealism (given that reality is not construed in terms of the contents of the human mind, as in 'subjective' idealism, but in terms of a non- or supra-personal consciousness). Like other idealists, Bradley draws a distinction between appearance and reality, infamously relegating much of what we normally regard as 'real' (including space, time, motion, causation, and the self) to the realm of appearance, while reserving true or ultimate reality for the Absolute alone.[12] This is an infinite reality, however, that always outstrips discursive thought, and thus, much like the Advaita notion of *brahman*

[9] A bit later, Taylor remarks: "Bradley's own personal religion was of a strongly marked mystical type, in fact of the specific type common to the *Christian* mystics. Religion meant to him, as to Plotinus or to Newman, direct personal contact with the Supreme and Ineffable, unmediated through any forms of ceremonial prayer, or ritual, and, like all mystics in whom this passion for direct access to God is not moderated by the habit of organised communal worship, he was inclined to set little store on the historical and institutional element in the great religions." (10, emphasis in original).

[10] A short but excellent account (and partial defence) of Bradley's conception of the Absolute, and the reasons that led him to this notion, is provided by Sprigge (1998).

[11] As Sprigge (1998: 197) puts it, "to claim that the Absolute exists is to claim that there is a single infinite centre of experience, the Absolute itself, of which all finite centres are fragments, and that everything else which in any sense exists is either a part of it, an aspect or feature of it, or something usefully posited by one of its parts, features, or aspects."

[12] For Bradley, however, appearances are not necessarily illusory. There are degrees of truth and reality, and an appearance may be 'not fully real' while nonetheless being 'highly real'. Richard Wollheim (1959: 227) puts this by saying: "Time, Space, Cause, Motion, Things may not exist as such: but still they exist; for they

nirguna, it is a reality that is ineffable or transcategorical (beyond the range of human categories of thought).[13] But if that is so, then the Absolute lies beyond good and evil, being neither good nor evil, neither personal nor impersonal, transcending all such conceptual delimitations.[14] This is not to deny the reality of evil, but only to deny that the Absolute can be characterized by such qualities as goodness and personality. Even if the Absolute, as an integrated and unified whole, could be considered harmonious and thus 'good' or 'perfect' in some metaphysical or aesthetic sense, what is ruled out is one of the key presuppositions motivating the problem of evil—that God shares a 'moral community' with us, so that there are moral principles and categories that are applicable to both God and human beings. As a result there is no possibility, from this Bradleian perspective, of the problem of evil (as standardly formulated) even arising.

In thus dissolving, rather than resolving, the problem of evil, some are likely to feel dissatisfied, even cheated. But perhaps this is only because they have not appreciated the radicality of the anti-theodicy critique: our unquestioned habits of mind when directed to God and evil may stand in need of thorough reformation. Consider, again, the relationship between God and morality that is usually presupposed in theodicy: the moral framework we employ when praising and punishing the behaviour of our fellow humans is also applicable, in its essentials, to God. There are not two moralities, one for God and another for us. Rather, morality forms a unitary and universal system, so that the moral standards and categories we employ to appraise human behaviour can also be extended to evaluate God. On this view, God is our 'moral peer', a member of our moral community.

But how plausible is it to think of God in these terms? One resource for casting doubt on such a conception of God is the doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which God has no parts or composition, and so is absolutely simple. On this view, properly speaking God is not good but is goodness itself, or the standard of goodness. But in that case, the notion of God as our 'moral peer' makes no sense, for there are no moral standards independent of God which could be relied upon in passing judgment

exist as parts or aspects or distinctions or, best, appearances, of the Absolute. And that most certainly is a form of existence."

[13] Obvious connections exist here between the Absolute or *brahman nirguna* and what John Hick called 'the Real in itself', or 'the Transcendent', that putative reality which transcends everything other than itself but is not transcended by anything other than itself (which Hick contrasted with the Real as mediated through the conceptual 'lens' of our religious traditions). Apart from Kant, however, Hick did not draw upon the German or British idealist tradition of philosophy when formulating his hypothesis of religious pluralism.

[14] William Mander (1995: 299) has stated that "Bradley was quite certain that personhood could not be the ultimate truth of the universe, for it is a clear consequence of his general metaphysical position, that personhood, being something essentially relational, cannot be ultimately real or true. The Absolute is not personal, although nor strictly is it impersonal. Rather it transcends both the personal and the impersonal including both within it." A similar line of thought is evident in the Advaita Vedanta tradition, for as Eliot Deutsch (1973: 100) observes: "Brahman transcends all moral distinctions and . . . man, being essentially not-different from Brahman, is likewise in his essence 'beyond good and evil'." Bradley, however, is prepared to speak of the Absolute as (in some sense) 'good'; see, for example, *Appearance and Reality* (1908: 411–12).

on God. The coherence or intelligibility of divine simplicity is often questioned by contemporary philosophers of religion, but the very point of the doctrine is to indicate the vast difference, or 'otherness', of God. As the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) stated in its edict against Joachim Fiora: "between the Creator and the creature so great a likeness cannot be noted without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them."[15] Whatever analogy there might be between the Creator and creatures must be set within the context of an even greater, if not an infinitely greater, disanalogy.

A further set of interesting considerations against the notion of God as sharing a moral community with us has been advanced by Brian Davies, whose specific target is the common tendency of regarding God as a moral agent (or as someone whose goodness is moral in nature). Davies notes, for instance, that a moral agent is someone who in some sense can succeed or fail—for example, she can succeed if she acts morally where others have failed to do so. A moral agent also has a character and personality that can improve and progress, or can regress and become worse, over time. But it makes no sense to talk of God as succeeding or failing, or as having a character that changes from worse to better. Davies also points out that God cannot be thought of as having duties or obligations, and neither can the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperateness, justice, and courage intelligibly be ascribed to God. If, for example, moral goodness consists in being virtuous, then God cannot be morally good since dispositions are displayed over time (one has to be temporal to have dispositions or habits of character), while God is eternal in the sense of transcending time altogether. For reasons such as these, Davies rejects the attribution of moral goodness to God, and he contends that, even though God can be said to be good, just and righteous in some non-moral sense, it is "wholly inappropriate to think of God as something able to be either moral (well behaved) or immoral (badly behaved)." (1998: 178)[16]

I don't think Davies' case is conclusive,[17] but it does at least indicate that the notion of divine goodness as moral goodness is not as obvious or plausible as it might initially seem. But if the relationship between God and goodness demands reconsideration—because (as Davies contends) divine goodness is not moral in nature, or because (as suggested by the doctrine of divine simplicity) human goodness is derivative upon God's goodness in such a way that the former cannot supply a criterion for judging the

[15] *Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest [tanta] similitudo notari, quin inter eos non maior sit dissimilitudo notanda* (Denzinger 2009: 1215; English translation in Denzinger 1955: 171).

[16] Davies also defends this view in *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (2006).

[17] One worry is that it is not clear why Davies' requirements on moral agency (e.g., the possibility of failure and improvement) should be universal in scope, applying not only to human agency but to divine agency also. Further, refusing to ascribe moral agency to God may only shift the problem of evil to another level, rather than eradicating it altogether—for example, the problem might be transferred from a quasi-judicial context (involving such questions as: In creating a world with evil, has God violated the obligations he has to his creatures?) to a context predicated upon another system of value, perhaps one that is better suited for the issues at hand. Marilyn McCord Adams, for example, contends that the purity and honour codes are more appropriate than modern morality for expressing and handling the problem of horrendous evil. See Adams (1999: chs 5 and 6).

latter—then the relationship between God and evil must be rethought too. Davies sums up the matter well:

> To be blunt, I suggest that many contemporary philosophers writing on the problem of evil (both theists and non-theists) have largely been wasting their time… They are like people attacking or defending tennis players because they fail to run a mile in under four minutes. Tennis players are not in the business of running four-minute miles. Similarly, God is not something with respect to which moral evaluation (whether positive or negative) is appropriate. (1998: 182)

This is a response to the problem of evil that not only Thomists but also idealists may subscribe to, as both seek to divest us of an anthropomorphic conception of God as an individual with a will that is subject, like ours, to moral praise and blame. No doubt, responses such as this bring with them questions and difficulties of their own, but they do at least bring out the highly contingent (and historically conditioned) nature of the problem of evil, predicated as it is on a specific way of thinking about the nature of divinity that would be repudiated by many philosophical and religious traditions, both Eastern and Western.[18]

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[18] To clarify, I do not myself endorse Absolute Idealism; my sympathies lie in the direction of a combination of idealist and process metaphysics, so that (as against Bradley) becoming and relation are taken as ultimate. Nonetheless, the Bradleian reply to the problem of evil outlined here is one I would endorse and extend in various ways. On the continuities and discontinuities between idealist metaphysics and process philosophy, see McHenry (1992).

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Response to Trakakis

Eleonore Stump

Nick Trakakis begins his paper with a strongly negative judgment about responses to the problem of evil. He says, "No adequate or convincing solution to the problem

[of evil] seems forthcoming, and this despite numerous and often sophisticated attempts over the centuries and from highly trained and gifted philosophers and theologians." And he bolsters his philosophical conclusions with a moving autobiographical report of the way in which he came to see traditional theodicies as "frivolous" or "bullshit". Given what he sees as the failures of traditional theodicies, Trakakis infers that there are only two possible responses to the problem of evil: either (1) atheism, or (2) change the rules of the game.

The approach Trakakis himself favours as regards the problem of evil is a kind of radical *via negativa*. On his view, we cannot simply assume that we know what we are talking about when we speak of God. As he says,

> there are countless conceptions of God . . . for example, are we assuming that God has libertarian free will? Or that God has middle knowledge? . . . Perhaps once we subject the 'rules of the Problem of Evil game' to thorough scrutiny, we are enabled to see our way past traditional and 'pat' answers, and to a way of reconciling God and evil that we had previously overlooked. That, at least, is my gambit.

In response, I think we should hesitate to accept Trakakis' inference. What about other major issues in the history of philosophy? Is the problem of evil any different from problems about the nature of free will, the nature of causation, the conflicting demands of partiality and impartiality, and other major philosophical issues? How many problems in the history of philosophy find a completely satisfactory, universally accepted solution? Are all attempts at solutions to these problems failures in consequence? And with respect to all of these, does it follow from the fact that we have no universally accepted solution that we have only the options of rejecting the controverted notion wholesale or else 'changing the rules of the game'? I myself would be unwilling to relegate all the major controverted notions in philosophy to this kind of abandonment.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that to call traditional theodicies "bullshit" or "frivolous," is to make a claim about their plausibility. But plausibility is a matter of fit with worldview, and the plausibility of a theory can shift radically as the worldview against which it is judged shifts.

In this connection, consider the case of the Rous sarcoma virus. In 1911 Peyton Rous put forward this thesis:

> *Rous thesis*: Chicken sarcoma R, which runs in families of chickens, is caused by a virus.

The Rous thesis was greeted with such derision by the then contemporary community of biologists that no one bothered even to try to replicate Rous' experiments. In 1911, the idea that a virus could cause a sarcoma which runs in families seemed wildly implausible to most biologists. But in 1966 Rous won the Nobel Prize for those discoveries of his in 1911. By 1966, half a century after Rous' original presentation of his thesis, few biologically literate people found it implausible to suppose that a virus can cause a cancer that runs in families.

And so what a person finds implausible—or frivolous or bullshit—depends on the other things that person believes. The wider worldview within which a claim is embedded matters to the evaluation of the claim. Plausibility is relative to a worldview; that is why a person's determination of plausibility with regard to a claim or a theory may tell us more about the person making the determination than about the truth of that claim or theory.

Trakakis puts his own position, the rejection of theodicy, this way:

> Anti-theodicy, at least as I conceive it, is not principally a moral or methodological critique; it is, first and foremost, a metaphysical thesis concerning the nature of God and, by extension, of ultimate reality.

And he goes on to give this complicated version of the well-known simple strategy for undermining the argument from evil, namely, altering one or more of the standard divine attributes:

> [Anti-theodicy] gives rise to a difficult but exciting challenge in speculative metaphysics, one which contemporary philosophers have shied away from: specifically, to construct models of God, or the divine, that remain true to the realities of evil while also avoiding the pitfalls of anthropomorphism (and preferably without renouncing a commitment to divine providence—that is, the idea of God's being actively involved in, and lovingly governing, the world).

Trakakis' own attempt to construct such a model of God can be found in his example of the Absolute:

> The Absolute lies beyond good and evil, being neither good nor evil, neither personal nor impersonal, transcending all such conceptual delimitations. This is not to deny the reality of evil, but only to deny that the Absolute can be characterized by such qualities as goodness and personality. Even if the Absolute, as an integrated and unified whole, could be considered harmonious and thus 'good' or 'perfect' in some metaphysical or aesthetic sense, what is ruled out is one of the key presuppositions motivating the problem of evil—that God shares a 'moral community' with us, so that there are moral principles and categories that are applicable to both God and human beings.

Now it is true that the problem of evil does not so much as arise if God is conceived of as the Absolute (as Trakakis describes the Absolute), since the Absolute does not share a moral community with us and is not perfectly good. On this view, one of the crucial premises of the argument from evil—namely, the premise that God is perfectly good—is false.

But is it possible to maintain, as Trakakis wants to do, that the Absolute (understood in Trakakis' terms) governs the world lovingly? What is the love of the Absolute if the Absolute is not good or moral in any sense we recognize?

And so, even apart from my worry over Trakakis' evaluation of theodicies and my unwillingness to accept the inference he draws from that evaluation, Trakakis' paper leaves me with a lingering concern. It has always been granted that the problem of evil can be quickly solved by giving up one or more of the standard divine attributes. But the high costs of this kind of solution have made it singularly unappealing to theists. Is it possible to reconceive God in the way Trakakis wants to do without incurring similar costs?

Response to Trakakis

John Bishop

'Anti-theodicy' expresses distaste at the enterprise of seeking to show how evil may somehow turn out to be meaningful through possessing at least instrumental value in the overall plan of creation carried out by God. But it is not enough merely to protest at theodicies that depict God as permitting or causing evil that good may come. It needs to be recognized that the ethical rejection of such theodicies implies as well *the rejection of a certain conception of God*. Indeed, it implies the rejection of the conception of God regarded as standard by 'analytical' philosophers—namely, the 'personal omniGod' conception of a supremely powerful and perfectly good supernatural personal agent. As Trakakis puts it, "anti-theodicy . . . involves much more than a purely moral critique, and has an important (albeit neglected) methodological and metaphysical component."

Those who believe in the personal omniGod are committed to the enterprise of theodicy—and (as I shall emphasize further, theodicy of a specific kind). To repudiate the 'Logical' Argument from Evil, they must hold that God has morally sufficient reasons for causing or permitting each and every evil that exists. And so they must rebut the *prima facie* reasonable claim that such morally sufficient reasons can arise only for beings limited in power, and not for omnipotent God. To rebut this claim they must provide theodicies that exemplify what, for all we know, God's morally adequate reasons for causing or permitting evil could possibly be, on the assumption that even omnipotent power is subject to constraints, though only of a logical kind. Theists must then maintain that God *actually has* reasons for causing or permitting evil that are at least *of the type* that theodicies envisage God could possibly have.

Trakakis borrows the term 'anti-theodicy' from Zachary Braiterman, who describes it as a response to the problem of evil "whose proponents refuse to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the relationship between God and suffering." On this understanding, if anti-theodicy is well founded, *no theodicy can be acceptable*. Anti-theodicy is committed, then, to *endorsing* the Logical Argument from Evil—or, at least, to endorsing a *normatively relativized* form of the Argument that affirms the values undergirding the refusal to 'make evil meaningful'. Trakakis accepts this conclusion, though I believe it deserves more emphasis than he gives it. In rejecting the acceptability of what is needed to make belief in God coherent, anti-theodicy gives us reasons for atheism—yet, Trakakis thinks, not necessarily for *outright* atheism. Trakakis takes it that what is ruled out is reasonable belief that there exists a personal omniGod, while leaving it open that it may still be reasonable to believe that God exists according to some distinct alternative conception.

Trakakis might thus add a note of caution to his remark that, although anti-theodicy is primarily a *religious* response to the problem of evil, it may be "open also to those of a non-theist . . . persuasion (whose goal would typically be that of demonstrating the

falsity or irrationality of theistic belief given the facts of evil)." For, it may be that the non-existence of God does not follow from anti-theodicy without a further premise to the effect that the God of theism must be understood as the personal omniGod (or near enough to it). But alternative understandings may be entertained. Trakakis discusses several such alternatives, including Thomism (understood, *contra* Stump, as distinct from personal omniGod theism), process theology, pantheism or panentheism, and Absolute Idealism. To 'demonstrate the falsity or irrationality of theistic belief given the facts of evil' will thus require establishing that *every* viable conception of God is susceptible to a successful Argument from Evil.

That general claim will evidently not be established if Absolute Idealism is admissible. Absolute Idealism certainly does not give rise to an opposing Argument from Evil, since 'the Absolute' transcends moral distinctions and is 'beyond good and evil'. For that very reason, however, Absolute Idealism appears unable to provide a viable conception of the God of the theist traditions. Theism is distinctively committed to divine ultimacy as (including) 'the sovereignty of the good'. This is what secures theism's *salvific* force in dealing with the existential problem of evil—namely, the problem of living well in a world where evil threatens flourishing and often prevents or undermines it. But any salvific affirmation of the ultimate sovereignty of the good faces the problem of explaining how it could be reasonable to accept its truth given that evil exists to be dealt with in the first place—it faces, in other words, the problem of responding to an opposing Argument from Evil. A conception of the God of theism is therefore unlikely to be viable unless there is a significant challenge to the coherence of belief in such a God from some version of the Argument from Evil.

An interesting question thus arises about *the scope* of anti-theodicy. Since—as I have just argued—belief in God under *any* viable conception will need to be supported by an explanation of how it can be that evil (or, maybe, just certain types or degrees of evil) can exist in a divine creation, it would seem that anti-theodicy on Braiterman's characterization must oppose all such explanations. Trakakis recommends that, in the light of anti-theodicy's metaphysical implications, we will do well to "rethink and, if necessary, revise and reject the ideas about God we have inherited from our religious traditions, and seek to bring them into line with our experience and knowledge of evil." But perhaps the stance taken by anti-theodicy resists *all* attempts to bring ideas about God "into line with our experience . . . of evil"?

My own belief is that what 'anti-theodicists' reject is actually *a specific kind* of theodicy—namely, the kind of theodicy that has to be accepted, given the facts about evil, for coherent belief in God according to the standard personal omniGod conception (or nearby modifications of it). This sort of theodicy has to portray the sustaining of horrendous evils as part of an all-controlling Person's overall perfectly good plan of action in producing and governing the created world—it 'justifies' evil, and 'makes it meaningful', in *that* kind of way. On conceptions of God that either reject the notion of God's power amounting to overall control or else, more radically, deny that God is a personal agent at all, morally more palatable explanations of the existence

of horrendous evils *may* be available. Whether such explanations actually *are* available, or whether there will always be something morally suspect in any attempt to vindicate divine justice in the face of evil (that is, any attempt at theodicy, in its most general sense), is a question that needs more discussion. Other types of explanations for evil do appear in theist tradition. Thomism, for example, bases its theodicy on a development of Augustine's claim that evil is the privation of good, although that kind of explanation is often rejected on moral grounds also—typically, as a failure to treat evil with sufficient seriousness.

My conclusion, then, is that what is needed is a clearer understanding of just what the moral objections are to explaining how there can be (horrendous) evil in a divine creation. I believe it mistaken to dismiss all such explanations as morally suspect, even though certain specific types of theodicy may indeed fail on moral grounds. I share with Trakakis the view that this is the case for the specific types of theodicy into which personal omniGod theists are forced. I also, therefore, share the conclusion that, if theism is rationally defensible at all, it must require an alternative to the personal omniGod conception of the divine. Further work needs to be done in determining whether there is a religiously viable conception of God such that belief in God under that conception can be shown coherently to fit the actual facts about suffering and evil without moral offence.[19] It may be possible, then, to accept a theodicy in the general sense of an understanding of the place of evil within the just providence of God, while rejecting as morally flawed theodicies that speculate about what God's adequate agential *reasons* for sustaining evil may be.

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Response to Trakakis

Graham Oppy

Trakakis says that there is a "difficult but exciting challenge in speculative metaphysics": "to construct models of God . . . [which avoid] the pitfalls of anthropomorphism . . . without renouncing a commitment to divine providence—that is, the idea of God's being actively involved in, and lovingly governing, the world."

[19] In collaboration with Ken Perszyk, I have been exploring a *euteleological* conception of divinity. According to this conception, the Universe's being a divine creation amounts to its being inherently directed upon the supreme good as its *telos*, and existing only because that *telos* is realized within it. For a discussion of how the Argument from Evil impinges on God's existence under this conception, see Bishop and Perszyk (2016).

As an example of a view that avoids the pitfalls of anthropomorphism, Trakakis offers Bradley's Absolute Idealism: the Absolute is ultimate unconditioned reality, neither good nor evil, neither personal nor impersonal, etc. However, Bradley's Absolute Idealism seems peculiarly unsuited to the "difficult but exciting" challenge, because the Absolute is neither loving nor hating, and so, in particular, cannot lovingly govern the world. Moreover, this problem is not unique to Bradley's Absolute Idealism: exactly the same point can be made about '(nirguna and saguna) brahman', and about 'subsistent being itself'. The general difficulty here is that 'active involvement' and 'loving governance' carry an anthropomorphic load that cannot be discharged: if we reject the idea that God is a person, then consistency enjoins us also to reject the idea that God is actively involved in our universe and lovingly governs us.

One possible response to this objection is to say that talk of 'love' in connection with God is not to be taken literally: God does not love us; rather, God 'loves' us, in some metaphorical, or analogical, or otherwise non-standard or non-literal sense. However, even if this response were otherwise unobjectionable, it founders on the observation that we can make exactly the same move concerning the words 'person' and 'good': God is not a person; God is merely a 'person' in some metaphorical, or analogical, or otherwise non-standard or non-literal sense; God is not good; God is merely 'good' in some metaphorical, or analogical, or otherwise non-standard or non-literal sense.

Of course, in raising this concern about the prospects for meeting Trakakis' "difficult but exciting" challenge, I do not mean to suggest that one cannot respond to logical arguments from evil by rejecting one or more of the characterizing premises. Long ago, Mackie suggested that there are 'adequate responses' to his logical argument from evil that proceed in precisely this way. Mackie's 'argument' is the claim that the following set of sentences is inconsistent and yet contains only claims to which theists are committed:

(1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is perfectly good.
(3) There is evil.
(4) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.
(5) A good thing eliminates evil as far as it can.

Obviously enough, if we deny that God is omnipotent and/or that God is perfectly good, then this 'argument' creates no problem for us. However, there are many theists who maintain that God *is* omnipotent and that God *is* perfectly good; and those theists cannot avail themselves of the 'adequate response' that is plainly available to those who deny that God is omnipotent and/or that God is perfectly good.

Trakakis joins Andrew Gleeson in suggesting that "the moral and existential seriousness of concrete cases of evil is easily missed or mishandled by the impersonal methodology characteristic of contemporary analytic discussions of the problem of evil." However, it seems to me that this suggestion turns on a misunderstanding of the nature of the problem under discussion. Properly understood, Mackie's claim is that perfect

being theism is logically inconsistent. What makes the putative logical inconsistency a *problem of evil* is that a claim about evil is an ineliminable member of the logically inconsistent set of claims to which perfect being theists are allegedly committed. Since the claim about evil is non-negotiable, and since perfect being theists cannot give up the characterizing claims (on pain of renouncing their perfect being theism), the only issue to discuss is whether perfect being theists accept the linking premises.

Since best formulations of perfect being theism reject one or both of the linking premises, it is clear that Mackie's argument fails. However, this failure leaves it open that some other logical argument from evil might succeed. Consider, for example, the following variation on the theme of Rowe's logical argument from evil:

(1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is omniscient.
(3) God is perfectly good.
(4) There is much horrendous evil.
(5) For *any* [part] of that horrendous evil, an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being would prevent *it* unless it could not do so without losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
(6) An omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being could prevent *some* [part] of that horrendous evil without losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Here, again, the interesting question is whether perfect being theists accept the linking premises; or, more carefully, whether there are best versions of perfect being theism that are committed to these two premises. However, for those who would reject perfect being theism "without renouncing the idea of God's being actively involved in, and lovingly governing, the world," there is a similar question that arises in connection with the linking premises in the following logical argument from evil:

(1) God is the actively involved, loving governor of the world.
(2) There are horrendous evils.
(3) For any part of that horrendous evil, an actively involved, loving governor of the world would prevent it, unless it could not do so without losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
(4) An actively involved, loving governor of the world could prevent *some* [part] of that horrendous evil without losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Those who suppose that God is the actively involved, loving governor of the world must reject one or both of the linking premises in this logical argument from evil. But it seems plausible—to me, at any rate—to think that, when it comes to the evaluation of these linking premises, the considerations that arise are much the same as those that arise when it comes to the evaluation of the linking premises in our earlier variation on the theme of Rowe's logical argument from evil.

Reply to Stump

N. N. Trakakis

Stump finds three aspects of my Position Statement objectionable, and I will briefly address each of her concerns, reserving most space for her third—and, I take it, most serious—challenge.

(1) Stump holds that the difficulty of resolving the problem of evil is comparable to the difficulty of resolving many other philosophical problems that have been extensively discussed and debated in the history of the discipline. In particular, just as the lack of a compelling and universally accepted solution to, say, the problem of free will or the nature of time does not necessitate the rejection of the conceptual framework within which these issues have traditionally been set, so too, in the case of the problem of evil, the widespread and seemingly ineradicable disagreement this problem has occasioned over the centuries does not all by itself require the overthrow of the very terms of the debate.

I do not disagree with Stump, but I suspect she may have missed the suggestion I was making. The suggestion, briefly put, is: when faced with the consistent failure to resolve a significant philosophical problem, one reasonable strategy is to investigate some of the underlying (and perhaps hard to discern) presuppositions that have given rise to the problem. This need not mean rejecting these presuppositions, but the result may well be some form of challenge to or modification of them. We should not also rule out from the outset the possibility that, having subjected the relevant assumptions or framework to scrutiny, the question itself that has brought us to this point is showed up as meaningless or a pseudo-question. To be sure, such a conclusion would require rigorous argument, but it should not be dismissed prematurely. If philosophy teaches anything, it is how to ask questions—and that is a difficult skill. We cannot always presume to be asking the right, or the best, or even sensible and coherent questions.

I might also add that it is not merely that lack of "a completely satisfactory, universally accepted solution" to the problem of evil which, in my view, motivates the turn to foundations and frameworks. The situation is far more serious than that. Even the semblance of a plausible or rationally acceptable solution is missing. Again, this requires argument, but note Plantinga's remark that "most of the attempts to explain why God permits evil—theodicies, as we might call them—seem to me shallow, tepid, and ultimately frivolous" (quoted in my position paper). That approaches what I was pointing to: not only the absence of general consent or a compelling solution, but also and more tellingly a plethora of *dismal* responses.

(2) I also do not disagree with Stump's account of plausibility as relative to a worldview. Indeed, this is why I sought in my position paper to broaden my critique of theodicy from a predominantly moral position (e.g., theodicy violates the Categorical Imperative) to one that embeds moral criticism within a comprehensive metaphilosophy

(an account of philosophy that, e.g., seeks to overcome the now-standard dichotomy between theoretical and practical problems of evil) and an overall metaphysics of the nature of reality, both divine and human. Once the anti-theodicy position is filled out in this way, I claim, theodicy and the relation of God to evil can be seen in a new and perhaps more discriminating light. This does not necessarily mean that theodicy will then be revealed as frivolous or bullshit. I don't think such blanket dismissals of theodicy are warranted, even if elements of the theodicy program might be highly questionable. Rather, my view is that anti-theodicy, developed along moral as well as metaphysical and metaphilosophical lines, offers a way of thinking about God and evil that is more faithful to both of these realities than traditional, theodical approaches, while also ridding us of many of the difficulties such approaches have generated.

(3) Stump comments that my response to the argument from evil crucially rests upon the rejection of the premise that God is perfectly good. For Stump, this is way too easy: giving up one of the standard divine attributes, such as omnipotence or omniscience or perfect goodness, clearly defuses the problem of evil, but it comes at too high a cost, for it forces us to relinquish *theism itself*. My strategy, then, seems only to capitulate to atheism, rather than attacking it. A strange strategy indeed!

I will make two points by way of reply. Firstly, even if the goodness of God were considered a non-negotiable element of theism, the sense in which God is good stands in need of analysis and clarification. Stump seems to assume that God's goodness must at a minimum be *moral* in nature. But is this true, or obvious? Brian Davies (2006), claiming to be following Aquinas, contends that it makes little sense to think of God as a moral agent, and that divine goodness is best construed in non-moral terms to mean perfection (in actuality or being) and the source or maker of creaturely goodness.[20] Davies' view, in comparison with Stump's, seems to me to cohere better with the radical uniqueness and otherness of God.

Secondly, anti-theodicy is indeed in some ways an ally of atheology, for both seek to rid us of God *as conceived in a certain fashion*. The italicized phrase is significant, for there is no such thing as 'theism'. Theism invariably comes in specific shapes and sizes, and it must always be asked which variety of theism or which God one is defending or deposing. Now, the version of theism I wish to uphold may be called 'idealist theism', as it is a continuation of the great idealist tradition in Western philosophy and Eastern religious thought.

If we focus, for the sake of argument, on the absolute idealism of F. H. Bradley, it is not entirely or straightforwardly correct to say that the idea of perfect moral goodness finds no foothold in his system of thought. To begin with, Bradley (like other idealists) subscribes to the notion of 'degrees of truth', so that one proposition might possess greater truth than others. (For Bradley, the degree of truth is measured by the criteria of coherence and all-inclusiveness.) In line with this view of truth, it may be held that

[20] See especially chapters 4 and 8, where Davies also provides an account of divine love that does not presuppose that God is a moral agent.

the statement 'God is (morally) good' is true, *to some degree*. And Bradley at various points shows that he is prepared to speak of the Absolute as good, albeit in some relative or limited sense. But the *ultimate* truth, according to Bradley, is that the Absolute is neither good nor evil, for these are relational and hence contradictory terms which cannot apply to the ultimate reality itself: "Evil and good are not illusions, but they are most certainly appearances. They are one-sided aspects, each over-ruled and transmuted in the Whole." (1908: 401)[21] Despite this limitation in our everyday moral categories, Bradley wishes to retain the idea that the Absolute is of absolute value, or evaluatively perfect. This is why he holds that the predication of 'goodness' to the Absolute is not completely unjustified or inappropriate, and is in fact closer to the truth than are predications of 'badness' or 'evil'. As William Mander (2011: 193) explains, "although the Absolute transcends both good and bad, the transcendence has a definite direction from bad to good rather than good to bad, and that allows us to give some sense to the claim that reality is perfect. Though we cannot really grasp the value of the Absolute, it being beyond our ethical concepts, the passage from bad to good and beyond functions as a kind of arrow towards what we mean."

Bradley, to be sure, does not equate the Absolute with the personal God of the theistic religions, but if the ultimate divine reality were conceptualized along Bradleian lines, would this not immediately dispense with the problem of evil, as claimed by Stump and as intimated in my position paper? Again, a clear-cut answer is not possible. To the degree that God (or the Absolute) lies beyond moral evaluation, there is no problem of evil. But to the degree that God (or the Absolute) can be characterized as morally good and evaluatively perfect, or in more Bradleian vocabulary as 'an all-embracing and harmonious Whole', then some way must be found to account for or deal with the evidence of evil, imperfection, and disharmony. In this latter sense, there remains a problem of evil, and a significant one at that. But when theistic idealism is conjoined with anti-theodicy, the result is that no explanation (of a theodical sort) for these negative phenomena is available or desirable. The idealist God is not the kind of god that (literally) has reasons, whether moral or not, for choosing one course of action over another; and even if he did, he could not avail himself of morally sufficient reasons for permitting horrors, because he would then simply become one more horror in need of explanation!

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[21] Bradley, of course, controversially rejects all relations as contradictory.

Reply to Bishop

N. N. Trakakis

Do theistic forms of anti-theodicy undermine the traditional commitment of theistic religions to the 'sovereignty of the good' and the salvific power of God? Bishop raises this important question, but before saying something by way of response I will reply to another, not entirely unrelated, question raised by Bishop: What is the scope of anti-theodicy, as I see it? Are all theodical explanations ruled out, or only those explanations that are predicated upon defective forms of theism (e.g., personal omniGod theism)?

There is, to be sure, no reason why the anti-theodicist must renounce explanations of evil *per se*. Causal accounts in broadly empirical terms (such as those usually proffered by, e.g., physicists, sociologists, and psychologists) of the existence and spread of 'evil' (construed widely, so as to include what are normally categorized as 'natural evils' and 'moral evils') are certainly available to the anti-theodicist, as much as the theodicist, in the attempt to reach a rational understanding of evil, as far as this is possible. But may, or should, the anti-theodicist also make appeal to *theodical* explanations? According to Bishop, "what 'anti-theodicists' reject is actually *a specific kind* of theodicy—namely, the kind of theodicy that has to be accepted, given the facts about evil, for coherent belief in God according to the standard personal omniGod conception (or nearby modifications of it)" (emphasis in original). This, however, is not my conception of anti-theodicy. *Any* theodicy—that is, any attempt to justify or explain God's permission or creation of evil—is rejected. One reason for this (though not the sole reason) is that theodicies tend to be tied to flawed forms of theism. The relevant flaws are often due to anthropomorphisms that have 'gone on holiday': cut adrift from its status as symbol, metaphor, analogy, etc., anthropomorphic imagery gets mistaken for the actual or literal thing itself. I see this as a variety of religious 'materialism', where the objects of the material world (and the concepts and categories they give rise to) shape in problematic ways how we think about spiritual realities. But the further away one moves from such materialism, the less need there is for theodicy. Does this entail renouncing the providence of God, or the ultimate goodness and justice of the world? Let me now try to address this very important question.

This brings me to a second reason for rejecting theodicies (of all stripes): they cannot countenance the reality, or even the possibility, of genuine evil. And by 'genuine evil' I mean evil that has no objective or God-given point or purpose—evil, of this kind, is a sheer surd. There are, of course, theodicies (such as John Hick's soul-making view) that allow for pointless evil in this sense, but any pointless evil is then situated within a larger divine scheme that makes such evils possible, if not inevitable. But what I want to reject is any such scheme that renders pointless evil somehow meaningful and necessary in the long run. The horrors of war, genocide, slavery, degrading poverty,

and sexual abuse are precisely what they appear to be: evil, in the ordinary (as opposed to the technical, philosophical) sense in which this word is regularly employed today to refer to something that is more than merely bad or immoral but is rather something monstrous, dehumanizing, 'beyond the pale', unable to be rendered morally intelligible because it inverts or annihilates our 'moral landscape'.[22]

But if our world is replete with gratuitous evil, and lacks any overarching providential plan to finally set things right, then what becomes of the sovereignty of God and the good? Such a bleak vision of the world seems incompatible with traditional theistic optimism, where the salvific power of perfect love guarantees 'the triumph of God over evil' (to borrow the title of William Hasker's 2008 book on theodicy). For Bishop, this is where the absolute idealist view I had sketched in my position paper falters. The Absolute, Bishop observes, lies beyond the moral fray, and so no argument from evil could unsettle it. But the capacity to be challenged by an argument from evil is taken by Bishop as a *criterion of adequacy* for any conception of God: any God worth having must be put in the dock on charges of 'immorality' or 'unlawful conduct'.

The Absolute has been figured in different ways by different idealists. Some, like Bradley's great critic Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, demand that the ultimate ground of reality, the Absolute, be conceived in personal terms (thus avoiding Bishop's worries). But even those, like Bradley, who refuse or hesitate to apply personal and moral predicates to the Absolute continue to think of the good as having primacy over evil, even if neither has any ultimacy. What undergirds the relative priority of good over evil is the characteristic idealist doctrine of degrees of being or reality. On this view, a phenomenon is less real the more it is just a fragmentary aspect of the whole, and given that goodness constitutes a more faithful reflection of the whole than evil it can be said that the Absolute is better characterized as good than evil. Whether this is sufficient to occasion an argument from evil, or to underwrite the sovereignty of the good, I will not attempt to answer. But even if it is not, the question remains whether divine sovereignty of this sort is necessary or desirable on a theistic view of the world.

It is held as almost an article of faith by contemporary philosophers of religion that any plausible theistic account must be one in which God is in some important sense *victorious in the end*. This eschatological principle is usually thought to entail that any evil that takes place must be 'conquered' by God, where this is achieved by God's ensuring that all evil is compensated or outweighed by some greater good, or that it is defeated and redeemed, perhaps even to the extent that *sub specie aeternitatis* any victims would not (with the benefit of hindsight) wish that the course of their lives would have taken a less evil-strewn path. In this fashion, God wins out in the end, no matter how hopeless things might appear at present. This is a fundamentally optimistic picture of the world.

[22] I borrow the term 'moral landscape' from Stephen de Wijze (2002: 221), who describes it as "those prerequisite values needed for any civilized attempt to manage conflict and to establish a minimal level of respect and dignity between persons."

But why must the theist be obliged to see the world in this way? I have to confess that such optimism strikes me as not only false, but as perversely false in a way deserving of the scorn that Voltaire heaped on Pangloss. Candide refuses to 'gloss', that is, to misrepresent and distort the true (gratuitous and horrendous) nature of much suffering. This of course assumes that evil (or at least its most horrific instances) is in reality irrational, unjustified, irredeemable, and unforgivable. Many thorny questions lurk here which I cannot delve into. For example, can there be (within a theistic perspective) such a thing as *unforgivable evil*, evil that should forever be condemned? Similarly, can there be (again within a theistic framework) evil that can *never be redeemed or defeated*? Perhaps nothing can make amends for certain evils, or it is impossible to 'undo' some evils so as to achieve healing and reparation. Theism has not always been interpreted in optimistic terms. Schopenhauer, for one, took Christianity (at its best!) to be a pessimistic religion. Isn't it time that theistic philosophers removed their rose-coloured glasses?

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Reply to Oppy

N. N. Trakakis

I agree that, insofar as God is viewed as actively involved in, and the loving governor of, the world, some version of the argument from evil, like that developed by Mackie or Rowe, could be raised against the existence of God. So it seems, as Oppy contends, that no real progress has been made by deferring to an idealist version of theism, as I had proposed.

I am not, in fact, very comfortable with the notion of God as "actively involved in, and lovingly governing, the world," as this gives the mistaken impression of a deity *externally* related to the world—and this is a way of thinking about God I would like to overturn. At the same time, however, I don't want to deny the loving nature, or the perfect goodness, of God. I don't wish to rule out talk of the 'love' and 'goodness' of God as somehow invalid or inappropriate, or to reinterpret such language in non-cognitive (e.g., emotivist, or expressivist) terms. But that doesn't imply that the content of such attributions can be easily and clearly spelled out. Indeed, in line with the apophatic strain of the theistic tradition, I want to preserve a sense of the mystery and incomprehensibility of the divine nature, so that our language and understanding will never be able to fully capture the ways and depths of God's love and goodness. (I would in fact endorse a more generalized apophaticism, whereby it is not only the divine

nature that ultimately eludes us, but also created reality as well. Think only of human love and its secrets.)

With that proviso in place, we can proceed to say something—and not merely things of a trivial or purely formal nature—about the love and goodness of God. However, my point or 'gambit' (as I called it) in recalling certain ideas from idealist philosophy was to emphasize that the ultimate divine reality—whether called 'God' or the 'Absolute'—cannot be loving and good in the same way as we ordinarily characterize Francis of Assisi or Gandhi as loving and good. Even any analogy between the divine and human cases would be only a faint and flawed one.

One of the attractions of the work of the British idealist, F. H. Bradley, is that much of what he has to say about the Absolute is continuous with Eastern philosophy and religious thought. Like Bradley, various schools of Hinduism and Buddhism strictly delimit or even outright refuse the notion of personhood when thinking about the divine or ultimate reality. This has often been regarded as a sore point in Western and Eastern relations, with the Abrahamic traditions conceptualizing ultimate reality as personal or a personal deity (e.g., as Yahweh, the Trinity, Allah), while Eastern traditions tend to express what is ultimate in non-personal or transpersonal terms (e.g., as Brahman, Nirvana, the Tao). But recent work in comparative philosophy and theology has done much to show how seemingly incompatible views about personhood across Western and Eastern traditions can be reconciled, and also how Eastern ideas regarding personhood can be employed to challenge and enrich long-standing Western prejudices and positions. I am thinking in particular of the pioneering research carried out by Richard De Smet and Sara Grant, who sought to seriously engage Christian theology and spirituality with the 'non-dual' Hindu tradition of Advaita Vedanta.[23] Inspired by the Advaita tradition and its connections with Christian (and especially Thomist) theology, De Smet and Grant have emphasized that the personhood of God, whatever it is, cannot be like ours: a nature or structure constituted by beliefs and desires, specific preferences and purposes, a will in competition with other wills, and a character that forms over time and is expressed by means of discrete actions. It is this problematic connection between what it is to be a 'person' (or to be a 'personal' being) and being a limited, anthropomorphic individual that often leads Hindu thinkers to speak of Brahman as 'non-personal', and indeed as transcending such oppositions as the personal and impersonal, or subject and object.

The contemporary commonsense notion of a 'person' also comes under pressure within monist or non-dual metaphysics, whether it be that of the Advaitins or the British idealists. Both traditions subscribe to the monist position that there are ultimately no separate things, for reality is essentially one or a unified whole. On this view, the deepest level of reality consists in holistic connectivity, so that everything is related (e.g., temporally or spatially) to everything else, and the nature and identity of each thing depends upon its relations to all else. In such a world, where all relations are

[23] On De Smet, see Malkovsky (1999, 2000). See also Grant (2002).

'internal', what room remains for the modern notion of a 'person' as an individual agent and centre of consciousness that is ontologically distinct, independent, and self-sufficient? The Absolute, construed as what is ultimately real, simply consists of a single, vast, and intricately interconnected whole, and so it cannot be described as either 'personal' or 'impersonal'. Rather, the entire dichotomy between the personal and the impersonal is overcome. And this prompts the further question: Is the category of 'personality' finally dispensable from our ontology, from our account of the ultimate foundations of reality?

If one's metaphysics is developed along such idealist and monist lines, then how might one respond to the kinds of argument from evil sketched by Oppy? Like most theists, the idealist theist is likely to reject one or both of the 'linking premises'. But the idealist theist has reasons of his own for doing so, reasons that a 'standard' theist is unlikely to endorse. This is where the 'theologically loaded' character of the linking premises needs to be foregrounded: these premises are not as theologically or metaphysically minimal as is often supposed, but carry with them substantive assumptions about the nature of God. In particular, God is being imaged in quasi-anthropomorphic fashion as a person who has intentions and plans, or perhaps reasons and desires, and acts on the basis of these—for example, the intention to permit evil for the sake of some morally sufficient reason. But the idealist God, as I have briefly indicated, does not conform to this image. And this introduces something different, if not radically different, into the debate over God and evil. Indeed, I think it compels us to reconsider the entire framework within which this debate has been set up in the analytic philosophical tradition over the past half-century or so.

I cannot therefore agree with Oppy that, given that the idealist God is defined as good and loving, the game of assessing the credentials of theism in light of the facts about evil remains essentially the same—or that the idealist theist has essentially the same moves open to him or her as the standard or traditional theist (e.g., seeking to identify possible or plausible reasons as to why God permits evil). On the contrary, the idealist God is a game-changer. The old rules have lost their force. There is another game in town, even if it's not the only one.

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5

Evil, Feminism, and a Philosophy of Transformation

Beverley Clack

Introduction: Shifting the Ground

There's an old joke—a very old joke—which fittingly describes the stance on evil to be taken in this chapter. Some townies are lost in the deepest English countryside. Waving down a local, they ask for directions. The response to their query is not immediately helpful: "If that's the place you are looking for, I wouldn't start from here, if I were you."

I want to make a similar response—albeit, I hope, in the long run more helpful—to those engaged in the form of discourse which dominates discussion of evil in the philosophy of religion. As anti-theodicists have been at pains to point out (Phillips 1993, Surin 1986, Tilley 1991), these arguments revolve around an assumption of evil as a puzzle that needs to be solved. Rarely is the problem of evil approached in such a way as to provide reasons that would satisfy those struggling with the lived experience of suffering, as the result of either natural forces or the actions of others.[1]

While my starting point is not dissimilar to that of the anti-theodicist, my concern is not to expose in any more detail the irrelevance of the answers offered by theodicists for those struggling with the felt effects of evil or the experience of suffering.[2] The aspect I wish to pursue here relates to something hinted at in Kenneth Surin's discussion of theodicy: namely, that *unintended consequences* may arise from pursuing theodical arguments (Surin 1986: 154–63). In the attempt to form detached and purportedly objective responses to the problem, theodicists run the risk of dulling their senses—moral and emotional—to the very real suffering of individuals and

[1] That the anti-theodicist arguments have found their mark is suggested by Eleonore Stump's recent use of narrative to explore the issue of suffering and the kind of defence of God that might be made in light of its reality (Stump 2010).

[2] While we might well argue that evil and suffering are separate issues—the former dealing with metaphysical questions about the nature of the universe, the latter with the lived experience of evils, natural and moral—in practice, the two categories are invariably blurred in the discussions of philosophers and theodicists.

communities.[3] My concern is to consider a response to evil that might move beyond this claim. How might an account of the sources of evil and suffering be made that enables better ways of living to emerge? As such, the discussion of evil that follows locates the problem in the realm of ethics, my contention being that it is only by so doing that we are able to avoid the problems anti-theodicists have identified with the intellectual pursuit of evil.

It is worth spending a little time on this reframing of the problem as it raises more general questions about what philosophy as a discipline can or cannot achieve. When a philosopher approaches the problem of evil, they do so with a particular aim in mind. For some, the concern will be to provide a possible 'solution' to the problem,[4] and this may well involve making distinctions between the 'logical' and the 'emotive' (or experiential or evidential) problems of evil. They may have a particular tradition in mind, and may be addressing the problem in order to establish a convincing theological apologetic. Whatever the aim, something much more fundamental is at work, for the way in which evil is approached reveals much about the way in which the very practice of philosophy is understood.

In the analytic tradition, the practice of philosophy involves the analysis and criticism of language; it involves aligning oneself—as closely as possible—with the methods and practices of science. Its detractors have been similarly certain about what philosophy involves, and have consistently—and insistently—pointed to the failure of philosophers to engage with the questions of 'real life'. For Paul Ricoeur's 'Masters of Suspicion', this failure leads to the conclusion that philosophical practice is an irrelevance. Thus, for Freud, the desire to practice philosophy reflects a melancholic disposition that seeks answers to questions that could never be answered (Freud 1960: 436), while detracting from the much more realistic and worthwhile work of empirical scientific investigation (Freud [1916–17] 2001: 20). For Nietzsche, it denotes the failure to say 'yes' to life ([1887] 2001: §327, 182–3). This criticism leads Nietzsche to frame his 'gay science' as a means of changing the values of the old world to an affirmation of this life, be it through dancing with Dionysus ([1887] 2001: §381, 246) or through 'philosophizing with a hammer' ([1889] 1990). For Marx, what matters is engaging in practical politics: "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." (Marx [1845] 2002: 184)

In suggesting an ethical focus for the discussion of evil, I am aligning myself with aspects of those critiques: most notably with the emphasis placed by Marx and Nietzsche on the kind of practice most likely to bring about transformation, of one's

[3] Surin's approach reflects, similarly, that of Jürgen Moltmann: the way in which we construct our image of God has an impact on the way in which we structure our relationships with others. So, for Moltmann, advocating divine *apatheia* cultivates apathy in the response—or lack of it—that might be made to those suffering (1974: 267–78).

[4] I am not convinced by the turn, inspired by Alvin Plantinga (1977), and developed by philosophers such as Stump (2010: 19–20), that there is a real difference between offering a 'complete' theodicy and a 'partial' defence. The focus remains on solving—or at least going some way to solve—a problem for God, rather than ameliorating the experience of suffering (see Clack 2007).

self and of the world.[5] That does not mean, however, that I intend to accept their rather pessimistic vision of what philosophy can—or rather, *cannot*—achieve. I do not accept that philosophy is, by its very nature, a practice disengaged from the everyday task of living. Indeed, by aligning philosophy of religion with ethics, and approaching the discussion of evil in this way, I believe it is possible to show something of the importance of critical religious thought and practice for how we might live.[6]

In shaping an ethical approach to the problem, the insights of feminist philosophers of religion are invaluable: not least because the political dimension is central to feminist theorizing. For the feminist, to discuss evil and suffering necessitates considering the questions they raise for our life together; for the feminist *philosopher*, evil and suffering raise questions about the way in which philosophical discussions affect the way we act in the world. This makes an engagement with practical politics impossible to avoid and leads me to frame the argument of this chapter in the following way: is it possible to shape a philosophy of evil capable of enabling the kind of life that supports human flourishing? (And in emphasizing human flourishing, I understand that notion to involve not just the life of the individual, but also, crucially, the shape of the political and social realm.)[7]

In framing the discussion in this way, I am indebted to the insights of Mary Midgley. In her innovative investigation of wickedness ([1984] 2001), Midgley directs attention away from insolvable and unknowable debates about God and metaphysics, towards the much more practical task of trying to understand the sources of human wickedness. For Midgley, the discussion of evil is primarily an ethical one, for it raises questions of how it might be resisted, as well as forcing us to consider the nature of the good life.

To approach evil as a problem for human beings rather than for God raises questions about the contribution that can be made by the philosophy of religion. My hope is that approaching evil in this way allows for a fresh appreciation of why religious perspectives might be helpful for engaging with this most pressing of concerns.

Identifying Evil: the Contribution of Feminist Analysis

In suggesting that the problem of evil be framed primarily as an ethical issue, I understand 'the ethical' to denote both the way in which social relationships are shaped by political structures, and the way in which personal relationships are conducted. Moreover, in pursuing an ethical approach to evil, I want to suggest the importance of

[5] In asserting the transformative nature of philosophical practice, I am building upon Michael McGhee's (2000) formulation of philosophy as spiritual practice.

[6] It says much about the dominance of one way of proceeding in Anglo-American philosophy of the twentieth century that this view of philosophy can appear rather novel. As Martha Nussbaum (1996) amongst others has shown, this vision of a philosophy that might be able to ameliorate the experience of suffering (to paraphrase Epicurus) shapes the earliest forms of the discipline.

[7] Here I am indebted to the work of Grace Jantzen, whose feminist philosophy of religion was explicitly structured around the promotion of human flourishing (Jantzen 1998).

one's orientation to the world, for it is here that the practice of philosophy of religion proves significant.

In order to make this shift towards the ethical, it is necessary to start with an element often lacking in the analyses of evil offered by philosophers of religion: the social and political context for personal relationships. To even get close to understanding the sources of evil, it is vital to consider the social locatedness of the human subject, and here feminist philosophy provides an important starting point: not least because it allows for examination of the ideas that support social and political life.

Feminist philosophy connects critical analysis with practical, political action; a connection which holds out the prospect of transforming academic discussions of evil. While there may be different *feminisms*, each reflecting different theoretical positions,[8] they share a common concern to expose and correct the marginalization of women's lives and experiences, and to address gender injustice. And feminist philosophy, as Gillian Howie (2010: 9) points out, is explicit about an implicit feature of *all* philosophy: namely, that "every philosophy is practical, even when it seems at its most contemplative: its method a social and political weapon."

That feminism arose out of women's struggles to be recognized as 'fully human'—to use Rosemary Ruether's memorable phrase (1983: 18)—inevitably means that, far from being a distraction, the discussion of evil is at the heart of the feminist commitment to changing the world. To locate the discussion of evil in a political movement for change necessitates considering the way in which 'evil' is defined. For the feminist, concerned with identifying and resisting gender injustice, the issue of moral evil takes priority. (Indeed, for the vast majority of feminists—and specifically for ecofeminists—the notion of physical or 'natural' evil is a misnomer. The natural processes which make human life possible cannot be described as 'evil', even if their effects are felt in human suffering [Plumwood 1993]. This is an idea with an ancient pedigree: when Seneca writes on the propriety of natural processes, he is at pains to conclude that if you don't like the suffering that accompanies life in this world, that's your problem. Such experiences, he says bluntly, are the price we pay for the privilege of being alive [1969: Letter XCI, 181–2].)

In making their focus the exposure of injustice, feminists expand the very notion of what counts as 'evil' to include not just individual moral failures but its socially-embedded manifestations. As Sharon Welch and others note, to understand injustice, its enactment and perpetuation through political and social structures has to be addressed (Welch 1990). To describe the way in which these interlocking structures allow oppressive practices to be enacted and enshrined in personal relationships, the term 'structural evils' is employed by such thinkers.

We might at this point question the propriety of using the term 'evil', accepting, with Midgley, that we are better advised to instead employ the terms 'wickedness' or 'injustice'. It is, however, powerful to name something an 'evil'. Something about the very

[8] For a brief description of these differences, see Clack (2013: 326–8).

word demands we take seriously things that are 'out of joint'; that an attitude or an event or a history is so wrong that we must act to 'put things right'. In drawing attention to structural evils, the feminist demand is that we seek ways of challenging *and changing* such structures. At the same time, extending the notion of what constitutes evil does something more: it alerts us to the fact that what is meant by 'evil' is not self-evident. Ideological commitments are reflected in the definitions which are offered. There is no purely objective stance to be taken in relation to this work of definition: ideas are never 'innocent', for they reflect our starting point but also, crucially, shape the way in which the world is conceived and society is structured.

Exploring the relationship between ideas and social practice formed a large part of the work of early feminist philosophical analysis, which centred on exposing the way in which definitions of 'Woman' shaped the exclusion of women from the public realm. Susan Moller Okin (1979) and Genevieve Lloyd (1984) were at pains to expose the unacknowledged history of misogyny in Western philosophical and religious thought. Building upon Simone de Beauvoir's contention that gender is not a given, but is constructed over time by family, social, and historical assumptions (Beauvoir [1949] 1972), they detailed the historical constructions of 'Woman' as that which stood in opposition to the values claimed by the male.

Discovering the considerable energy spent by past philosophers and theologians in defining 'Woman' can come as something of a surprise.[9] Even more surprising can be the realization that their 'findings' all too frequently identify women with 'evil'. An example: if Aristotle viewed the female as essentially passive matter to be shaped by the active male (see Clack 1999: 31–6), this notion was developed by Aquinas to claim that Woman is fundamentally flawed—she is, in his words, a "defective male" (Clack 1999: 77). For medieval theologians concerned with the phenomenon of witchcraft, the 'fact' that Woman is ontologically flawed makes women the perfect conduit for evil. When Kramer and Sprenger write their handbook for witch-finders in the fifteenth century, it is not surprising that, as a result, they view women as peculiarly linked to that which is evil. Evil entered the world through a woman: a process which did not end there but which is continued in the actions of *all* women, cast as her daughters (Clack 1999: 89).

If women are defined as, at worst, incapable of goodness, and, at best, limited in their ability to pursue the moral life, practical measures will be deemed necessary to curb their influence. To define women as evil is not, then, to partake in whimsical reflections that have little bearing on lived relationships; indeed, such notions were felt in social practices which constrained the lives of generations of women.[10]

[9] My *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader* (1999) resulted from the shocked realization that Western philosophers and theologians had spent an inordinate amount of time engaging with the question of 'who woman was' and what it was that she wanted. Becoming conscious of the extent to which 'Woman' had been considered an object to be studied radically challenged my sense of philosophy as a neutral and objective practice. Rather, its history and its categories reflected the social positioning of one group: usually white, usually affluent, males.

[10] For a classic account of the history of misogyny, see Marilyn French (1992). While we might like to think that such days are long gone, claims of female fallibility continue to fuel debates about the unequal

The task for the feminist philosopher of religion, confronted with such a history, is to expose the theological and philosophical basis—both then and now—for legitimizing gender injustice. To paraphrase Marx, the role of critique is to tear up the illusions that justify oppression ([1844] 2002: 171). The analysis of ideas, as a result, is not simply for the sake of analysis alone. Analysing ideas and their effects has the power to challenge social injustice, for the critical function of philosophical practice is not an end in itself, but provides the groundwork for *changing* unjust social conditions.

Social Structures, Evils, and Human Suffering

It is relatively easy to frame philosophy as a critical practice which challenges assumptions, even as a practice that alters the way in which individuals might be encouraged to modify their attitudes and behaviours. We might think, for example, of the role of the 'spiritual exercise' to bring about change in the attitudes and behaviour of the individual, as described by Martha Nussbaum (1996) and Pierre Hadot (1995) in their accounts of the Hellenistic Schools. But can critique transform *social* practices? If the Masters of Suspicion claim too little for philosophy, am I claiming too much?

Hannah Arendt's work suggests that this kind of socially engaged, transformative philosophy is a very real possibility for philosophical practice: but only if we challenge entrenched assumptions about what 'philosophy' involves. Like Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, Arendt is skeptical of the extent to which philosophy can be of use to the practical task of shaping the public realm. "Burdened by tradition,"[11] philosophers cannot easily respond to the plurality of positions that characterizes her vision of the kind of public space we should aim to create; a vision that is, to her mind, most conducive to the flourishing of individuals.[12]

numbers of men and women in public life and leadership roles. Recent discussion highlights the problems of a male-dominated political elite. In the UK, a cross-party inquiry was set up to consider why many women MPs were stepping down at the next election, held in 2015 (Tim Ross, "MPs Call for Action to Keep More Women in Politics," *The Telegraph*, 9 February 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/10626637/MPs-call-for-action-to-keep-more-women-in-politics.html). It may not be so hard to understand, in light of a female MP reporting her experience of being barracked for having a northern accent (Felicity Morse, "Tories 'Deliberately Mock Women MPs for Their Northern Accents' Says Pat Glass," *The Independent*, 17 February 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tories-deliberately-mock-women-mps-for-their-northern-accents-says-pat-glass-9133437.html). Arguments that women need to 'toughen up' in the face of such treatment—often made by women—suggest the extent to which claims of female weakness permeate the political world. Rather than challenging the way in which politics is conducted, this response suggests that the problem lies with women for wanting to change it (see Radhika Sanghani, "Former Tory MPs: 'If These Silly Modern Female MPs Can't Cope, They Shouldn't Be There'," *The Telegraph*, 20 February 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-politics/10649213/Former-Tory-MPs-If-these-silly-modern-female-MPs-cant-cope-they-shouldnt-be-there.html).

[11] This comment is taken from a conversation with Günter Gaus, in Baehr (2000: 4).

[12] Arendt also raises the question of the political failure of philosophers to identify injustice as injustice; the most obvious case being found in Arendt's mentor and erstwhile lover, Martin Heidegger, and his inability to see Nazism as something to be resisted, not accepted. As Dana Villa (1996: 192) describes it, in Heidegger there is found "the 'strange alliance' between philosophy and thoughtlessness." Abstract thought of the kind in which Heidegger excelled means little if there is no "care for the world."

Yet her depiction of thought as a *disruptive practice* provides a helpful framework for integrating theory and practice in such a way that philosophy can be part of the process by which social change is brought about. In Arendt's philosophy can be found the groundwork for an ethical approach to the problem of evil which illuminates the possibility of effecting personal and social transformation.

Arendt is doubtless best known for her report of the trial of the Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann, for the *New Yorker Magazine*. Eichmann could not have looked less like the popular image of a war criminal: he was a shabby little bureaucrat, not a monstrous presence of evil. As she attempts to understand him, she arrives at her famous description of 'the banality of evil' (Arendt 1963).[13] Eichmann is troubling because he *is* so ordinary, and, in framing the evil he represents as 'banal', Arendt refuses to set him apart from the rest of humanity. If anything, he is an example of what she describes as a "new type of criminal" (1963: 276), whose crimes emerge from a particular set of social conditions and working practices. Far from being a monster, he exhibits attitudes and behaviours common to many. In developing this analysis, Arendt makes a compelling case for linking social and political structures with the creation of individual attitudes, and thus raises the importance of embarking on forms of action that enable the transformation of both.

Arendt begins with an analysis of the structures that support oppression and the perpetration of destructive acts. To be understood, Eichmann must be placed in the context of the twentieth century's burgeoning dependence upon bureaucratic systems for structuring the state and shaping human behaviour. The roots of this phenomenon are first set out in Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* ([1951] 1968), before being taken up once more in her report on the Eichmann trial.

Arendt claims that bureaucracies enable the flourishing of individuals like Eichmann: individuals who are rendered incapable of associating their particular, isolated tasks with the broader agenda of their employers through the working practices of their institution. Bureaucracies operate on the basis that a prescribed end can be achieved through the implementation of rules and procedures (Weber 1947). Such systems give the appearance of being 'rational' and easy to manage in comparison with the messy reality of dealing with idiosyncratic and apparently 'irrational' individuals. While there might be some truth in this, the effect of such a judgement is that the human realm, made up of such individuals and thus beset with uncertainty, becomes characterized as less trustworthy than 'the system' itself.

If human relationships are disparaged in this way, bureaucratic states require the worker to limit their understanding of the scope of their work to the specific task with which they are engaged. For a worker to succeed in such a workplace, they must become "a mere function" of the organization (Arendt 1968: 215), 'aloof' from ordinary human concerns that might obscure the focus on achieving the prescribed social

[13] Richard Bernstein (2002: 205–24) offers a fine account of Arendt's conception of evil, which includes reflections on the controversy surrounding her notion of the banality of evil.

ends.[14] To be successful *as a function* necessitates resisting the kind of thoughtfulness that would connect one's actions to effects felt in the lives of others.[15]

In such a context, Eichmann becomes a rather successful example of a bureaucrat. This dull little man surprised Arendt because he was, if anything, all too familiar; not that different from the kind of administrator who might be encountered anywhere, whose job is similarly fragmented, focused on specific tasks which are, in turn, detached from the broader aims of their organization.

Social practices therefore have an effect on the ethics of the individual, and Arendt's conclusion goes far beyond explaining the actions of one individual. To reiterate, Eichmann is a "new type of criminal . . . who commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong" (Arendt 1963: 276). The modern workplace, shaped by bureaucratic systems, provides an ideal spawning ground for 'moral idiots' like Eichmann; people who become incapable of making the connection between their actions and the fate of others. It is thus *thoughtlessness*—understood as the failure to connect—that provides fertile ground for evil to flourish.

The philosopher of religion, intent on discovering the roots of evil, might not automatically turn their attention to the workplace. But for Arendt this is vital, for there is a connection between apparently neutral social structures and the effect they have on the actions of those who inhabit them. Expect the wicked to be monstrous and you are unlikely to recognize wickedness when it is being enacted (Midgley [1984] 2001: 4–5, 140). Indeed, for Arendt evil is able to flourish because of the kind of thoughtlessness demanded by specific working practices. In terms of how we proceed in our discussions of evil, there may be dangers for the theodicist who wishes to resist engaging with the problem of Auschwitz;[16] but what Arendt suggests is that it is no less problematic to focus exclusively on 'horrendous evils' (Adams 1999). To locate evil outside the realm of day-to-day activities runs the risk of divorcing it from the petty actions and failures that allow hideous acts of wickedness and injustice to flourish.[17]

[14] Arendt identifies this ideal in the methods of administration and the promotion of this kind of administrator in the structures developed by the British to effectively manage their Empire (1968: 212).

[15] A current example might be the number of reports suggesting that UK Job Centres are setting targets for sanctioning benefits claimants, thus enabling a culture of intimidation—both for claimants and Job Centre staff (Patrick Wintour and John Domokos, "Leaked Jobcentre Newsletter Urges Staff to Improve on Sanctions Targets," *The Guardian*, 25 March 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/25/jobcentre-newsletter-sanctions-targets). While these claims have been rejected by the UK Department of Work and Pensions, such claims continue to be made (see "Jobcentre Awarded Staff Gold Stars for Sanctioning Claimants," *Political Scrapbook*, 20 February 2014, http://politicalscrapbook.net/2014/02/jobcentre-awarded-staff-gold-stars-for-sanctioning-claimants/).

[16] See Stephen Davis' attempt to do this (Davis 2001: 73–89), and John Roth's criticisms of such a move (Roth 2001: 97–101).

[17] See, for example, newspaper reports of a man whose disability benefit payments were cut, and who, it has been claimed, "starved to death" as a result (Vicky Smith, "Disabled Man Starved to Death After Benefits Cut When Atos Declared Him Fit for Work," *Mirror*, 28 February 2014, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/disabled-mark-wood-starved-death-3194250).

Arendt's example of Eichmann—while useful for making this shift from the extraordinary to the ordinary—might still act to obscure the relative ordinariness of the sources of evil. Eichmann's job, after all, was to ensure that the trains ran on time to the death camps, and his claims to ignorance were undercut by the fact that he had been an eyewitness to mass murder (Arendt 1963: 87–90). A rather different example might prove helpful at this point, one which focuses on something small and apparently insignificant and whose over-appreciation acts as a means of ignoring one's fundamental responsibilities to the other. In the process, we move some way towards thinking about how reflection on the sources of evil can be used to think seriously about what it means to live well.

Muriel Spark's novel, *The Girls of Slender Means*, opens with the line: "Long ago in 1945 all the nice people in England were poor, allowing for exceptions." ([1963] 2013: 1) This opening sets the tone for what is, apparently, a light-hearted story of a group of genteel young women, rivals in love and for the use of a single designer gown. It ends as a much darker tale. An unexploded bomb, hidden in the garden of the hostel they inhabit, explodes, and a fire ensues. Caught in a tiny bathroom, there is a gap in a window that only the thinnest can negotiate in order to escape. Selina, having escaped, contrives a return. Nicholas—her lover—assumes "she had done this in an attempt to rescue one of the girls, or assist their escape through the window." (122) Nothing could be further from the truth: she reappears clutching the much-fought-over dress, pushes past the distressed girls who remain trapped and exits once more through the window, pausing once she is safely outside to inspect "the condition of her salvaged item." (125) Saving the dress is the priority, not the imminent death of friends.

There is something shocking in Selina's action, something that reflects Arendt's banality of evil: the possibility of becoming desensitized to the things that really matter (such as friendship, love, and compassion), while replacing them with the things that do not (material goods, money, and status). As a result of his horror at Selina's actions, Nicholas takes holy orders, having "witnessed [an] action of savagery so extreme that it forced him involuntarily to make an entirely unaccustomed gesture, the signing of the cross upon himself." (60)

There is, of course, a direct relation, easily identifiable, between the callousness of this one individual and the suffering of her friends, left without hope and without comfort by someone from whom they might expect these things. In responding to this story, we might well console ourselves with the belief that we would not have behaved like Selina. More challenging, perhaps, would be to consider the connections between apparently abstract economic structures and the detrimental impact they have on the lives of others, particularly if we benefit from the inequalities enshrined by such structures.

The setting for Spark's novel is the 'Austerity Britain' of 1945 (see Kynaston 2007). The poverty of that time may not be felt by the rather genteel ladies of the May Tech Hostel in quite the same way as the majority of Britons at that time: Spark's girls are, after all, from the upper middle and upper class. But that is not to say that the rationing

of this period did not influence their actions: their fighting over a rare designer gown only makes sense against the backdrop of limited access to material goods. Indeed, Selina's selfish actions are framed in this context: she might well have behaved differently if surrounded by the material comforts expected in 'normal' times by someone of her class.[18]

This comment is not meant to absolve a spoilt girl of responsibility for her actions. We might feel uncomfortable if highlighting the social context for her actions leads us to this conclusion. At this point it is worth directing attention in a not dissimilar way to the apparently abstract economic and social conditions which have similarly distorting effects upon our relationships with others.

Pierre Bourdieu's work on social suffering offers a way into a complex web of connections that are not easily identifiable and that may well prove unsettling if we like to think of our lives as relatively blameless ([1993] 1999). Bourdieu and his research team conducted interviews with a range of people from disadvantaged social backgrounds who were struggling to cope with "the distress caused by clashing interests, orientations, and lifestyles." ([1993] 1999: 4) Reproduced in their entirety, these interviews allowed the voices of groups rarely heard to speak of their struggles and anxieties. Through these interviews, Bourdieu presents "the social macrocosm" ([1993] 1999: 4) against which people live out their lives. Suffering is placed, as a result, within a 'social order'.

Bourdieu's analysis can make for uncomfortable reading for those of us whose lives benefit from unequal economic and social relations. As Bourdieu shows, tensions in personal and social relations are located in the experiences of unemployment, social change, and shifts in global industry and finance. As Bourdieu details the effects of global and social trends on the lives of individuals and families, it is difficult not to be reminded of familiar terms, such as 'restructuring', 'economic downturn', and 'rationalizing the workforce', that pepper political discussion in today's own 'Age of Austerity'. The use of such abstract terms for describing economic conditions and their effects on working practices masks the extent to which such processes impact upon the lives of individuals and their social relations.

Spark and Bourdieu can be read, then, as extending Arendt's analysis in different, but interlocking, ways. Spark's story challenges us to reflect upon the way we conduct our own personal relationships, and particularly the things that get in the way of taking seriously the needs of the other. In Bourdieu's research, complex and easily ignored structural features are related to the day-to-day sufferings of people with whom we share social space. A socially engaged philosophy will need to connect critical reflection upon our intimate, personal relationships with political critique. At the heart of a critique of this kind is the question central to the hermeneutics of suspicion proffered by Ricoeur's 'Masters of Suspicion': Who benefits? Asking that question may well

[18] In this sense Selina's actions could be interpreted through Bernard Williams' notion of 'moral luck' (1981: 20–39).

reveal the extent to which we are far from blameless ourselves, that we are, in fact, beneficiaries of advantages built upon the sufferings of others.

To consider the problem of evil as an ethical one necessitates, then, the kind of critical reflection that challenges both personal behaviour and social structures. At the heart of second-wave feminism was the claim that 'the personal is political'. In order for us to address what Bourdieu tellingly describes as 'the weight of the world', experienced by many, the way in which we conduct our lives—personally and politically—must be at the heart of our enquiry. Critical reflection, grounded in social analysis, enables the disruption of assumptions and attitudes. It is this that allows for an approach to evil that holds out the possibility of transformation: of self and society.

Philosophy of Religion and the Work of Transformation

Identifying the conditions for evil is vital, but for the ethical dimension to become central it is necessary to respond to the challenge evil poses for human relationships. It is here that I turn explicitly to the philosophy of religion, for it is a discipline that can provide a creative space for enabling the work of personal and social transformation.

To recognize the complex web of personal and social connections that supports the perpetuation of suffering should not be the end of the process for an ethical philosophy. The next step to be taken is to turn our attention to the attitudes, behaviours, and social structures that enable flourishing for the many, not just for the few. To bring about social change that addresses the root causes of evil a fundamental reorientation of the self towards others and the world is required.

To reorientate the self requires remaking relationships with others and the world. And it is the notion of reorientation that is at the heart of religious theorizing and practice. The very word 'religion' suggests something of this activity. There is a disputed definition which traces it to *religare*, meaning literally 'to bind'. This sums up neatly the most laudable of the desires that drive religious practice and belief. Religion involves the attempt to connect: with others and with the universe. To bind ourselves to others and the world means addressing the current structures of society as well as our daily lives together.

To reorient the self requires critical reflection: in Arendt's terms, it requires the cultivation of thoughtfulness. That philosophy of religion offers space for critical reflection is a point hardly worth making. Yet it is worth pausing for a moment to consider *why* this kind of critical thought matters. Michèle Le Doeuff, feminist philosopher and activist, poses the question in the following way:

> We have to wonder what we are doing when we teach … Does our teaching have negative or supportive impact? Is it of any consequence for the future? *For knowledge either breeds hope or crushes it* when the past serves as a mirror of a desired future, or if one uses 'facts' to define and defend a norm for today and for the future. (Le Doeuff 2003: 82–3, emphasis added)

Because she is interested in the social effect of thought, Le Doeuff grounds critical reflection in the ordinary tasks of living, for here its transformative power can be felt.

Critical thought, she argues, holds out the possibility of freeing the individual from what she calls the 'cognitive blockages' that ensnare them. She provides an example of what this means from her work as a feminist activist:

> A woman phones a domestic violence hotline: "I'm calling because…my husband, no, no, he isn't violent, but I'm worried…I'm wondering whether he might become violent. Last night I didn't feel like having sex, and I said so. Then he got a knife from the kitchen, held it to my throat, and forced me to have sex like that. I think he might become violent." It is quite usual for feminist centres to receive calls like this one, which both attest to the outrages inflicted on women and signal a kind of cognitive blockage. This woman was incapable of recognising violence for what it was, even when she was experiencing it. (Le Doeuff 2003: xv)

Enabling space for critical reflection allows for the sources of suffering to be identified *in order that they are challenged*. And for an effective challenge to be made, the practice of judgement is required: on the actions of others and, crucially, on ourselves (Midgley [1984] 2001: 49–73, 117–35).

Effective judgement requires resisting the desire to project all that is wrong out of the self and onto others. According to Melanie Klein (1975), psychic development hinges on the movement between the 'paranoid-schizoid' and 'depressive' positions. In the first stage of infant psychic development, the child learns to separate what is felt as evil from what is experienced as good; this is done by projecting onto the m/other all that is felt as bad. In the second stage, the child learns to take back both possibilities for evil *and* goodness into the self. This process—which Klein relates to maturity—suggests the importance of judging ourselves, our attitudes, and our limitations. We must be self-critical, as well as critical of the societal structures and actions of others which support injustice.

As Arendt and Midgley contend, the problem of evil can be addressed to some extent through cultivating this kind of critical self-awareness. Habitual behaviours—ours and others—can be challenged, and, as a result, different perspectives developed. Developing this way of thinking cannot be taken for granted; it must form part of our daily practice. Here, the significance of spiritual or religious practice comes to the fore. We might think of the Stoic understanding of philosophy as a form of spiritual exercise that enshrines attitudes towards life in this world (Hadot 1995). Alternatively, we might think of Bonhoeffer's claim that in a world come of age Christian practice will consist only of "prayer and righteous action." (Bonhoeffer 1971: 300) These claims emanate from widely different contexts but reflect broadly similar forms of practice. Reflective practice is not separate from how we live but connects our life with that of others, and necessitates living in such a way that we recognize our obligations to the other. What begins as a form of individual praxis allows for the kind of activity capable of transforming the world.

Gillian Evans' (2006) study on educational failure and working-class white children in Britain shows something of the possibilities open to this kind of socially engaged critical reflection. Evans' ethnographic research arose from her desire to understand

the community of a housing estate in London's Bermondsey with whom she lived. Evans' analysis focuses on the description of a complex web of social relationships—along with the political policies and school practices—that act to enshrine the experience of failure in the children of this estate.

The method she employs is fascinating. She describes her relationships with particular families, the practices of the local school, and her developing relationships with the children she is studying. She allows the experience to challenge her own attitudes and beliefs, often in uncomfortable and disturbing ways (Evans 2006: 45–7). Ultimately, however, she goes beyond simply *describing* a set of social conditions, and offers concrete proposals for the kind of educational practices, rooted in an understanding of social conditions, which she believes would transform the experiences of children growing up on such estates. The possibility of changing society in very practical ways grows out of her work of critique.[19]

Now, we might say that this form of academic practice does not cohere with the aims of philosophy of religion; that philosophy of religion is primarily concerned with the analysis of ideas, not with the transformation of the political and social world. This is to ignore voices that suggest alternative models for the discipline: most notably, Grace Jantzen's revisioning of philosophy of religion as a practice that enables the cultivation of flourishing. For Jantzen (1998: 204), the philosophy of religion should be reframed as a form of practice that "enables the divine." By this, she means creating a space for exploring themes that relate directly to the social world. And so she highlights the importance of considering what makes for trustworthy communities, how to affect justice for others, and how to create a sustainable relationship with the planet. To pursue such themes necessitates praxis as well as reflection. Philosophy of religion becomes a practice of living, not just a way of thinking. Pursuing this socially embedded vision of the subject enables a sense of its importance to emerge. It provides a context for identifying the things that hinder flourishing. But it has the potential to do more than this, encouraging the kind of connections that make for human flourishing.

Conclusion: Evil and How to Live Well

The problem of evil is at its most potent when it challenges the way we live. Its urgency is felt, not in the attempt to justify the ways of God to humans, but in the way it forces reflection on the conditions and attitudes that hinder human flourishing.[20] Thinking critically about the conditions that make for injustice and that support the suffering of individuals and communities provides the basis for an engaged philosophy committed to seeking better ways of living for all. A critical philosophy does more than provide the context for the work of deconstruction: rigorous analysis enables forms of living to emerge that have the potential to transform the world of political and social relationships.

[19] See especially Evans (2006: 158) for a synopsis of her proposals.

[20] We might want to expand the notion of flourishing to include the flourishing of other animals and the planet itself; see Goodchild (2002).

An approach to evil located in the area of ethics cannot avoid dealing with the effect that structures and practices have on individuals and communities. At the same time, it necessitates thinking seriously about the way in which our individual ways of living challenge or enshrine the kind of practices and attitudes that lead so many to experience life as harsh and uncaring.

If we wish to think seriously about how best to live, the question that Grace Jantzen posed for the discipline is a useful one: How might the philosophies of religion we develop support human flourishing? Rather than shy away from this question, philosophers of religion should rise to its challenge, for we are well placed to engage with the problems that beset our age: poverty, the effects of impersonal markets on individuals and communities, the self-interest promoted by consumer capitalism, the looming global disaster of climate change. Through the study of evil we can help develop a form of discourse and a kind of practice that enable better ways of living, based upon an appreciation of the importance of finding fresh ways of orientating ourselves to others and the world.

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Response to Clack

Yujin Nagasawa

The focus of Beverley Clack's paper goes beyond my expertise. In this reply, therefore, I list only what I find helpful in her proposal and raise two questions calling for clarification of important points about the framework.

I agree with Clack's claim that philosophy should not be, "by its very nature, a practice disengaged from the everyday task of living." The philosophy of religion, in particular, addresses important issues that have direct relevance to how we live. The problem of evil is one of the paradigmatic examples of such issues, so it is ironic that philosophers of religion tend to focus solely on the intellectual aspect of the problem, namely, the compatibility between the existence of God and the existence of evil.

I find Clack's discussion of evil as an outcome of social relationships, which she claims are shaped by political constructions, useful. In citing Auschwitz as an example she illustrates vividly her point that while it is important to address horrendous evil realized through large-scale injustices, it is problematic to place it "outside the realm of day-to-day activities." When we look at history, horrendous evils caused by humans are often indirect outcomes of acts that initially appear relatively insignificant or even harmless. Hence, social and political considerations seem to be crucial for analysing evil.

I now move on to raise two questions about Clack's framework. First, I do not see exactly what philosophers of religion can do if they try to work within Clack's new framework on the problem of evil. In her framework, the problem of evil is no longer a problem concerning the compatibility of the existence of God with the existence of

evil. It is instead a problem concerning the existence of evil as a consequence of social and political structures and personal relationships. I can see that philosophers in such areas as social philosophy, political philosophy, and applied and normative ethics can make contributions to the debate within this framework. I can also see that religious practitioners can contribute to the debate because, as Clack says, "religion involves the attempt to connect: with others and with the universe." Yet I do not see very clearly what *philosophers of religion* in particular, that is, philosophers whose main interests are in rigorous analysis of religious beliefs and concepts, can do given that the problem of evil within Clack's framework no longer involves (at least directly) belief in the existence of God. Perhaps Clack's aim is to transform the debate over the problem of evil in the philosophy of religion into a new discipline, which might be called the 'philosophy of evil', but if so, I want to know what the role of philosophers of religion would be in the new discipline.

Second, I want to understand the place of natural evil in Clack's framework. Regarding natural evil she writes: "Indeed, for the vast majority of feminists—and specifically for ecofeminists—the notion of physical or 'natural' evil is a misnomer. The natural processes that make human life possible cannot be described as 'evil', even if their effects are felt in human suffering." However, at the same time, she writes (in footnote 2): "While we might well argue that evil and suffering are separate issues—the former dealing with metaphysical questions about the nature of the universe, the latter with the lived experience of evils, natural and moral—in practice, the two categories are invariably blurred in the discussions of philosophers and theodicists." Perhaps 'evil' is an inappropriate term with which to characterize pain and suffering caused by natural disasters, because we cannot ascribe moral terms to nature, which is not a moral agent. Nonetheless, we cannot set aside the countless instances of so-called natural evil that we observe every day around the world. I would like to know how this problem can be addressed within Clack's new framework. She might claim that her framework is meant to address only so-called moral evil, but existential concerns are often raised by so-called natural evil as well. One of the weaknesses of the mainstream debate over the problem of evil in the philosophy of religion seems to me to be that participants pay too much attention to moral evil and tend to forget natural evil. I wonder if Clack's framework suffers from the same weakness.

Response to Clack

Terrence W. Tilley

I have long been baffled by the wild misunderstandings of Arendt's provocative phrase, 'the banality of evil'. But Clack's essay seems to me to get it right. Eichmann was a banal man doing banal things in a banal office. What Arendt reveals is how bureaucratic blinders can limit the range of our vision and of our taking responsibility for our

actions if we do not problematize them. It is the power of "apparently neutral social structures" like bureaucracy that enables blindness and the irresponsibility of folk like Eichmann—and perhaps of all of us, at least sometimes, since we cannot avoid or interrogate all our practices, roles, and situations.

Clack highlights 'thoughtlessness'. I quite agree. But what is the remedy? How can we valorize *thoughtfulness*? The first part of the remedy, I suggest, comes from Iris Murdoch: we need to develop our *vision*. Before we can make moral judgements, we need to see what is going on.[21] Such thoughtfulness can be painful, especially if we are comfortable in our social locations. The second part of the remedy is the development of *self-aware wisdom*. In other contexts (see Tilley 1995, 2004), I have noted that we live in a world in which we cannot avoid internalizing and participating in practices that make demands on us. For example, I play multiple roles: spouse, parent, teacher, writer, historian, theologian, administrator, etc. Such roles carry role-specific responsibilities. Sometimes these responsibilities conflict—a recipe for one's affliction by tragedy.

Yet I am a *person* who has responsibilities regardless of my role.[22] Eichmann may have been a splendid train scheduler and was a 'good' bureaucrat who engaged in some role-specific responsibilities well. But he did not step outside his roles to consider the conflicts among his *role-specific* responsibilities or between them and his *personal* responsibilities to other persons which may override one's role-specific responsibilities. Neither did Selina, who pursued the object of her desire at the expense of taking any responsibility for any others. Both (willingly?) accepted without interrogation the blinders that enabled them to act horribly.

Self-aware wisdom requires one to develop the ability to see through one's desires and role-specific responsibilities to one's person-specific responsibilities. Occasionally, at least, we cannot avoid tragic choices between incommensurable goods or responsibilities. But in some circumstances the painful and imponderably difficult resolution of such conflicts may be to see how to fulfil one's person-specific responsibilities as a way through the competing claims of one's various desires and role-specific responsibilities—as a wise, self-aware person does.

However, Clack brings out the point that at least some institutions and communities may carry the structural evil of blinding us to our more fundamental responsibilities and disabling our development of wisdom. A wise person works to preserve the institutions which carry, and the communities which display and proclaim, the practices which teach critical wisdom; and works to change those institutions and communities which undermine the exercises of self-aware wisdom and the people who understand person-specific responsibilities. Once one is aware of the social barriers to knowledge

[21] Ethicist Stanley Hauerwas showed the significance of this point early in his career. See Hauerwas (1974).

[22] That these are exceedingly difficult to specify is obvious, but that problem does not undermine the point being made here. In Tilley (2004), I argued that one's religious responsibilities, including critical and constructive understandings of one's faith tradition, are person-, not role-, specific.

and wisdom,[23] one works to change them where appropriate. Perhaps one can conceive of this as working to instantiate a community that takes as an ideal something like Habermas' ideal speech situation crossed with Rawls' original position.

So what is wisdom in the face of structural evil? In short, a truly wise person would be one who envisioned and advocated ways to engage wisely in those practices which were carried by empowering institutions and learned in communities that make as one of their constitutive goals the sort of vision that empowers creative reproduction and critical reformation of seemingly wise practices, and that puts persons ahead of roles (while recognizing the utter necessity of the roles we play as social beings).

Clack shows the power of narratives.[24] I want to comment on one story inevitably cited in the discourse of theodicy: Ivan Karamazov's 'Rebellion'. People forget that Dostoevsky claimed that the whole novel was his response to Ivan's challenge.[25] I want to suggest that such forgetfulness is akin to what Clack calls 'blindness'.

Ivan displays an 'apparently neutral' epistemology. Ivan's style is one of stubborn (and ultimately horrendously inconsistent) epistemic detachment. In contrast, Alyosha displays a flexible and practical problem-solving epistemology, even conspiring to arrange Mitya's illegal escape after his trial. Ivan's 'neutral' rationalism cannot resolve problems, while Alyosha's reasonable involvement can and does. A basic conflict in *The Brothers Karamzov* is not 'faith vs reason', as many modern interpreters insist, but Ivan's 'apparently neutral' epistemic stance versus Alyosha's commitment to solving problems.[26]

If you begin with Ivan's hearsay reports of observations, 'you can't get there from here', if 'here' is the commitment to dealing with the systemic conditions for real evil,

[23] See Code (1991) for an analysis.

[24] Clack reminds us that stories—whether great novels, police procedurals on television, or films in theaters—shape our vision. Alas, some of the stories we read or see—or live in and live out—constrict our vision. Yet others open us up to see what is actually there. Clack's narratives imaginatively open us up to becoming more thoughtful.

[25] Cf. Frank (2010: 213). Frank ignores epistemic issues while highlighting moral ones; at other places this great scholar also endorsed the 'faith vs reason' understanding I find troublesome.

[26] Ivan's epistemic stance is situated 'outside the fray'. Early in the novel, Fr. Paissy says that Ivan is "toying out of despair with your magazine articles and drawing-room discussions, without believing in your own dialectics and smirking at them with your heart aching inside you." (Dostoevsky 1990: 70) Ivan does not reject Fr. Paissy's portrayal of Ivan's own article on church and state. Ivan also accepts Fr. Paissy's account of Ivan's beliefs about virtue and immortality. But Ivan's narration of the horrors in 'Rebellion' consists of 'hearsay' stories about events he neither witnessed nor participated in. Ivan's epistemic stance is that of the modern observer, a clinically neutral and detached investigator (and this anticipates another 'apparently neutral' influential story in philosophy of religion that valorizes detached neutrality, the story of the wanderers who come upon a neglected garden, featured in Wisdom 1957). In contrast, Alyosha is *involved*—even to the point of being stabbed by a boy in the process of solving the children's problems, an incident that leads to reconciliation, a resolution of the problems, even, perhaps, a recasting of relationships among them. His facilitation of his brother Mitya's escape from Russia has arguably freed Mitya from structures that have oppressed him. Few commentators problematize the psychological, social, and epistemic position of Ivan. My view is that one needs to start with the person of self-aware wisdom—and its necessarily connected compassion—if one wants to change the structures that make both banal evils and horrors possible. I hope to make an argument for this view of the significance of 'Alyosha's Reason' during my next research leave.

banal or otherwise. Perhaps starting with Alyosha's wisdom cannot 'get you there' either. But a vision of involvement with the resolution of problems of suffering seems a more useful starting point for social transformation than does 'apparently neutral' detached observation. And if Alyosha is a wise person, as described, perhaps there is no better place to start from.

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Response to Clack

Andrew Gleeson

I welcome Beverley Clack's introduction of Hannah Arendt's concept of *thoughtlessness* into the discussion of the problem of evil. Arendt had in mind the time-serving or careerist functionary, conscientiously performing an administrative task in a totalitarian bureaucracy, eyes and heart closed to the horrors of the system they serve. But thoughtlessness is not confined to 'organization men' of limited abilities. It is also characteristic of ideological zealots and criminal thugs. Could intellectuals, and even philosophers, be guilty of it? Well, what is thoughtlessness? Clack describes thought*ful*ness as that which connects "one's actions to effects felt in the lives of others," and later she glosses thought*less*ness as the incapacity to make a "connection between [one's] actions and the fate of others." 'Thoughtlessness' here is being used in that ordinary sense in which I say that someone has acted or spoken without regard for others: 'I'm sorry, that was so thoughtless of me'.

Intellectuals and philosophers are indeed not immune to thoughtlessness in this sense. As the case of the Nazi sympathies of Arendt's own philosophical mentor,

Martin Heidegger, shows, it exists in people of significant intellectual accomplishment. And it can be present not just in *them*, but in their *thought*. How can *thought* be thought*less*? The paradox is dispelled when we recall that thoughtlessness, as Clack defined it, is a failure of one *kind* of thought (there are other kinds, of course): attention to others, or more broadly to the human implications of what one thinks. Plenty of intellectual activity has been obviously thoughtless in this sense, e.g., intellectualized racism. But there is a more elusive and interesting form this failure of thought can take in intellectual life: the radical *dissociation* of thought from its ostensible subject-matter. This happens when problems that are human and personal are interpreted as abstract and impersonal. Stanley Cavell has called this phenomenon 'deflection'. His favourite example is modern philosophy's construal of our relationship to the world and one another as fundamentally one of 'knowing'. Do I know, and how do I know (can I prove?), that there is an external world, or that 'other bodies' have minds? The questions ignite doubts philosophers have not silenced. The moral, Cavell says, is not that we are radically ignorant, but that our basic relationship to the world and one another is not that of knowing, not that of proving or failing to prove. Rather, he speaks of it as one of *acceptance* (of the world) and *acknowledgement* (of one another). Seeing that others suffer pain, for example, requires more than just holding that they have internal causes (with a certain qualitative feel) for certain bodily motions, which is the most the argument from analogy (or its contemporary sophistications) might establish. It requires that *I acknowledge* the implicit demands that another's suffering makes upon me, acknowledgement that can variously be made in sympathy, charity, pity, anguish, or guilt.

So is there deflection in philosophy of religion, in particular in discussion of the problem of evil? In *A Frightening Love: Recasting the Problem of Evil* (2012), I offer examples of philosophers saying things about God and evil that are radically disconnected from life, often things deeply at odds with the way their lives doubtless proceed outside the seminar room: for example, things about inflicting or permitting terrible evils for the sake of greater goods. I argue that this arises from a pervasive conception of what serious thought is, viz., that it is answerable only to the narrow criteria of logical reasoning, rationality, factual information, and the methods and results of the physical, social, and formal sciences. On this conception serious thought is essentially impersonal or anonymous. It is of no importance *who* does the thinking, so long as that thinking conforms to the ideal. In particular it does not matter (as far as getting the right answer, or an acceptable answer, goes) that *I* do the thinking; in principle I can hand the problem over to someone else—a better thinker than me, an expert—who can discover the answer for me. Judgements which cannot be mandated by the criteria outlined here are suspect: e.g., the judgements that someone's thought is *sentimental*, or *world-weary*, or *banal*, or *self-aggrandizing*, or even just something that *I*, speaking only for myself, *cannot* (or *must*) endorse. These very different, humanistic criteria for good thinking are ubiquitous outside the academy when dealing with morality, art, or religion. But many sectors of the academic world—much philosophy,

but also much in the field of literary studies—try hard to distance themselves from them. Hence the marked reluctance, of which I give several examples in *Frightening Love*, of some philosophers to make their speculative thought about God and evil accountable not just to 'argument' (the impersonal criteria) but also to powerful literary examples and autobiographical testimony, any serious discussion of which is necessarily informed by attention to wider, humanistic criteria for appraising thought.

The literature on the problem of evil articulates and privileges the impersonal conception of thought in the nearly universal distinction made between the intellectual problem of evil, on the one hand, and the personal or existential problem on the other. The former is the special bailiwick of philosophers, and is a cognitive matter; the latter is the affair of pastors and counsellors, a practical, affective, and personal matter. As I contend in my position paper for this volume, the intellectual problem of evil is a scholastic distortion of the existential problem. The routine distinction the literature makes between the two problems encapsulates nicely the *deflection* in philosophy of the latter on to the former. It is that deflection, with its dissociation of philosophical thought from what Wittgenstein called the "rough ground" of our lives, which makes it possible for there to be an *absence* of thought—specifically of existential thought, thought answerable to the humanistic criteria just noted—in thought that is otherwise highly sophisticated. This is a very specific and distinctively intellectualized kind of failure in thinking. Because of it, some philosophers have said things about evil that fail to take its reality seriously. But just because this is a form of failure in thinking that disconnects philosophical thought from life, there is no reason to think it reflects on the philosopher *as a human being*. Dissociation in thought may be present without dissociation in the thinker.

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Reply to Nagasawa

Beverley Clack

I found many of Nagasawa's comments helpful for developing an approach to evil which focuses on its emergence from social relations, not least because the questions he raises allow me to expand on aspects of my approach not detailed in my position paper.

Nagasawa raises two questions about my approach. His second focuses on the place of natural evil in my argument. I do not intend to add anything substantive to the comments made in my paper. I remain unconvinced as to the propriety of ascribing

'evil' to natural processes which impact upon humans in often terrible ways, but which are a fundamental part of the natural, living world. If I held to the kind of theistic position which suggests a personal agent responsible for creation, suffering resulting from these natural processes would obviously constitute a problem. As I do not, natural evil does not pose a problem for the religious position I espouse; though it will, of course, demand a practical response to the sufferings of others.

I confine my remarks to his first question, and specifically to this comment: "I do not see exactly what philosophers of religion can do if they try to work within Clack's new framework on the problem of evil." He goes on to say that "philosophers in such areas as social philosophy, political philosophy, and applied and normative ethics can make contributions to the debate within this framework." Similarly, he sees 'religious practitioners' having a role; but, he continues, "I do not see very clearly what *philosophers of religion* in particular, that is, philosophers whose main interests are in rigorous analysis of religious beliefs and concepts, can do given that the problem of evil within Clack's framework no longer involves (at least directly) belief in the existence of God" (emphasis in original).

Here we run up against an entrenched problem in Anglo-American philosophy of religion: that there is only one way of doing the subject, and, moreover, only one way of understanding 'God'. God is identified as a being whose existence can be proved (or, at least, supported by rational argument). I say little explicitly about God in my Position Statement, so let me go some way towards rectifying this omission.

The ethical approach to the problem of evil that I advocate is not unrelated to the account of God given by Stewart Sutherland in his *God, Jesus and Belief* (1984). God is not a being whose existence could be proved in much the same way that I could prove the existence of my cat. Rather, 'God' is the name we give to the fact that the world is such that it can support goodness, that self-sacrifice and bravery are possible, and that such altruistic features give the lie to the claim that 'the survival of the fittest' is the only way of explaining our world.

'God' for Sutherland and myself is thus identifiable with a principle for ethical action made possible by the way the world is. This God is intimately connected to the necessity of practicing the ethical life. Grounding this God in the facts of existence is reminiscent of the claims Paul Tillich made back in the 1950s concerning the two types of philosophy of religion. Tillich argued that there was an 'ontological' and a 'cosmological' form of the subject. For the ontological approach, God is not the *object* of our questioning but the *basis* of all questioning (Tillich 1959: 13). For the cosmological approach, God ceases to be encountered as 'Being-Itself' and instead is viewed as a particular being whose existence and nature can be established through argument (1959: 19).

Tillich's concern was that in neglecting the ontological approach to God, those committed to the latter, more dominant form of the discipline ignore the *existential* meaning of God. God is not a being, but 'Being Itself', the 'Ground of All Being', the 'Ultimate Concern' for human beings. Our reasoning about such a God cannot be separated out

from the totality of our lived response. "*Man* [sic], not his cognitive function alone, is aware of the Unconditioned." (1959: 24, emphasis in original) Indeed, for Tillich, dealing with God as a being whose existence could be proved was as atheistic as denying the existence of that being (Tillich 1951: 237).

Crucially, for my purposes, Tillich suggests that the work of the philosopher of religion who starts ontologically involves challenging all attempts to move "something conditioned, a symbol, an institution, a movement as such to ultimacy." (1959: 29) Tillich's words resonate for our times. I write this in 2016, a year which has seen the rise of what commentators are calling the 'alt-right', and what the philosopher Cornel West has called 'neofascism'. I am not convinced that philosophers of religion can leave the opposition to such movements to other colleagues in other disciplinary areas, not least because it is religious groups that are providing much of the support for those who would ride roughshod over the rights of others. Tillich's resistance to the Nazi regime led to the loss of his post at Frankfurt and his eventual relocation to the United States. Other philosophers—most notably Martin Heidegger and Gottlob Frege—singularly failed to challenge the evil of their times and the threat it posed to those deemed outside the pale. How we as *philosophers* respond to the conditions that allow evil to take hold is a question of vital importance for the integrity of the discipline we practice.

What form of action would best suit philosophers of religion? First, we need to interrogate the values embodied in our accounts of the divine. To what extent do such values support the flourishing of all and the planet? Secondly, in an age where politics is increasingly determined by raw and often fact-free emotion, the task of the philosopher of religion could not be more important: namely, to continue to ask critical questions, and to assert the importance of clear thinking, in religion as well as in all the ways in which we shape our life together in this world.

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Reply to Tilley

Beverley Clack

Tilley has identified two key aspects of my paper, and I am grateful for the way in which his comments extend my position.

First, he addresses Arendt's description of the 'banality of evil', which he connects to limitations in the scope of a person's moral vision. When I emphasize the negative aspects of bureaucratic systems, it may seem that I have neglected their seductive

quality. When all is systematized, when someone or something—the Management, the Institution, the Government—is 'in control', it seems possible to evade responsibility for the effect *my* actions have on the lives of others. It is a hard thing to look beyond the parameters of what we do, to accept that there are obligations that we each have toward the other. As Tilley rightly says, "I am a person who has responsibilities *regardless of my role*" (emphasis added). His words are reminiscent of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. When Scrooge encounters the ghost of his business partner, Jacob Marley, wrapped in the chains that reveal those moments in life when he failed to respond to the needs of others, Scrooge seeks to lessen his old friend's burden by excusing his actions: "But you were always a good man of business, Jacob!" Marley's response is to angrily exclaim: "Business! . . . Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!" (Dickens [1843] 2016: 24).

These words seem surprisingly pertinent, given that they were written some 150 years ago. Since the 1980s, Western societies have increasingly subscribed to the tenets of neoliberal economics. In contrast to the Keynesian shaping of an active and enabling state in response to the devastation of the Second World War, neoliberal economics (shaped by the theories of such figures as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman) stem from the belief that the best way of achieving human well-being is to promote policies which enable greater individual and economic freedom, and private initiative. The Market is given principal place in this system, taking on the role of the supreme value for shaping and regulating human society.

That 'secular man' should think nothing of bowing before the power of this mythical construction, 'The Market', suggests a desperate need for the 'self-aware wisdom' Tilley describes. In making this point Tilley, secondly, opens up my attempt to locate the problem of evil in the realm of ethics. For an economy based on the need to consume in order to be successful, the individual must be encouraged to think of themselves and their desires as all-important; then businesses offering services or goods that meet those desires will be able to flourish. How to be 'self-aware' in a context which actively promotes this kind of self-*centred* individualism? The irony is that consumerism does not deliver the kind of happiness it is supposed to, as levels of mental illness and dissatisfaction in Western economies seem to suggest.[27]

Against this neoliberal backdrop, the needs of the other come to be felt as encroachments on one's freedom. The other is seen as a burden or as a competitor who must be overcome. Yet as studies suggest, people are happier when they feel a sense of connection to others and the world.[28] What role might there be for philosophy in cultivating

[27] See Layard (2011). Layard begins by acknowledging that rising standards of living have not made people significantly happier—a fact that continues to trouble Western governments.

[28] A recent documentary, *The Age of Loneliness*, broadcast by BBC on 7 January 2016 and produced by Wellpark Productions, suggested just this. It should be noted, of course, that there is a difference between 'loneliness' and 'being alone', with those like Sara Maitland writing powerfully about the importance of both the latter and of silence. See Maitland (2009, 2014).

the kind of attitudes conducive to human flourishing? Here we arrive at Tilley's helpful clarifications of the kind of transformative philosophical practice I seek. Tilley suggests that there is a difference between an apparently 'neutral rationalism' and a 'reasonable involvement'. In illuminating this position, he turns to Dostoyevsky's Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov. Rightly he reads them, not as representing the old 'faith versus reason' debate, but as offering different responses to human suffering. Ivan may have powerful arguments, but his pessimism enables an easy detachment from the needs of others—a position that stands in stark contrast to Alyosha's responsive attitude to those who are suffering.

Ivan and Alyosha model two different forms of wisdom: Ivan's actions suggest the detachment of the analytic philosopher; Alyosha the lived embodiment of reflective praxis. Like Tilley, I find Dostoyevsky's novice monk, Alyosha, most attractive, and so it makes sense to conclude with a comment about the role of religion in all this. In my paper I said relatively little about the role of religion. Increasingly, however, I have come to believe that adopting a religious framework for one's life enables the cultivation of the kind of reasonable involvement that Tilley equates with wisdom and which I would wish to make central to a transformative philosophy of religion. At a time when ISIS/Daesh reveals the horrors perpetrated in the name of religion, it seems hardly necessary to note that a religious perspective can just as easily add to as it can diminish the sum of suffering in the world. Yet there is something about religious attempts to locate the self in the broader context of the universe that enables ways of living which actively promote the responsibilities we each have for the other. By de-centring the self—which I see as central to religious practice—it becomes possible to resist selfishness, so often at the roots of our failure to live well with others and with the world.

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Reply to Gleeson

Beverley Clack

Gleeson's response demonstrates the importance of critical philosophical thought. Far from being unnecessary or somehow outmoded, rigorous critique of terminology can enable deeper understanding of the scope—as well as limitations—that the notion of thoughtlessness offers to the discussion of evil. The question Gleeson poses—'Can

thought be thoughtless?'—is far from irrelevant, for it prompts further discussion of what it means for a philosopher to engage *seriously* with a problem.

There is much here with which I agree. Like Gleeson, I contend that philosophical method is diminished by the assumption that to engage seriously with something requires the removal of responses that might be considered personal. Contrary to the methods of some philosophers, I do not accept that rendering problems abstract and impersonal means we will arrive at answers approximating most closely 'the truth' of any state of affairs.

Elsewhere, I have identified philosophical practices that lead to the kind of distortion Gleeson details (see Clack 2007). I remain critical of those who would render the kind of existential problems faced by all of us—philosophers and non-philosophers—as outside the scope of 'real' philosophical enquiry. There is, I believe, a particular responsibility placed upon professional philosophers to open up our discourse in ways which enable those outside the academy to gain something from it. And here, the problem of evil and suffering is of real significance, for it is not something that any of us can avoid as we journey through life.

As Gleeson notes, "the intellectual problem of evil is a scholastic distortion of the existential problem": a rather neat way of reversing the normal priority given to analytic considerations of the problem of evil. As he suggests, it is the existential problem that lies at the heart of the issue. When philosophers eschew the lived experience of evil and suffering in favour of 'scholastic' engagements, we should ask questions about the way in which professional philosophers view their practice. We might, for example, challenge the strategies by which philosophical work is deemed important or frivolous, good or bad, taking note of the role taken by professional associations and the peer review process for journals which may act, inadvertently or deliberately, to exclude important contributions from thinkers who lie outside that which is designated the 'mainstream'.

Gleeson's comments, then, prompt me to think about the structures that shape philosophy as a discipline. I am less convinced, however, about his conclusion: "dissociation in thought may be present without dissociation in the thinker." It is, indeed, important not to reduce the work of any philosopher to a virtual beauty pageant where only the ideologically pure and the completely consistent are deemed worthy of study. I am thinking here of the somewhat chequered history of philosophy with regard to racism and sexism. It would, for example, be wrong to dismiss entirely the work of philosophers such as Kant or Hume, who alongside their major contributions to critical thinking rather unthinkingly appropriated the ideas of their day when it came to race and/or gender.[29]

[29] Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* ([1764] 2004) offers a troubling set of reflections about the differences between men and women and between whites and blacks. To be male and to be white emerge as the far better states. Robert Palter (1995) offers detail of the arguments regarding Hume's apparent racism.

At the same time, however, we cannot ignore the way in which 'dissociation in thought' may impact upon the life of the thinker. The French feminist philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff makes a convincing argument for relating Sartre's application of the feminine as a category to his dismissal of Simone de Beauvoir's early attempts at philosophizing. By seeing the feminine as that from which the masculine subject must escape, he makes the possibility of the 'woman philosopher' more difficult—a fact reflected in his rejection of Beauvoir's ideas which she, in turn, internalized. Beauvoir, it should be noted, never again saw herself as a philosopher after that bruising demolition of her ideas. Far from being disconnected, Le Dœuff concludes, Sartre's thought affects his actions (see Le Doeuff 1991: 135–209).

This particular example might be read as showing that, whatever else we think of Sartre, his thought and action cohere. A better example might be Heidegger. Here, we once more run up against the issue of thoughtlessness. He might have been a 'brilliant' philosopher, but his failure to respond to Nazi aggression against Jewish academics (according to some accounts, such as that of Ott (1993), a failure that was more commission than omission) should prompt us to consider quite where his brilliance as a philosopher lies. As Dana Villa (1996: 192) notes, in Heidegger there is "the 'strange alliance' between philosophy and thoughtlessness." Abstract thought of the kind at which Heidegger excelled means little without "care for the world."

The best response to dissociation is to consider the kind of ethical philosophical practice we might cultivate. This requires, I think, an acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the philosopher. I am not a brain-on-a-stick, but a living, embodied person. Can we cultivate a style of writing that takes seriously my place in the world and my struggles, while also enabling critical reflection on what I say and how what I say relates to how I live? Here, the model provided by religious practice may help, for at its best it locates critical reflection within a way of life. There may be no end-point for cultivating thoughtfulness, but this means that what is required is a commitment to live in such a way that thoughtful practice is grounded in a reflective and engaged form of life.

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6

The Problem of Evil for Atheists

Yujin Nagasawa

6.1 Introduction

Atheists often claim that the problem of evil constitutes the most powerful argument against theism. In fact, many of them reject theism and subscribe to atheism precisely because they do not think that theism can successfully respond to this problem. I argue, however, that the problem of evil is not a problem only for theists. In what follows, I try to show that there is a version of the problem of evil—the 'existential problem of systemic evil', as I call it—that applies to both theism *and* atheism. Moreover, I argue that it is particularly forceful against atheism because atheism faces a significant disadvantage compared with theism in responding to this version of the problem.

This chapter has the following structure. In section 6.2, I introduce the 'problem of systemic evil'. This problem initially raises a challenge for theism by showing not only that specific events or specific types of events in the world are evil, but also that the entire biological *system* on which human existence is based is evil. I explain why this problem is more powerful than the standard problem of evil. In section 6.3, I explain that both theists and atheists typically embrace 'existential optimism', which affirms that the world is generally good and that we should be happy and grateful to live in it. In section 6.4, I argue that, by incorporating existential optimism into the problem of systemic evil, we can develop the 'existential problem of systemic evil', which applies to both theism and atheism. In order to show the strength of the problem I contrast it with Janna Thompson's 'apology paradox'. In section 6.5, I argue that the existential problem of systemic evil can be considered a version of the problem of evil especially for *atheists*, because it is significantly more forceful against atheism than it is against theism. Section 6.6 concludes.

6.2 The Problem of Systemic Evil for Theists

Nature is governed by natural selection, which involves competition for survival. For approximately four billion years, uncountably many organisms have competed and struggled for survival. In this cruel, blind system, the weaker are eliminated, and even the survivors will eventually die, often painfully and miserably. This fact raises a significant

challenge for theism because the evil of the biological system seems to be incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent and morally perfect God.[1] One might claim that nature cannot be good or evil, because these properties apply only to moral agents. I can safely set this point aside, because what I say in this essay can be formulated without using the term 'evil'. For example, we can describe nature as a system that involves intense, undesired pain and suffering, rather than a system that is evil. I use the terms 'good' and 'evil' simply for the sake of simplicity.

The claim that pain and suffering in nature raise a challenge for theism is not new. In fact, Charles Darwin himself expressed his perplexity about the cruelty of nature when he introduced the theory of evolution. Darwin considers this problem explicitly regarding the Ichneumonidae, a family of parasitic wasps. These wasps paralyse grasshoppers and caterpillars without killing them. They take the prey into their nests and deposit eggs into the bodies in such a way that their hatchlings can feed on the live bodies of the prey. Darwin finds it difficult to reconcile such cruelty in nature with the theistic worldview. In his letter to Asa Gray, dated 22 May 1860, Darwin writes:

> With respect to the theological view of the question; this is always painful to me.—I am bewildered.—I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see, as plainly as others do, & as I should wish to do, evidence of design & beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent & omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.[2]

One might claim that grasshoppers and caterpillars do not suffer, or at least that their suffering is minimal, because their cognitive and sensory systems are not sophisticated enough. Even if that is true, there are many other examples of cruelty in nature that involve sentient animals. For example, as Darwin mentions in the quote we have looked at, there have been and there will be uncountably many mice that are severely injured and die slowly and painfully as cats play with them.

In an earlier letter to J. D. Hooker, dated 13 July 1856, Darwin writes: "What a book a Devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering low & horridly cruel works of nature!"[3] It might be no exaggeration to compare nature with a small cage in which many animals are placed together so that they desperately fight and kill each other for limited resources until a handful survive. In fact, Darwin's theory of evolution was inspired by Thomas Malthus' book, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*

[1] Throughout this essay, I use the terms 'compatibility' and 'incompatibility' in a broad sense. The problem of evil can be formulated in terms of logical consistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil (the logical problem of evil), or in terms of the evidential value of evil against the existence of God (the evidential problem of evil). When I talk about the compatibility and incompatibility between God and evil in this essay I have in mind both the logical and evidential problems. The distinction between the two problems is not crucial here because what I say applies equally to both.

[2] The full texts of more than 7500 letters of Charles Darwin, including ones quoted in this paper, are available on the website of the Darwin Correspondence Project (http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk).

[3] See Draper (2012) for a detailed discussion of Darwin's view on pain and suffering in nature.

([1798] 1982), in which Malthus argues that the human population would cease growing exponentially after reaching a certain number because the propensity of populations to produce more offspring than can possibly survive with the limited resources available to them causes war, famine, and disease, which would effectively reduce population size. Darwin applies Malthus' insight to the larger domain of biology.

Contemporary scholars share Darwin's sentiment regarding the cruelty of nature. The philosopher Holmes Rolston III (1994: 212), for example, writes: "Though there is no sin in amoral nature, there is quite a list of candidate evils from which nature might need to be redeemed: predation, parasitism, selfishness, randomness, blindness, disaster, indifference, waste, struggle, suffering, death." Similarly, in an interview with Frank Miele, Richard Dawkins, one of the best-known contemporary champions of the theory of evolution, says:

> [N]atural selection is out there and it is a very unpleasant process. Nature is red in tooth and claw. But I don't want to live in that kind of a world. I want to change the world in which I live in such a way that natural selection no longer applies. (Miele 1995)

Dawkins' claim that he does not want to live in a world governed by natural selection is illuminating because it makes us realize vividly how cruel nature is. Imagine a society which involves extreme competition for survival all the time. People in this society constantly fight for limited resources, assaulting and killing each other in order to steal food and other goods. Those who survive are the selfish and physically strong ones whose main concern is their own survival. Those who are disadvantaged, such as the elderly, the poor, and the handicapped, have no hope for survival. Nature seems to be comparable to this kind of society, in which few would wish to live. One might think that these descriptions of nature are exaggerated, because even in the worst cases humans have never lived in such a cruel survival game of beasts. Even if that is true, it should still be acknowledged that billions of other sentient animals have lived and will live in such conditions and that our human existence depends on it. Moreover, from a larger historical point of view, humans *are* products of a long evolutionary process, which has involved a long series of violent, cruel, and unfair competitions among our animal ancestors.

Contemporary philosophers, such as Quentin Smith (1991) and Paul Draper (1989, 2012), have also developed and defended the use of natural selection as an argument against theism, and such theistic philosophers as Trent Dougherty (2014), Michael J. Murray (2008) and Christopher Southgate (2008) have tried to respond to them. But I want to emphasize an important point that is often overlooked in the literature. That is, the cruelty of nature raises a form of the problem of evil that is fundamentally different from other forms of the problem. The problem of evil standardly focuses on specific *events* that are considered evil (e.g., the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, the Boxing Day tsunami in Southeast Asia, etc.) or specific *types of events* (e.g., wars, murders, rapes, earthquakes, floods, etc.). But the problem in question suggests not only that specific events or specific types of events are evil but also that

the entire biological *system* on which nature is based is fundamentally evil. Hence, I call it the 'problem of systemic evil'. The problem of systemic evil is more forceful than the standard problem of evil because, again, it is focused on something more fundamental than specific events or types of events that are deemed evil. Even if theodicies successfully undermine the standard problem of evil by explaining away the evil of specific events or specific types of events, the underlying systemic evil remains.

6.3 Existential Optimism

Let us set aside the problem of systemic evil for the moment and consider what I call 'existential optimism'. 'Existential optimism' is the thesis according to which the world is, overall, a good place and we should be grateful for our existence in it.

The first chapter of the Book of Genesis describes God's creation of humans and animals, and reports, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (Genesis 1:31) Leibniz's well-known claim that this is the best of all possible worlds might be too extreme, but virtually all theists agree that *overall* this is a good world, indeed, a very good world. Happiness and gratitude, therefore, seem to be natural reactions, from a theistic perspective. The Bible is indeed filled with expressions of thanks to God:

> Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. (Ps 118:1)

> Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:20)

> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (Jas 1:17)

Theistic philosophers commonly echo these expressions and thereby embrace existential optimism. They think that we owe thanks and worship to God for creating and sustaining our existence. Thomas V. Morris (1984: 261), for example, endorses existential optimism by contending that "We . . . have a duty to worship God and be thankful for his benefits." In a similar vein, Robert Merrihew Adams (1972: 324) writes, "People who worship God do not normally praise him for his moral rectitude and good judgment in creating *us*. They thank God for their existence as for an undeserved personal favor" (emphasis in original). Richard Swinburne (1981: 126) even goes as far as to say that worship is not only an appropriate expression of existential optimism but an obligatory reaction to God: "Worship is obligatory—it is the proper response of respect by man to his creator."

Existential optimism, however, is not just for theists. Atheists can in principle also endorse it, because it does not require any commitment to theism. And, as a matter of fact, most atheists do endorse it.

Atheists are often caricatured as negative, nihilistic, pessimistic people who think that life is miserable or absurd. Their ontology is limited to the material universe and, according to the caricature, they think that there is nothing about our mortal existence for which we should feel happy or grateful. There certainly are atheists of this

kind. David Benatar, for example, holds that coming into existence is always a serious harm. He writes:

> Although the good things in one's life make it go better than it otherwise would have gone, one could not have been deprived by their absence if one had not existed. Those who never exist cannot be deprived. However, by coming into existence one does suffer quite serious harms that could not have befallen one had one not come into existence. (Benatar 2006: 1)

Benatar derives from this observation the proposition that it is morally wrong to procreate and, hence, that the optimal number of humans is exactly zero. It would be better, he says, all things being equal, if human extinction were to happen sooner rather than later.

There are, however, very few atheists who are so pessimistic and nihilistic. As far as I know, many, if not most, atheists think that we have good reason to think that the world is generally good and that we should be happy and grateful that we live in it. Atheist optimists maintain that even though they do not believe in the existence of God or the afterlife it is still rational for them to be happy and grateful that they are alive. For instance, Paul Kurtz, an American philosopher who is regarded as the father of contemporary secular humanism, argues that one can have a happy, fulfilling life while accepting a naturalistic worldview (Kurtz 2004). Dawkins, another prominent secular humanist, also expresses his gratitude for being alive, which he feels when he sees the magnificence of nature. In a 2009 debate entitled 'Atheism is the New Fundamentalism', sponsored by Intelligence Squared, he said:

> When I lie on my back and look up at the Milky Way on a clear night and see the vast distances of space and reflect that these are also vast differences of time as well, when I look at the Grand Canyon and see the strata going down, down, down, through periods of time when the human mind can't comprehend, I'm overwhelmingly filled with a sense of, almost worship… it's a feeling of sort of an abstract gratitude that I am alive to appreciate these wonders. When I look down a microscope it's the same feeling: I am grateful to be alive to appreciate these wonders. (Dawkins 2009)

Dawkins also remarked in his lecture 'The Greatest Show on Earth', delivered at the University Auckland in 2010, that "We have cause to give thanks for our highly improbable existence, and the law-like evolutionary processes that gave rise to it. Such gratitude is not owed to, or to be directed towards, anyone or anything." Another atheist, Greta Christina, writes:

> I have a strong awareness of having good things in my life that I didn't earn. Including, most importantly, my very existence. And it feels wrong to not express this awareness in some way. It feels churlish, or entitled, or self-absorbed. I don't like treating my good fortune as if it's just my due. I think gratitude is a good thing. (Christina 2011)

It seems reasonable to construe these quotes as expressions of existential optimism. Dawkins and Christina present their existential optimism in terms of 'I', but on a

charitable interpretation they are not simply saying that they are among the exceptional people who are happy and grateful to be alive. Otherwise, their view would be a form of pessimism except about themselves; existential optimism is a worldview, rather than the plain assertion that '*I* am happy and grateful to be alive (but I do not know about others)'. Atheists do not direct their gratitude towards God because, of course, they do not believe in the existence of God. Instead, they present their gratitude in terms of how wonderful the world is and how improbable their existence is. Whether or not atheists can express gratitude without assuming any agent, such as God, to whom to direct their gratitude is an important question, but I do not address it in this essay.[4] What is important for our purposes here is that existential optimism is widely embraced not only by theists but also by atheists.

6.4 The Existential Problem of Systemic Evil for Theists and Atheists

Let us now apply our discussion of existential optimism to the problem of systemic evil.

The problem of systemic evil arises for theism initially because the biological system, which guarantees pain and suffering for uncountably many sentient animals that evolve through natural selection, seems incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent and morally perfect God. The problem evokes the question: Why does God create such a violent, cruel, and unfair biological system if his nature is such that he is powerful enough and benevolent enough to avoid it? Yet we can also formulate the problem of systemic evil in terms of existential optimism, rather than by way of an omnipotent and morally perfect God—call it the 'existential problem of systemic evil'. The thrust of the problem can be presented as the following question: Why should we think that the world is overall good and that we should be happy and grateful to be alive in it if our existence depends fundamentally on a violent, cruel, and unfair biological system which guarantees pain and suffering for uncountably many sentient animals?

What is unique about the existential problem of systemic evil is that it does not mention God; it is based solely on the conflict between systemic evil and existential optimism. This means that the problem raises a challenge not only for theists but also for *atheists* who embrace existential optimism. Recall Dawkins' (2010) claim that, "We have cause to give thanks for our highly improbable existence, and the law-like evolutionary processes that gave rise to it." If the "law-like evolutionary processes" guarantee pain and suffering for uncountably many humans and other sentient animals, it seems impossible for atheists like Dawkins to consistently defend existential optimism.

Let us analyse the formulation of the existential problem of systemic evil more closely. The core of the problem is the apparent incompatibility between the following two points: (i) the scientific fact that our existence depends fundamentally on a violent, cruel, and unfair biological system which guarantees pain and suffering for many

[4] See, for example, Bishop (2010), Colledge (2013), and Lacewing (2015).

people and other sentient animals; and (ii) existential optimism, according to which the world is overall a good place and we should be grateful for our existence in it. Holding (ii) while acknowledging (i) is like expressing our happiness about and gratitude for living with smiley faces while, at the same time, recognizing that we are standing on the corpses of countless people and sentient animals that have died painfully and miserably, allowing us to survive. The quantity and quality of the costs that these people and animals had to pay for our survival seem unjustifiably high.

One might think that the existential problem of systemic evil is a version of the 'apology paradox', which Janna Thompson (2000) introduces in another context.[5] Thompson formulates this paradox as a challenge for people who sincerely wish to express apology for or regret about the fact that historical injustices, such as slavery and the dispossession of indigenous people, have taken place, while acknowledging that we benefit from them.

Suppose, for example, that your grandparents met in Poland during World War II. Suppose further that, given their circumstances, they would not have met had the Holocaust not occurred. This means that, as their descendant, you would not have existed had the Holocaust not occurred. That is, your existence depends causally on the Holocaust. At the same time, you hold that the Holocaust is an awful thing that should have never taken place. If you are a political leader you might wish not only to express regret but also to apologize for the historical injustice. At the same time, you also want to affirm that you are glad to be alive. Yet, given the causal link between the Holocaust and your existence, it seems inconsistent to maintain existential optimism while regretting or apologizing for the fact that the Holocaust took place.

However, there are many reasons to think that the existential problem of systemic evil is not a version of the apology paradox. I submit that the challenge that the existential problem of systemic evil raises is more fundamental than the challenge that the apology paradox raises. First, like the traditional problem of evil, the apology paradox focuses on specific historical *events* such as the Holocaust (or specific types of historical events, such as genocide) that are deemed evil or morally wrong, while the existential problem of systemic evil focuses on the entire biological *system*, such as natural selection, that is deemed evil. Needless to say, the biological system is more fundamental than historical events that take place within the system. Secondly, the apology paradox focuses on a *causally sufficient* link between a specific historical event and our existence, while the existential problem of systemic evil focuses on a *nomologically necessary* link between the biological system and our existence. Needless to say, nomological necessity is stronger than causal sufficiency. (I will explain this point in greater detail.) Thirdly, the apology paradox focuses on historical injustices for which free humans are responsible, while the existential problem of systemic evil focuses on the biological system for which humans are not responsible. Fourthly, the

[5] According to Neil Levy (2002), the apology paradox itself is a version of the so-called non-identity problem originally introduced by Derek Parfit (1984).

apology paradox is concerned with the existence of specific individuals, while the existential problem of systemic evil is concerned with the existence of the world and humanity as a whole.

We can also see that the existential problem of systemic evil is more fundamental and more forceful than the apology paradox by applying Thompson's solution to the apology paradox to the existential problem of systemic evil. Thompson describes her 'best solution' to the apology paradox as follows:

> Many people feel uncomfortable or even apologetic about benefiting from an injustice even when they had no responsibility for it. They are sorry that the good things that they now possess came to them because of a past injustice. They do not regret that they have these things, but that they came to have them in the way they did. An apology could be interpreted as an expression of this kind of regret. So interpreted it is not, strictly speaking, an apology *for* the deeds of our ancestors or an expression of regret that they happened. Rather it is an apology *concerning* deeds of the past, and the regret expressed is that we owe our existence and other things we enjoy to the injustices of our ancestors. *Our preference is for a possible world in which our existence did not depend on these deeds.* (Thompson 2000: 475, emphasis added to the last sentence.)

Thompson's point is this: we can consistently say that we are glad to be alive while regretting or apologizing for the fact that a historical injustice, which is causally linked with our existence, took place, because it is coherent to wish that our existence had been realized through some other causal link. This point can be clarified by analyzing it in terms of possible worlds. The apology paradox is based on the following assumption:

(1) If a certain historical event, say, the Holocaust, had not taken place, then we would not have existed.

According to possible world semantics, this does *not* entail the following:

(2) There is no possible world in which the Holocaust did not take place and we exist.

Instead, (1) entails the following:

(3) In the closest possible world to the actual world in which the Holocaust did not take place, we do not exist.

And this is compatible with the following:

(4) There is a possible world in which the Holocaust did not take place and we exist.

Such a world might be quite different from the actual world because it is not the *closest* possible world to the actual world in which the Holocaust did not take place. But the consistency of (1) (and equivalently (3)) with (4) shows that one can coherently wish that we had existed without the Holocaust. So, according to Thompson, what we do when we wish that the Holocaust had not taken place while holding existential optimism is to express our preference for a world described in (4) rather than the actual world.

I submit, however, that Thompson's response to the apology paradox does not apply to the existential problem of systemic evil and that this indeed highlights the strength of the problem.

The existential problem of systemic evil is based on the following assumption:

(1′) If natural selection had not governed nature, then we would not have existed.

This does not entail the following:

(2′) There is no possible world in which natural selection does not govern nature and we exist.

Instead, (1′) entails the following:

(3′) In the closest possible world to the actual world in which natural selection does not govern nature, we do not exist.

And this is compatible with the following:

(4′) There is a possible world in which natural selection does not govern nature and we exist.

But a world described in (4′) is very different from the actual world, because the laws of nature in such a world differ from those that apply to the actual world. Changing the laws of nature is much more radical than, for example, removing a certain historical injustice from the actual world. Wishing that the laws of nature were different is so fundamental that it would undermine existential optimism, according to which the world is generally good and we should be happy and grateful to be alive in it. What sort of world is it in which we exist without natural selection? Perhaps it is a world in which we (or our counterparts) are silicon-based beings created by a higher intelligence, or immaterial spirits that do not arise through evolution. But wishing that such a world, instead of *our* world, was actual, and wishing that we lived in such a world, would mean that we think neither that our world is good nor that we are happy and grateful to live in it.

6.5 The Disadvantage of Atheism

The apology paradox arises even if I am the only person in the actual world who is happy: How can I consistently say that I am glad to be alive while also acknowledging that my existence depends on a historical injustice which I think should never have happened? On the other hand, as I have mentioned, existential optimism, which creates the existential problem of systemic evil, is not concerned with the happiness and gratitude of an individual. It is rather concerned with the world and humanity as a whole. Of course, existential optimism does not suggest that the world is thoroughly and entirely good or that the life of every single person in the world is good. It allows that certain parts of the world are not good and that there are miserable lives that do not demand expressions of happiness or gratitude. Existential optimism says instead that the world is overall good and that we should be happy and grateful to live in it.

Here is an illustration of existential optimism: Suppose that positive things in the world and life are painted yellow, while negative things in the world and life are painted grey. Existential optimism says that although there might be parts of the world and people's lives that are painted mostly grey, overall the whole picture is painted mostly

yellow. Existential optimism is not the view that only a part of the world which I inhabit is yellow or that only my life is painted yellow. It holds that many other parts of the world and many other people's lives are also painted yellow. Now, the existence of natural selection suggests that this perception of life and the world is inaccurate. If we peel off the yellow surface there is an enormously large grey underlying part which is linked to the violent, cruel, and unfair biological system. That is, a large part of the material universe, including many lives in it, is—contrary to the initial perception—painted grey.

I have argued that the existential problem of systemic evil applies to both theism and atheism because existential optimism is independent of belief in the existence of God. Hence, the problem of evil—or more precisely, the existential problem of systemic evil—is no longer a problem exclusively for theists. It is interesting to see that there is a version of the problem that can be raised against atheists as well as theists. But what is more interesting is that theists are significantly better situated to address it than atheists are. Atheists commonly think that the material universe is all there is, so the range of their ontology is quite limited. On the other hand, theists commonly think that the material universe is not all there is. For example, they think that there is a God, an immaterial being that exists beyond our material universe, and that there is also an afterlife which lies beyond our life in the material universe. The range of their ontology is, therefore, significantly and possibly infinitely wider than that of atheists.

Let us return to the painting illustration. If a large part of the material universe and a large part of life in it are painted grey, atheists have to give up existential optimism, which entails that these components are painted mostly yellow. Yet theists, who do not believe that the material universe or life in it represents all there is, can still hold that the world and life in it are *generally* good and painted mostly yellow, because the material universe and life in it are only small segments of the whole of reality.

Let us strengthen this point in relation to existing theistic responses to the standard problem of evil against theism. The soul-making response, for example, says that pain and suffering are compatible with the existence of an omnipotent and morally perfect God because they are necessary for us to grow spiritually. Spiritual growth of this kind is useful even for people who die young because, according to this response, life is not limited to this material universe; there may be an afterlife or reincarnation. The skeptical theistic response, to take another example, says that we cannot fully comprehend why God allows pain and suffering in the world. This does not mean that God does not have any good reason for doing so; it simply means that we are, cognitively or morally, significantly more limited than God. To take yet another example, Marilyn McCord Adams' response to the problem of evil says that intimacy with God would engulf even the most horrendous forms of evil and overcome any *prima facie* reasons for people to doubt the value of their lives (Adams 1989). Using Adams' term, God 'defeats' evil even if there might not be a humanly accessible answer to the question why there has to be evil. These theistic responses can be applied with necessary adjustments to the existential problem of systemic evil. Such an approach suggests that, even if a large part of the

material universe and life in it are painted grey, theists have resources with which they can show that the overall picture might well be painted mostly yellow. None of these responses is available to atheists because, again, atheistic ontology is limited to the material universe. Conversely, any response that atheists can put forward is available to theists as well, because theistic ontology includes the material universe.[6]

I do not have space to discuss whether or not any of the theistic responses outlined here succeeds in solving the existential problem of systemic evil. What is crucial here is that whether or not any of them succeeds, theists are significantly better situated than atheists are with respect to the existential problem of systemic evil. They have in their ontology much greater, and possibly infinitely greater, resources than atheists to which they can appeal in defending theism. By appealing to items beyond the material universe, such as God and the afterlife, theists can develop numerous approaches to the problem, approaches to which atheists have no access. Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that the existential problem of systemic evil is primarily *a problem of evil for atheists*.

6.6 Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to establish the following four points. First, the problem of systemic evil, which is focused on the entire biological system on which our existence is based, is stronger than the traditional problem of evil, which is focused on specific events or specific types of events. Secondly, both theists and atheists typically endorse existential optimism, according to which the world is generally good and we should be happy and grateful to live in it. Thirdly, the existential problem of systemic evil, which incorporates existential optimism, can be directed against not only theists but also atheists. Fourthly, as far as the existential problem of systemic evil is concerned, atheists find themselves at a significant disadvantage relative to theists because their (the atheists') ontology is much more limited and there is nothing to which they can appeal beyond the material universe to solve the problem.

We normally take for granted that the problem of evil provides a reason to give up theism and a motivation to adopt atheism. Yet, if I am right, it might be the other way

[6] One might claim that the existential problem of systemic evil does not arise for atheists who endorse moral non-cognitivism. These atheists seem to be able to avoid the problem because they maintain, for instance, that the proposition that natural selection is evil does not express any truth-value. This claim, however, seems too strong, because if non-cognitivism is true, then the existential problem of systemic evil does not arise for theists, either. One might at this point reformulate the claim in question as follows: the existential problem of systemic evil does not arise *for atheists who endorse moral non-cognitivism*, while it does arise *for theists who reject moral non-cognitivism*. In order to respond to this, it seems that theists have to decide whether or not moral non-cognitivism is indeed true. However, whether or not moral non-cognitivism is true, atheists seem to remain on shaky ground because: (i) if moral non-cognitivism is true, then the existential problem of systemic evil arises for neither theists nor atheists; (ii) if moral non-cognitivism is false, then the problem arises for both theists and atheists. Thanks to Nick Trakakis for raising this potential atheistic response to the existential problem of systemic evil.

around. The problem of evil, or at least the existential problem of systemic evil, provides a reason to give up atheism and a motivation to adopt theism.[7]

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[7] I read an earlier version of this paper at the 'God and Nature: The Problem of Evil' conference in Verona, which was sponsored by the Fondazione Centro Studi Campostrini; a meeting of the Open End discussion group at the University of Birmingham; a conference of the European Society for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Uppsala; and a public lecture at Auburn University. I would like to thank everyone in these audiences. I am particularly grateful to John Bishop, J. Loxley Compton, Nick Trakakis, and Sami Pihlström for useful discussion, and Sofia Vescovelli for her helpful and engaging response, presented at the Verona conference.

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Response to Nagasawa

Beverley Clack

There is much here that I found illuminating. That a particular approach to the problem of evil, which Nagasawa calls "the existential problem of systemic evil," may pose as many problems for atheists as for theists—if not more—opens up the question of what we are doing when we discuss evil and suffering; a comment to which I will return.

Nagasawa suggests that it is in the realm of 'natural evil' that the force of the problem of evil is found. Analytic philosophers have tended to avoid this area, preferring to focus on questions of moral evil; while philosophers such as myself, influenced by 'Continental' styles of thinking, have preferred to consider the practices which contribute to—or challenge—the experience of suffering in the world.

Nagasawa is right to link his claim to the existential dimension, as this is undoubtedly where the full force of the problem is located. Understanding the sources of evil and responding appropriately to them are of more importance than simply engaging in a subdiscipline of philosophy or theology. He is also right to consider precisely what it means to bring in that existential dimension.

Yet I wonder if Nagasawa's argument does not miss the full weight of framing the problem thus. He is right that evil does not pose a problem simply for those who believe in God, though we have to be careful about how we frame that word 'God'. It is all too easy to assume that 'God' denotes the God of philosophical theism—a specific construct that, with D. Z. Phillips, I would query, viewing it as a 'philosopher's myth',

distilled from the lived experience of religious faith and practice, that may well distort, more than illuminate, questions of religion (Phillips 1988: 7).

Indeed, the examples Nagasawa provides of atheists celebrating the sheer givenness of the experience of being alive suggest that we should look more closely at what we mean by 'God', given the appropriation of language associated with God by those who would ordinarily reject such a concept out of hand. Nagasawa is right to be surprised by such celebrations from those committed to an evolutionary account of nature which coheres rather well with notions of a nature 'red in tooth and claw'. That Richard Dawkins can speak of being "overwhelmingly filled with a sense of, almost worship" when confronted with the beauty and vastness of the Milky Way raises questions about precisely the kind of God that Dawkins is ordinarily at such pains to reject. Does the desire to worship demand that we think again about what the word 'God' is supposed to designate? What kind of image of the divine might emerge from such reflections?

Nagasawa frames his discussion by applying a theist/atheist dichotomy. By 'theism', I assume he means 'philosophical theism'. God is omnipotent, omniscient, Swinburne's "person without a body" (1977: 1). Defining God thus makes it well-nigh impossible to avoid a discussion of how a God like this could fail to be responsible for a world containing evil and suffering. God is like us, only greater. 'He' is a creator, and, as a moral agent, cannot but be held accountable for 'his' chosen method of creation. When Nagasawa describes the 'theistic benefit' of belief, it is difficult for his rehearsal of theodical solutions to do anything other than draw our attention to the past, such explanations invariably being concerned to explain why God would have chosen to create in such a messy way in the first place.

What happens if we direct our gaze differently, considering not the past but the present and the future? How we are to live in the face of evil and suffering? Viktor Frankl's memoir of the Holocaust does not engage with the question of whether a good God could have created a world that includes the concentration camp. Instead, he notes the intensity of religious practice in the camp, the power of love, and his belief that even in this terrible place there was the possibility of "choice of action" (Frankl [1946] 2004: 46, 48–50, 74). Crucially, "it is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future—*sub specie aeternitatis*." (*ibid.*: 81) Rather than thinking about 'the meaning of life', the vital thing is to "think of ourselves as being questioned by life . . . Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct" (*ibid.*: 85).

To claim that Frankl is not religious is to miss the point. There is something profoundly religious in his desire to 'connect us again' to each other and to the world.[8] In the lived experience of religious practice we meet a God who is not abstracted from such striving; a God framed by and in community. God is 'an event' (Moltmann 1981) or 'a relationship' (McFague 1982). Such a God goes some way to explaining Dawkins'

[8] '*Religare*' is the much-disputed root of the word 'religion', meaning 'to bind again'.

desire for connection with that transcendent universe. God is found in connection with world and others.

None of this is to deny the importance of a critically reflective faith. A philosophical approach to questions of religion challenges believers to resist ways of thinking that lead to violence and intolerance that would break that connection with world and others. Yet the God of philosophical theism is problematic precisely because it reifies the kind of mono-thinking that excludes other answers, demanding the divine be framed in only one way.

The problem of evil is most pressing when it transcends academic attempts at explanation, becoming a question that must be addressed if I am to live well. This existential approach has a long pedigree. In Christianity it is framed by these questions: How am I to live out the Kingdom of Heaven in my life? How am I to model Christ in loving others who are suffering? Such questions frame the promise of an existential approach to the problem of evil, making us reflect more deeply on our lives, and calling us to create better relationships with others and the world.

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Response to Nagasawa

Terrence W. Tilley

Professor Nagasawa's argument is, on the whole, persuasive. His creative mobilization of the concepts of 'systemic evil' and 'existential optimism' shows that systemic evil is a problem for certain kinds of atheists (like Dawkins, Kurtz, and Cristina) as well as for theists. His argument seems to be a distant cousin of Plantinga's argument that naturalism in epistemology makes most sense if one is a supernaturalist in ontology. Nagasawa argues that existential optimism, despite systemic evil, makes most sense if one is a theist rather than an atheist (although he does not presume that theism actually 'makes sense'). Despite my general agreement with his conclusions, I want to make three critical points, two technical, one more 'existential'.

First, I don't find persuasive Nagasawa's rejection of something like Thompson's response to the 'apology paradox' for atheists as a response to the problem of systemic

evil. He assumes that the 'we' in (4′) is the same 'we' as in (3′). This is not so. To imagine who these 'we' might be, Nagasawa suggests that 'we' or 'our counterparts' might be silicon-based or pure spirits, since the natural laws of that possible world would be so far from our own. Since I believe that having or being my body is an essential characteristic of me, and my body is carbon-based, I could not exist in such a different world. I also have no unambiguous way to pick out my counterpart. Hence, I don't find this argument persuasive, because 'we' shifts its meaning from (3′) to (4′) and renders the argument invalid.

Secondly, I do not find persuasive his claim (in note 1) that the argument applies equally to theodicies and defences. Consider the following:

(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.
(2) God created this world that includes the systemic evil of natural selection.

Are these two propositions compatible? Well, yes, because it is possibly true that

(3) There is no possible world in which *we* could exist and that has no systemic evil.

A defence of the compatibility of (1) and (2) is no more undermined by the recognition of systemic evil than Plantinga's free will defence is undermined by moral or natural evil. While I agree that recognizing systemic evil does raise important new questions for theodicies and other explanations of and responses to evil in the natural world, it raises no new kinds of problems for theists' defences against the logical problem of evil.

The 'more existential point' is to consider Nagasawa's portrayal and analysis of the natural biological world as systemically evil. Nagasawa's apprach trades on its violence. Does systemic *violence* make the biological world systemically *evil*? Reflection on this point leads me to think that some atheists, as well as some theists, might have good reason not to accept this equation.

First, Nagasawa's analogy of a surface of yellow paint over a huge substratum painted grey is misleadingly static. Nagasawa's illustration ignores the fact that this violent world gave rise to a species that, while still violent, has evolved from simplicity to complexity. It has evolved social beings which, at least much of the time, cooperate. A large number of these beings desire peace; some even go so far as to eschew violence, to care for the weak, aged, and infirm, and to campaign for stopping violence done to other social beings. The grey substratum is necessary for the emergence of the yellow 'surface'. If the yellow is indeed mostly good and the grey is necessary for its existence, perhaps the grey substratum is not evil in itself. (This leaves aside the question of beings who are victimized by morally evil acts performed by humans or by social structures set up by humans; that's a different issue.) Secondly, must existential optimism as a worldview extend to the entire biological system? This material universe has evolved beings who are not only sentient, but who are in some sense 'spiritual'. The price for this is evolutionary, systemic violence. But many of the biological beings are minimally sentient. The good and evil that minimally sentient beings experience is just

that: minimal. Eventually rather sentient social species evolved, for which the violence was more than minimal. But it seems that the evolution of the human species could not have occurred without systemic violence.

Are the violent means that brought about the development of social beings who create cultural goods 'evil'? Perhaps so. But why could not some atheists adapt Thompson's point and say that we are glad to be alive while we regret that we are products of systemic violence that has brought about the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, and that we can and should work to minimize the violence we inflict on other sentient beings?

The key problem that affects Nagasawa's argument is his claim that existential optimism finds that the world is "generally good." His parsing of "generally good" is that the world must be good, on the whole, for each sentient being in it. But is a world that evolves beings who can work to instantiate what is good not generally good *on the whole*? Surely some atheists could find it so.

Nagasawa demands too much. He thinks that existential optimism requires optimism about each and every being. That demand is too great—especially in a universe that is still evolving.

Some atheists might well find that Nagasawa neglects the social dimension of atheistic humanism. Nagasawa writes that "existential optimism is a worldview, rather than the plain assertion that '*I* am happy and grateful to be alive (but I do not know about others)'" (emphasis in original). Some atheists would construe this as "*we* are or should be happy to be alive." The worldview is not just 'mine', but should be 'ours'. As a worldview, such atheists would want it to be accepted by all of us, especially given that the general goodness of the biological world may still be emerging as our social and cultural worlds develop more complexity and interconnectedness.

Despite these points, I happen to agree that existential optimism is more compatible with theism than with atheism. My colleague, Elizabeth A. Johnson, in *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (2014), even envisions a sort of 'heaven' for non-human creatures with rudimentary consciousness. Hope even for 'the beasts' is possible from a theistic viewpoint, but not from an atheistic one.

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Response to Nagasawa

Andrew Gleeson

Professor Nagasawa introduces existential concepts to the discussion of the problem of evil, but does not make fruitful use of them. Janna Thompson says (in effect) that resentment at some causal circumstance of our life's origin need not conflict with

gratitude for being alive, since that resentment may express only a wish that we had come to be in some other, innocent, way, and not a wish that we did not exist at all. Nagasawa thinks this resolution of the conflict fails for the case of his biologically systemic evil, since to wish for us to exist without the biological system would be to wish for a world in which we were "silicon-based beings… or immaterial spirits," and to wish for such a different world would be inconsistent with recognizing the goodness of *this* world and being grateful for it. But one can, consistently, be grateful for something in one respect, deplore it in another, and wish that you could have had the good without the bad. Can this be right in the systemic evil case, where the wish has to be for a world where we no longer exist as biological beings at all?

I suspect the real reason Nagasawa thinks not is because his 'existential problem of systemic evil' and its threat to 'existential optimism' are new words for familiar modes of thought. He describes 'existential optimism' in quantitative terms: the optimist sees more yellow (positive things) than grey (negative things). And the theist has more resources than the atheist for dealing with systemic evil, since the existence of an afterlife offers unlimited scope for redressing any deficit of yellow in the present life. This picture is profoundly untrue to our actual 'existential' responses to the world. A *single* case of a tortured child can make the world unredeemable in someone's eyes—the attitude of Ivan Karamazov is very close to this. Encounter with such a case may leave a person's life with only an inconsolable sorrow, especially if they are that child's parent. All the yellow pales into grey. But the opposite can also be the case. In her memoir, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, Ruth Klüger:

> …describes her own astonishment and awe at the act of the young woman at Auschwitz who first encouraged a terrified child, Ruth at 12, to tell a lie that might help save her life, and who then stood up for her, got her through a selection. Klüger says that she tells the story in wonder, that she has never ceased to wonder at that girl's doing, the "incomparable and inexplicable" goodness that touched her that day. (Diamond 2008: 61–2)

I can only assume that Ruth would prefer never to have been in Auschwitz and indeed that Auschwitz had never been; that she would wish for another world in which she had reached adulthood. Here we have someone who has known suffering beyond comprehension and yet in whom the light of life's wonder has not been extinguished. Sometimes, just a splash of yellow is enough. This is not to suggest that 'anything goes' in such matters. If Ivan Karamazov is melodramatic or self-pitying he will be open to criticism, as will people like Ruth Klüger if what they write is cloistered or Pollyannaish. And both must respect logic and fact. There are people who are not at fault on any of these scores and who find they *cannot* be grateful for life, given the evils it contains, just as there are also people, equally not at fault, who *cannot but* be grateful for life, despite those evils. You may find one of these attitudes incomprehensible, and the other inescapable. You will have a strong case behind you, but it is not the case of *rationality per se*. If a person is melodramatic or self-pitying in one case, or naïve in the other, this is not a matter that can be decided by impersonal logic and fact, not even

when supplemented by moral intuitions, the standard resources of much philosophical discussion about evil. And it is certainly not a matter of counting up how much of the world is yellow and how much grey.[9] That is just to revert from the existential problem of evil to a form of what, in my Position Statement, I call the academic one.

But of course Ruth's example is not a case of the systemic biological evil that is Nagasawa's topic. So can we be both grateful and resentful in the systemic evil case? If anyone has had reason to curse the system of biological reproduction that rules life in our world, it is the human parents—most until very recent times—who have lost their children at very young ages to the most hideous afflictions. If anyone had reason to prefer another, safer way of getting children—reason to prefer another world—they did. Yet they went on having children and at least sometimes did so out of love. They could celebrate and be grateful for the yellow of their children, for the system having created them, even the ones who died, while still resenting that system for the grey of their children's circumstances that it necessitated. Indeed, it may have been their heart's deepest wish, maybe inarticulate even to themselves, that they could have the yellow without the grey. For them, the grey is not obscured, but it may be outshone. They say love is blind, meaning it as criticism. But perhaps it is good that sometimes, in a sense, it is colour-blind.

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Reply to Clack

Yujin Nagasawa

Professor Clack welcomes my attempt to expand the scope of the problem of evil in such a way that it raises a challenge not only for theists but also for atheists. However, she contends that the scope of my approach is still too narrow because it is limited to the so-called 'God of philosophical theism'. The God of philosophical theism corresponds to the classical concept of God, according to which God is an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect creator of the universe. This is the most widely accepted concept of God in analytic philosophy of religion. Nearly all topics in analytic philosophy of religion—including the problem of evil, divine attributes, religious

[9] This quantitative approach is sometimes given an aesthetic twist. For a fine critique of all attempts to deal with evil in this impersonal way, see Williams (1996: 132–48).

epistemology, miracles, and theistic arguments—assume this (or a similar) concept of God. Analytic philosophy of religion is centred on debates between theists, who defend the existence of God according to this concept, and atheists, who reject it. Clack thinks that these debates are based on a false dichotomy because there are many other alternatives to the classical concept of God.

Clack's criticism is not a direct response to my defence of the existential problem of systemic evil. This is manifest in the fact that her criticism applies to *any* arguments based on the classical concept of God. Yet, her criticism raises an important issue that transcends the debate over the existential problem of systemic evil, and even the problem of evil in general.

I agree with Clack that the scope of analytic philosophy of religion should be expanded to include alternatives to the classical concept of God. After all, the philosophy of religion is a subarea of philosophy which aims to address a wide range of concepts and practices in a variety of religious traditions. By saying this I do not mean to imply that the classical concept of God is not worth addressing. On the contrary, as my own publications suggest, I believe that the classical concept of God is an important concept that deserves serious consideration. However, at the same time, like Clack, I do not think that it is healthy for the discipline to focus exclusively on that concept, as if no other exists.

A number of prominent philosophers, theologians, and scientists have defended or expressed sympathy with alternatives to the classical concept. However, voices raised in defence of these concepts tend not to be taken seriously in philosophy of religion. This is one of the reasons why critics have often conceived of philosophy of religion as an apologetic project, rather than as an open academic inquiry undertaken to understand the world and explore the fundamental nature of reality.

Over the past several years, therefore, Andrei Buckareff and I have led research projects which aim to expand the scope of philosophy of religion by shedding light on alternatives to the classical concept of God (see Buckareff and Nagasawa 2016). In one of these projects we conducted a survey on 'Prosblogion', the most-often accessed philosophy of religion blog, in January 2012 (Buckareff and Nagasawa 2012). Of the 286 respondents to the survey, the majority (55.6%) identified themselves as classical theists, while many respondents (46.4%) held that alternatives to the classical concept of God fail to provide a metaphysically and religiously adequate framework for theological realists. Yet the overwhelming majority of the respondents (88.8%) thought alternative concepts to be worthy of examination. I find this encouraging because it suggests that philosophers of religion are more open-minded than how people tend to characterize them.

Clack illustrates the importance of widening the scope of philosophy of religion, by drawing attention to Richard Dawkins' assertion that when he sees the magnificence of the Milky Way and the Grand Canyon he is "overwhelmingly filled with a sense of, almost worship." As Clack hints, Dawkins' assertion seems to suggest that while he is an atheist with respect to the classical concept of God he might well be considered a

theist in a much broader sense. It is hard to determine, however, what his positive view is, precisely because the current debate between theists and atheists focuses exclusively on the classical concept of God. If our focus were to broaden we would not face such a problem.

Returning to the problem of evil, how one should respond to the problem depends crucially on the concept of God to which one subscribes. Addressing the problem from the viewpoint of the classical concept is no doubt important but, as Clack suggests, alternative viewpoints should not be neglected.

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Reply to Tilley

Yujin Nagasawa

Professor Tilley agrees with the overall conclusion of my Position Statement but expresses some reservations as well. I am grateful to him for raising three important objections that focus on specific aspects of my argument. In what follows, I will respond to each of them.

First, Tilley says that he is not persuaded by my rejection of a possible response to the existential problem of systemic evil, a response which is analogous to Thompson's response to the apology paradox. This response pays attention to the following thesis:

(3′) In the closest possible world to the actual world in which natural selection does not govern nature, we do not exist.

The response tries to undermine the existential problem of systemic evil by appealing to the fact that thesis (3′) is compatible with the following:

(4′) There is a possible world in which natural selection does not govern nature and we exist.

I claimed in my Position Statement that the response in question fails. The world described in (4′) is too different from the actual world because the laws of nature in such a world differ from those that apply to the actual world. Perhaps in such a world we (or our counterparts) are silicon-based beings created by a higher intelligence, or immaterial spirits that do not arise through evolution. This makes the response irrelevant to systemic evil in nature in the actual world. Tilley criticizes this point by saying that the 'we' in (4′) is not the same as the 'we' in (3′) because, according to him, having

or being our carbon-based bodies is an essential characteristic of us and, hence, we (or our counterparts) could not exist in such a world.

Whether or not having or being our carbon-based bodies is an essential characteristic of us is disputable, but I am willing to grant it for the sake of argument. However, Tilley's criticism does not affect my overall conclusion because my aim here is to show that the response in question fails to refute the existential problem of systemic evil. If Tilley is right in saying that having or being our carbon-based bodies is an essential characteristic of us, the response to the existential problem of systemic evil is a non-starter. This is fine by me as my goal is to show that the problem cannot plausibly be answered by means of such responses.

Secondly, Tilley raises an objection to my claim in footnote 1 that my argument about systemic evil applies equally to the logical version and the evidential version of the problem of evil. He says that, contrary to my claim, systemic evil "raises no new kinds of problems for theists' defences against the logical problem of evil."

I am not sure this is true. Many theists think that Plantinga's free will defence resolves the logical problem of moral evil and natural evil because it allegedly shows that there are logically possible scenarios in which a morally perfect, all-powerful God coexists with events or types of events that are deemed evil. Here these events are considered outcomes of abuses of freedom by humans or other morally significant free beings. However, this defence does not seem to apply (at least not directly) to the logical version of the problem of *systemic evil*, because the problem is not concerned with outcomes of the abuses of freedom by humans or other morally significantly free beings. It is concerned rather with the entire biological *system*, for which humans are not directly responsible.

Finally, Tilley raises a doubt about my portrayal and analysis of the natural biological world as systemically evil. His doubt is based on the following three sub-points:

(i) The violent process of natural selection has given rise to social beings which, at least much of the time, cooperate and desire peace. This means, using my analogy, that the grey substratum, which represents bad things in the world and life, is necessary for the emergence of the yellow surface, which represents good things in the world and life. This suggests that the grey substratum is not evil in itself.

(ii) The price for the emergence of sentient, social, spiritual species such as humans is evolutionary, systemic evil. But many biological beings are minimally sentient, which means that the good and evil they can experience is only minimal. We can consistently say that we are glad to be alive while we regret that we are products of systemic evil and that we can and should work to minimize the violence we inflict on other sentient beings.

(iii) The existential problem of systemic evil assumes that existential optimism requires that the world be good, on the whole, for each and every sentient being. This is incorrect. Atheists can maintain that a world that evolves beings

who can work to instantiate what is good is indeed generally good *on the whole*. By emphasizing social and cultural dimensions they can construe existential optimism as the view that "*we* are or should be happy to be alive" (emphasis in original), acknowledging that this view should be not just 'mine', but 'ours'.

In response to (i), I agree with Tilley that the grey substratum is necessary for the yellow surface. However, I do not think it is obvious that this entails that the grey substratum is not evil in itself. Pain and suffering seem to be intrinsically evil even if some positive things might come from them. Moreover, even if pain and suffering are not intrinsically evil, overall natural selection seems to cause more evil than good.

In response to (ii), I agree with Tilley that the good and evil that biological beings can experience are limited. Sentient animals that can experience pain and suffering represent only a small portion of the whole biosphere. I do not think, however, that the pain and suffering that they experience are negligible. Natural selection constantly necessitates pain and suffering for uncountably many sentient animals. We, humans, can and indeed should try to minimize violence but, ultimately, we cannot eradicate violence in nature, as it is a necessary outcome of natural selection on which the biosphere is founded. Conversely, if there is no natural selection there cannot be any biosphere in the first place.

In response to (iii), the existential problem of systemic evil does not assume that existential optimism requires that the world be good, on the whole, for each and every sentient being. It assumes only that existential optimism requires that the world be good overall. I agree with Tilley that social and cultural dimensions are important in tackling evil in the world and that we should recognize our ability to make the world a better place in which to live, not only for ourselves but also for other sentient beings. However, no matter how much effort we exert, the problem of systemic evil will remain because, ultimately, we cannot eliminate natural selection, which governs nature.

Reply to Gleeson

Yujin Nagasawa

Dr Gleeson makes some important points concerning my existential problem of systemic evil. I hope that in responding to them I can highlight the uniqueness of the problem.

First, Gleeson seems to misunderstand the nature of the existential problem of systemic evil because of a terminological confusion. I use the term 'existential' because the problem incorporates existential optimism, according to which the world is generally good and we should be happy and grateful to live in it. Contrary to what Gleeson seems to think, the existential problem of systemic evil does not focus on existential

terror or grievances that are raised by victims of actual occurrences of evil from their own perspectives. Since the existential problem of systemic evil addresses the consistency between existential optimism and systemic evil, it is more like what Gleeson calls the 'academic problem' than what he calls the 'existential problem'. Gleeson writes:

> There are people who are not at fault on any of these scores and who find they *cannot* be grateful for life, given the evils it contains, just as there are also people, equally not at fault, who *cannot but* be grateful for life, despite those evils. You may find one of these attitudes incomprehensible, and the other inescapable. You will have a strong case behind you, but it is not the case of *rationality per se*. If a person is melodramatic or self-pitying in one case, or naïve in the other, this is not a matter that can be decided by impersonal logic and fact, not even when supplemented by moral intuitions, the standard resources of much philosophical discussion about evil. (emphases in original)

Gleeson's claim makes sense if it is applied to existential terror and grievances considered from the victims' perspectives. However, the existential problem of systemic evil is a primarily intellectual problem concerning logical consistency, and so such tools as logic and moral intuitions are indeed necessary for addressing it. I do not think that Gleeson's non-academic approach is applicable to the problem unless it is radically reformulated.

Secondly, I want to emphasize that the problem of systemic evil says that the entire biological *system* on which nature is based is fundamentally evil. In this sense, this problem is much deeper than the standard problem of evil, whereby we understand that specific *events* or specific *types of events* are evil. Hence, as Gleeson himself notes, the example from Auschwitz to which he refers is not directly relevant here. The only passage in Gleeson's reply that is directly relevant is, therefore, one that occurs at the very end (where he speaks of parents "who have lost their children at very young ages to the most hideous afflictions"):

> They could celebrate and be grateful for the yellow of their children, for the system having created them, even the ones who died, while still resenting that system for the grey of their children's circumstances that it necessitated. Indeed, it may have been their heart's deepest wish, maybe inarticulate even to themselves, that they could have the yellow without the grey. For them, the grey is not obscured, but it may be outshone. They say love is blind, meaning it as criticism. But perhaps it is good that sometimes, in a sense, it is colour-blind.

I am not sure how this resolves the apparent inconsistency between existential optimism and systemic evil, an inconsistency that the existential problem of systemic evil tries to reveal. People do tend to express their gratitude for the yellow (i.e., the positive things in the world and life) without fully recognizing the grey (negative things in the world and life, particularly the pain and suffering of uncountably many sentient animals systemically necessitated by the process of natural selection). As Gleeson says, the apparent inconsistency is often invisible to ordinary people, who tend to be "colour-blind," but that does not mean that being colour-blind is a good way

to avoid the problem. Whether or not one is colour-blind, the problem remains. And, as I argue in my Position Statement, theists are better equipped than atheists are to resolve the apparent inconsistency.

Gleeson's distinction between the 'academic problem' and the 'existential problem' is important, but these problems are distinct and a solution to one problem does not apply to the other.[10]

[10] As I said in my reply to Gleeson's Position Statement, Gleeson's term 'the academic problem' seems problematic. That we can discuss the existential problem, which he distinguishes from the academic problem, in an academic book suggests that the existential problem is also at least partly academic.

7

A Trajectory of Positions

Terrence W. Tilley

7.1 Introduction

This chapter narrates the development of my positions on discourses regarding God and evils.[1] Along the way, I will sketch the arguments for the positions I have taken in my publications and presentations. I will then, in the section entitled "Developments," briefly indicate current projects.[2]

7.1.1 THEODICIES AND DEFENCES

In papers given to the College Theology Society and the Society of Christian Philosophers in 1983 and 1984, I argued that the failure to distinguish theodicies, e.g., the free-will theodicy typically attributed to Augustine or the soul-making theodicies inspired by Irenaeus of Lyons, from defences, e.g., Plantinga's free-will defence, led—and still leads—philosophers and theologians into serious blunders in rhetoric and logic.[3] A theodicy offers an explanation or a theory of why God as traditionally conceived

[1] The arguments for these positions are only sketched in this paper, partly because to rehearse all of them would extend the paper unreasonably. Developed arguments can be found in the cited works.

[2] I cannot finally separate this work from the person I've become. I worked my way through college and graduate school as a nursing orderly (doing just about everything RNs did in that era, except puncturing skin legally) over a period of eleven years. My reflections on God and suffering are coloured by my having taken many bodies—some of whom I had nursed—down to the morgue; of consoling scared and grieving patients and families; of trying—sometimes successfully—to start stopped hearts; of subduing the psychotic; of rescuing—and once not rescuing—patients from fires; of laughing with patients who laughed in the face of severe suffering; of salving patients whose personalities collapsed under the weight of suffering; and of realizing the 'randomness' of suffering. Suffice it to say that I was truly inoculated against a 'soul-making' theodicy well before I started graduate school.

My first scheduled lecture ever on the problem of evil—taking off from David Hume, "Epicurus' Old Questions…"—was preceded by a note from a dean telling me that one of the members of my freshman-level class was in a coma after an auto accident the previous night. His absence from that lecture, especially given the topic, was palpable to all in the class; he did, however, recover shortly; I lost track of him when he left school that semester.

[3] Published as "The Use and Abuse of Theodicy" (Tilley 1984). Those who unhappily conflated the two kinds of arguments include Hick (1977) and, rather disastrously, Murphree (1985), who takes one of Plantinga's possibly true propositions as actually true and necessary for his free-will defence; for my comments, see Tilley (2007a).

allows evils in the world God created. A defence offers an argument, typically against an atheistic challenge, of the possibility of rationally accepting both (a) that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, and (b) that even so there is evil in the world God created. A defence provides no explanation. Rather, it shows the logical compatibility of (a) and (b) by finding a possibly true proposition that combined with (a) entails (b). The heart of Plantinga's defence is that even an omnipotent being cannot make people such that they always freely choose the good. God can make people free, or God can make them always choose the good. Having made people free, (moral) evil is due to human free acts, not to God's acts.

The details of that argument need not concern us here.[4] Given that the flood of papers on this topic has ebbed, one can infer that the 'logical' problem of evil has been handled so well that it can be called 'resolved'. Even those not captivated by possible-worlds metaphysics—on which Plantinga and others rely heavily—can find the hypothesis of possible worlds a possibility, which is strength enough to utilize the arguments.[5]

Nonetheless, substantial debate still occurs regarding the 'evidential' problem of evil, typically mounted as an atheist's attack on the credibility or plausibility of believing in God, or the probability that God exists, given that there is so much evil in the world God created.[6] The evidential problem of evil assumes that belief in the existence of God is a hypothesis, that a person might find that evidence could verify or falsify this hypothesis. This approach misplaces the argument. As Basil Mitchell (1955), D. Z. Phillips (1969), and I (Tilley 1995) have argued in different ways, construing articles of faith or fundamental religious commitments as hypotheses is not an adequate or accurate portrayal of *religious* belief. The error is akin to that made in many dreary debates between creationists and evolutionists who treat their contrasting claims as scientific theories, rather than as metaphysical commitments. On my view, evidence is not totally irrelevant to religious commitments, but the place of evidence in such an argument about fundamental commitments or convictions is quite different from the place of evidence in debates about hypotheses.[7]

Why are these distinctions between theodicies and defences and between logical and evidential problems of evil important? By the time that the third or fourth member of the audience raised questions on my paper at the Society of Christian Philosophers meeting noted above, the distinction had been lost. This commentator

[4] While Plantinga has replied to numerous alleged defeaters, the basic argument can be found in his *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974).

[5] Another option that rejects possible-worlds metaphysics and the free-will defence as Plantinga offers it is to take a radically Thomistic approach as, among others, does Davies (2006). I disagree with one aspect of Davies' strategy. If one is challenged, one responds directly, i.e., one defends one's position, if necessary on the ground marked out by challengers. Davies changes the subject and goes 'on the offensive' by laying out a different metaphysical approach that dissolves the problem. This is a good strategy, but does not address the challengers directly—challengers whose rhetoric at least sometimes occupies the centre of the discourse about God and evil.

[6] One classic expression is Rowe (1979).

[7] See Tilley (1995: 93–154) for this account, but not couched in the 'creationism vs evolutionism' debate.

averred that he had thought the paper was superfluous. That was, however, a position on which he changed his mind, once he heard the previous two comments on the paper which continued to conflate theodicies and defences by asking questions that would challenge a theodicy, but not a defence. He noted that the argument I had made (or others like it) needed (at least) wider circulation, as even professional philosophers of religion were not 'getting' the significance of the distinction.

7.1.2 THE EVILS OF THEODICY

I continued to give presentations and write papers on aspects of the problem of evil, which eventually led in 1991 to the publication of *The Evils of Theodicy*.[8]

A. Speech Act Theory The book relies heavily on an account of speech acts.[9] Roughly, assertive speech acts (stating, asserting, opining) say how things are. Commissive speech acts (promise, vow, write a contract) say how things will be when I fulfil my commitment and do *not* say how things are. Directive speech acts (orders, requests, demands) say how things are to be when others act on my request and do *not* say how things are. Expressive speech acts (exclamations, expressions of feelings) are responses to events, actions, persons, or states of affairs, but do not make truth-claims about those things but express the speaker's response (these are irrelevant in what follows). Declarations are the explicit 'performatives' explored by J. L. Austin (1962). I claimed that a number of 'hybrid' declarations could be found, especially commissive declarations (the commitments made in a marriage ceremony, for example; a marriage vow is a declarative speech act which has strong commissive force) and assertive declarations (which make things to be what they are said to be; I argued that Augustine's *Confessions* was such a speech act—he declared who he was in front of God and everybody, and that's who he was: a "recovering sinner").

Why bother with speech act theory? It was my conviction—one I have seen no reason to modify in substantial ways—that scholars had been interpreting texts that formed a tradition or heritage of attempts to deal with the problem of evil as if they were all assertives. While more controversial, it also seemed (and seems) to me that actions are prior to texts. Written and oral acts *produce* texts or statements.[10] If one

[8] *The Evils of Theodicy* was reprinted in 2000 (Spokane, WA: Wipf and Stock) and is still available as a 'print on demand' book from Wipf and Stock.

[9] The account was heavily influenced by Searle (1969, 1975) and McClendon and Smith (1975). For ease of exposition, I accepted Searle's taxonomy as noted in the text *infra*, although I (i) claimed that the abundant species of speech acts were more variegated and importantly distinct than his generic taxonomy would allow, and (ii) found that one had to distinguish speech acts that could be performed only by persons who had specific status in institutions from those that could be performed without regard to such status. McClendon and Smith were not interested in a taxonomy nor in distinguishing the conditions in which one could perform particular kinds of speech acts.

[10] The debate between Searle and Derrida over speech acts and texts was, for the most part, 'won' by Searle. I think that Searle's theory overvalued author's intentionality over convention and reception of speech acts, but Derrida's arguments about iteration and reiteration simply failed to undermine even a relatively limited notion of agency, which is all that speech act theory requires. See Derrida (1977a, 1977b) and Searle (1977, 1983).

does not know the 'illocutionary' force with which the text is issued and received (commissive, directive, assertive, declarative), one cannot know the significance of what the text says.

Whether construed as sacred texts, philosophical texts, or literary texts, whether understood as mythical, historical, or fictional, the texts of the 'tradition of theodicy' were always mined for assertions that could then be assembled.[11] But if the texts were not making assertions, then such use of the texts is, at least in one sense, a misuse. Such use misrepresents them as 'forebears' that stand in a single tradition of making assertions, even metaphysical assertions, about God and evil.[12] This is not to say that sentences in those texts, and those texts issued and received in particular contexts, were not in some way representing the way things are along the way. But it was my conviction that the forces of these texts were seriously misinterpreted and the main part of the book made that argument for a representative sampling of classic texts.

B. Texts

1. ***Job:*** I argued that the book of Job had the fundamental force of a *warning*: do not think you can answer the question of why Job suffers. Although most modern authors either simply mention Job or write Job off, I went into the history of the text. I argued that from either the standpoint of the whole (a canonical reading) or from the assemblage of the parts (a more historical critical reading), Job as a text finally *asserts* nothing useful about God and evil, but *warns* the reader against claiming to know what God's purposes are.[13]
2. **Augustine, *Enchiridion:*** Given that all of Augustine's works are so rhetorical and conditioned by particular problems and opponents that one cannot find a coherent 'system' in them that does not leave out some major writing (so that, for example, arguments over Augustine's notions of free will and predestination have been carried on for centuries with textual support on various sides of the problems), the strategy I chose was to find an authoritative text in which Augustine the bishop was authoritatively *instructing* a believer on Christian doctrine. *Enchiridion* is one such text. It sketches the pillars of the Christian faith and addresses the problems of sin and suffering. Given the rhetoric of the text, and a

[11] John Hick is a primary culprit in this area. His version of the 'Augustinian theodicy' is an amalgam of propositions drawn from across Augustine's works (which have quite varying rhetorical forces) supplemented by quotations from Plotinus and others to 'fill out' the picture. In doing this, Hick was reflecting the tradition of Augustinian theodicy; see his *Evil and the God of Love* (1978: 37–89). My analysis is in Tilley (1991: 113–17).

[12] Surin (1986) claimed that modern and contemporary theodicists treated the authors of biblical texts, Augustine, Aquinas, and others as though they were participating in the same conversation about the same topic as were the moderns. While I found his claim, that the gulf between ancients and moderns was so vast that we could practically not know if we were talking about the same thing, to be overextended, his recognition that the tradition was far more varied than most theodicists seemed to think was reinforced by my own work.

[13] A preliminary version of this chapter was published as "God and the Silencing of Job" (Tilley 1989).

crucial difference between third-person and first-person plural writing at various points, among other things, I argued that (i) one could not assert that Augustine was asserting in this authoritative teaching that any person was damned, and (ii) the logic of Augustine's argument in the text was what today we call a 'defence', not a theodicy.

3. **Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy:*** Given that reading was mostly done 'out loud' in that era, given that the relative power of the voice of the prisoner diminishes to practically nothing in the course of the book and the voice of Lady Philosophy comes to dominate the final half of the book, almost completely, then the 'reader' of this text as a 'reciter' of this text is not merely reading a generic text, but performing a dramatic script. The purpose of the reading is performative: to transform one's own voice from that of a whining prisoner to that of someone who can accept providence no matter what it brings. Of course, one can read the *Consolation* as an assertive text, but then one misses the point of the dialogue and the weight given to the dialogue partners; one misses the point of the refreshment of the poetical sections; one misses the point that this text can be used to train one in speaking and being differently. As a text, then, this book is a prescription; and as a book recited properly, it is an *assertive declaration*, as the reader begins "where one is," wallowing in prison attended by the deceptive "sluts of the theatre," and winds up consoled by one's own voice articulating in one's own voice an account of providence.
4. **Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion:*** When preparing to write *Evils*, I found the ongoing philosophical debate over whether Cleanthes' voice or Philo's voice in the *Dialogues* was really Hume's (very few plumped for Demea).[14] I claimed that the *Dialogues* did challenge the credibility of evidentialist modern theism, but also challenged nonfoundationalist believers to be aware of the weaknesses of their positions. In the *Dialogues*, Hume displays, but does not assert or support, the 'natural' response of religious faith. He may indeed condemn by mockery superstition and support by *reductio* arguments the separation of moral from religious claims. But *Dialogues* does not 'assert' Hume's views. Rather, the voices in the *Dialogues* display the positions of others and, gadfly to the end, Hume takes no definite position—unless one accepts Part XII, where everything is given with one hand and taken away with the other, as a position; if so, after one sees that it all cancels itself out, it really asserts nothing, but makes a lot of noise and warns of the pitfalls of evidential theism as well as Demean fideism.
5. **George Eliot, *Adam Bede*** (1859): The chapter devoted to this text was titled "On Giving Voice to the Victim: Consolation without Falsification." The central event of the novel—based on an actual event in the life of George Eliot's

[14] A preliminary version of this chapter appeared as "Hume on God and Evil: Interpreting *Dialogues* X and XI as a Dramatic Conversation" (Tilley 1988).

aunt—is the 'pastoral' visit of the Methodist preacher lady Dinah Morris to the cell of Hetty Sorrel, who is condemned to die for the infanticide of her illegitimate child, fathered by Arthur Donnithorpe, the local squire. Hetty has been quite literally speechless—mute—evidently in terror and horror due to her experience of burying her baby. No one could get her to talk, but by praying with her and effectively preaching to her, Dinah enabled Hetty to speak, to claim her life and her deed. While perhaps not as profound a *declaration* as Augustine's *Confessions*, Hetty's confession establishes who she is in front of God, herself, and everyone. The evil she has done cannot be undone, as the virile yeoman Adam Bede put it. But it can be *acknowledged* out loud. And only then *regretted* and *repented*. And only then is any consolation possible.

Yet *Adam Bede* displays a more profound regret. The main plot is set in 1799, when Methodist women could preach in public. An afterword is set in 1810, with Hetty exiled, and Dinah married to Adam. By this date, Methodists had forbidden women to preach. The church had silenced the voice (of Dinah) that had given voice to the voiceless victim (Hetty). I argued that the much-maligned (by literary critics) afterword was a powerful chastisement of the church and the revelation of an instance of institutional, structural evil, beyond the evils of sin and suffering or *poena* and *culpa* (which are not the same categories, although some seem to think they are). The church never acknowledged, regretted, or repented. Thus, no consolation was possible for silencing the powerful voice that gave a voice to a victim.

C. The Evils of Theodicy The concluding argument of the book is that theodicy is a discourse practice in which the theodicists *assertively declare* that evil is sin and suffering. That declaration is accepted as the way the world is: individual sins and individual (human and animal) sufferings constitute evil. What theodicies as assertive declarations also do is to erase other forms of evil, especially what liberation and political theologians call 'structural evil', patterns of practice such as racism and sexism (the latter explored in *Adam Bede*). Structural evils and social sins are not declared to exist and thus they vanish from modern discourses about God and evil.[15] They are reduced to piles of individual acts and omissions. The fact that people suffer due to oppressive conditions that are not the result of any individual act that can be attributed to any individual agents, or, usually, even a determinate group of agents, is erased. In so doing, by misdeclaring the world, theodicy is itself (unwittingly) a practice that propagates more evil than it explains by effectively erasing structural evils. I also gave a number of instances in which theodicists had misappropriated or misconstrued earlier texts, especially those considered earlier in the book (except, of course, *Adam Bede*, which was, unsurprisingly, not deemed relevant in the discourse of theodicy).

[15] In Tilley (1991: 246–50), I find the arguments against theodicy that recognize structural evils to come mostly from beyond religious realms, e.g., Tiger (1987), Noddings (1989).

The problem with this argument, as I saw it then, is that I could not identify any particular speech act that initiated the discourse of theodicy. There seems to be a qualitative break between John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Archbishop William King's *De Origine Mali* (1698, English publication 1731), to which G. W. F. Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1710) is, in part, a response. So perhaps King's work is the precipitating act, but that may no longer be an issue, given further research in speech act theory regarding 'Status Function Declarations', which I will discuss.

My conclusion was that "if theodicy is a destructive practice . . . then the task before us is to engage in counteractive interruptive actions to undermine theodicists' old strategies and make room for new strategies. Our own symbolic acts must not efface evils, but identify their multiple forms, understand the processes which produce them, retrieve discourses which reveal them, and empower the praxes of reconciliation which will overcome them." (1991: 250) In the context of that text, I could not see how to do more than engage in this and similar hortatory rhetoric. A different genre would be required.

7.1.3 DEVELOPMENTS

A. From *Agents of Salvation* to *The Disciples' Jesus* 'Agents of Salvation' was the working title for a projected sequel to *The Evils of Theodicy*. It envisaged humans as secondary agents whose actions were in harmony (or not) with the 'will' of the primary divine agent of reconciliation. It was never written. I came to realize that it could not be written. A far more explicitly theological work was required. I came also to think of the 'praxes of reconciliation' as key. Although I had earlier argued for a narrative approach to theology (Tilley 1985), work on problems in propositionalist approaches to religious epistemology[16] led me to see that it would be better to focus to practices/praxes. While narratives remain the form of much theological work, understanding how to live in and live out a faith tradition required understanding the content of practices, including the practice of believing.[17]

The 'turn to practice' comes with the waning of the Enlightenment project in philosophy and theology. The 'turn to the subject' and the 'turn to experience' were individualistically inflected. But we are not individuals (and that very word is an adjective, not a noun, at root). We are agents shaped by the practices we learn in communities of practice. The 'nowhere man' of the Enlightenment has become a particular embodied person, located in a particular time and place. Our subjectivity and our agency are constituted by the relationships and practices that empower us. Theologically, reason does not provide a 'foundation' for faith. Rather, seeking understanding—doing theology—is one of the practices of faith.[18]

[16] See Tilley (1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995). Tilley (1993) is a slightly different version of Tilley (1990).

[17] See Tilley (2000, esp. 45–122). Also see Tilley (2006, 2014). In this I am influenced by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, but especially that of my teacher, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vols 1–3 (1986–2000; revised version with a preface by Curtis W. Freeman published in 2012 by Baylor University Press).

[18] See Tilley (2008: 30). Lest it be thought that this approach ignores the importance of 'reception' or of 'contemplation', let me note that it recognizes the importance of 'listening' as a demanding practice and of

The Disciples' Jesus (Tilley 2008) focuses on practices. It adapts the ancient claim that Jesus is the *autobasileia* by transposing it into a practical key. The empowering reconciling practices of 'the Jesus movement' realize the reign of God.[19] He—not alone, but together with his followers, ancient and modern—is the *autobasileia*, the reign of God in person. Christians, then, are those who strive to live in and live out God's reign. Thus, they can be secondary agents of reconciliation living out the salvation wrought by the primary agency of God present in Jesus. This approach links discipleship, christology, and soteriology.

The distinctive practices of the Jesus movement are reconciling practices. Their purpose is making whole the fractured persons and communities that we are. The Gospels especially portray the multiformed practices of healing, teaching, forgiving, and table fellowship. The communities that engage in these sorts of practices realize, however partially, the reign of God. If we read the New Testament not as texts, but as scripts that inscribe the community of disciples, then we can discern the continuity of the tradition in practice.

The practices of the reign of God are not limited to those of the New Testament. In every generation disciples have to discern how to carry on such a practical tradition. Often, new ways are needed. And such novelties must be tested by the community of Christian practitioners.

One felicitous implication that can be drawn from 'the priority of practice' is a retrieval of a Thomistic distinction between primary and secondary agency.[20] It is clear that God in Christ is the primary agent of our salvation. God saves, we don't. Yet in some sense we are also agents of salvation—for ourselves, for each other, and for the world. It is not that 'we do it' and God does not. Rather, when we practice our faith gracefully, we are God's agents, through whom God works. God is the primary agent, we are secondary. When we engage in those practices we should avoid, we proximately

contemplative absorption as possible only for those who are far advanced in contemplative practice. While there is a danger in a 'practical' approach that we may become fascinated with what we do, the proper approach is on what God does for us, to us, and enables us to do as God's devoted agents. 'Obedience' in such a perspective is not passive acceptance of authority, but active acceptance of empowerment to act gracefully.

[19] See Tilley (2008) where I note that I use the term 'Jesus movement' to refer to the community of Jesus' disciples. I used the term partly in homage to Clarence Jordan, whose 'Cotton Patch Versions' of New Testament texts were translations into the idiomatic English of the Southern United States. Jordan rendered *basileia tou theou* as 'the God movement'. The Jesus movement, then, is composed of all—past, present, and future—who seek to follow Jesus by living in, living out, and living for God's reign, the *basileia tou theou*, that Jesus preached and instantiated. By using 'movement' as my key term for the community, rather than 'church', I did not mean to suggest that structures of authority were not part of the movement. The question that faces the churches is not *whether* to have authority structures, but *how* those structures are to be instantiated in good practices so that the movement lives in creative fidelity to the tradition that is centred in remembering Jesus in practice.

[20] This is obviously analogous to more typical formulations of primary and secondary causality. I had been unsuccessful in finding a way to put together the points made in this paragraph until remarks made by Robert Barron reminded me that God's infinite power and humans' finite powers cannot be "in competition." That crystallized my understanding. See Barron (2007).

obstruct God's purpose. We cannot finally obstruct God's purpose, of course, nor can we think we are the only secondary agents God uses—the entire created world is in some way God's secondary salvific agent.[21]

Just as God's creation of all there is may best be construed as an act of infinite divine power, so salvation of all there is may also be best construed as an act of infinite divine power. But such power does not preclude either the need for or the usefulness of finite powers exercised in this world by finite agents who participate in and further the agency of infinite love. God's infinite agency and infinite power are not on the same level with nor exercised in the same way as finite power. Finite and infinite power and agency cannot be in competition with each other.[22] How one acts for God in contributing finitely to the ongoing work of reconciling all-that-is in divine love gives force to how one understands who Christ is—the primary agency of God present in and through the (non-competitive) secondary agency of Jesus—and what he does—reconcile the world unto God's own 'self' through the acts he performs in, through, and with his body.[23]

I hope to explore the significance of this 'practical' approach to primary and secondary agency in the future, as *The Disciples' Jesus* simply has 'promissory notes' regarding this distinction. As regards the problem of evil, I expect to approach Brian Davies' (2006) view (see note 5) as I develop this position. Davies does not do theodicy, but evades it.

B. Towards a Creativity Defence? A Creativity Defence (CD) is based on a vision that offers a different account of both natural and social evils from that of the Free Will Defence (FWD) (see Tilley 2007b). It can account for the power of social evils and the fact that they have 'a life of their own' in a way that neither modern theodicy nor the FWD does.

The insight behind this defence is a claim that God has created beings in the divine image and likeness. But God is the primary agent that creates all there is out of nothing. Can created secondary agents not also exhibit a form of divine creativity, creating 'something out of nothing' in at least an analogous way? Is that what evolution is doing

[21] Regarding primary and secondary agency, Austin Farrer wrote: "God works omnipotently on, in, or through creaturely agencies without either forcing them or competing with them." (1967: 62; cf. 65, 82, 154) This fundamentally Thomistic understanding of the relationship between divine and human agency remains a topic for further exploration. How these activities have dual authorship is not a soluble problem, in Farrer's view: "Both the divine and the human actions remain real and therefore free in the union between them; not knowing the modality of the divine action we cannot pose the problem of their mutual relation." (66) See Tilley (2008: chs 18 and 19).

[22] In this perspective, sin is not competing with God, but obstructing God's purpose.

[23] Robert Barron (2007) has also commented that understanding a heresy as obscure as monothelitism is important because it shows the problem of conflating as one will the infinite will of God with the finite will of Jesus of Nazareth. If these two could be conflated, then they could be in competition. But since one is an exercise of divine nature or primary agency, and the other of human nature or secondary agency, they can be in perfect harmony without the possibility of competition.

and what humans do in creating social reality? If so, then we have a sufficient background for a creativity defence.[24]

The key to a creativity defence is a possibly true proposition: 'It was not within God's power to create a world in which free entities could exercise creativity and which did not contain genuine evils.' It would be an alternative way of showing how (a) [God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good] and (b) [there is evil in the world] are compatible. Because creativity is or can be social, such a defence could account for natural, individual, and social evils. God could, perhaps, thwart human creativity, as God could make creatures always choose the good. But then God would not merely be thwarting the ability of humans to choose; God would be withdrawing that innate ability of matter that reflects the divine creativity.

This approach does not require a rejection of divine omnipotence. We cannot coherently say that God can do what is logically impossible. If creativity is an essential attribute of the universe, then God could not make the universe happen in a certain way. God could make the universe evolve in a certain way. Or God could let the universe exercise its own creativity. But, like the FWD, the idea that God could make a creative universe always create only good is at least *prima facie* incoherent. But an omnipotent God still can do what is logically possible for God to do. This has a chilling implication. As Charles Journet (1963: 289) stated in a text whose terror I have only begun to understand, "if ever evil, at any time in history, should threaten to surpass the good, God would annihilate the world and all its workings." As primary creative agent, God could remove his sustenance of each and every secondary creative agent—each and every actual entity—in the universe. Journet's dictum shows the limits of relative creative autonomy in God's world.

The CD does not entail process theism, as it need not accept the co-dependence of God and the world or the process theists' account of divine power. It could be compatible with this view, but also with a 'dual agency' view characteristic of some contemporary forms of Thomism.[25] Nonetheless, CD learns from process theism about the importance of creativity and the social nexus of actual entities. Pure natural evils result

[24] Obviously, there might be objections from a Thomist on this issue. "But the act of creating something that, prior to such creation, was 'nothing', is quite different from the act of 'creation *ex nihilo*'. For even when we humans create something that, prior to such creation, was 'nothing', we always create things by relying on some pre-existing thing or things that we did not create. When a human being creates something, he or she inescapably creates the thing 'out of' some pre-existing other thing or things. To create '*ex nihilo*' is to create something out of no pre-existing thing whatsoever. No human can do that." (Michael J. Baur, email to the author, 17 September 2012) But how do we know that "no human can do that"? Baur treats this as a conceptual question. However, it seems to me to be an empirical question. Baur's conceptual distinction also seems stipulative and I do not see the grounds for such a stipulation. If humans perform status function declarations as I will discuss in connection with John Searle's work, then humans do something that appears to fit the criteria for calling what they do 'creation *ex nihilo*' at least in a sense derivative of, but analogous to, divine creation. What has had no ontological existence is brought into being by such declarations. And those novelties have status and powers. They continue to exist so long as human recognition keeps them in being.

[25] Stoeger (2001: especially 95–8 and the essays cited in his note 32) and Johnson (1996) are interventions in the ongoing discussions of divine agency that approach the problem in ways that utilize the

from a universe suffused with creativity (as process theism suggests). Social evils are the result of the corruption of human creativity in the creation of social structures analogous to the way individual sin is the corruption of human freedom; as such, social evils are a constituent of the 'natural evils' that are 'natural' disasters. Thus, a CD has the potential to provide a defence of God's goodness in the face of manifold forms of evil beyond the hackneyed 'sin and suffering' typically found in theodicies and defences.

C. Status Function Declarations Recent work by speech act theorist John Searle (1995, 2010) on Status Function (hereafter, SF) Declarations possibly solves a problem we have looked at and opens up an avenue for further exploration. An SF Declaration is a speech act that declares, in its most general form, '*x* counts as *y* in context *c*'. By counting as *y*, *x* acquires 'deontic powers'. SF Declarations impute "rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorizations, entitlements, and so on." (Searle 2010: 9) Searle's favourite example is a twenty-dollar bill he takes from his pocket: "This piece of paper counts as twenty dollars in the United States." By having and utilizing this piece of paper, Searle has the ability to buy twenty dollars' worth of goods, or give it away so others can do so, or save it for a rainy day, etc. Only because this *x* counts as *y* in *c* does he have these abilities. If it were a confederate bill from the civil war, it would have no monetary function (and its worth would be recognized only by collectors) because it would no longer be recognized as legal tender, although it still exists physically.

Searle's fundamental claim is that "all of human institutional reality is created and maintained by (representations that have the same logical form as) SF Declarations, including the cases that are not speech acts in the explicit form of Declarations." (Searle 2010: 13, emphasis removed) Searle's understanding of 'institutional' is quite broad. He includes almost every linguistic and non-linguistic social fact under this umbrella—a tactic that is not surprising considering his goal is to provide a fundamental social ontology.[26]

Searle acknowledges that some SF Declarations can be traced to no particular declarative speech act. He claims that "sometimes we just linguistically treat or describe, or refer to, or talk about, or even think about an object in a way that creates a reality by representing that reality as created." (Searle 2010: 13) An originating act is not needed. Hence, even if there is no 'originating speech act' creating theodicy as a discourse, the general acceptance or recognition of the parameters of the modern discourse of theodicy fits this description. Devils or demons no longer haunt the Enlightenment and contemporary landscapes as sources of evil. Rather, all evils are natural sufferings and sinful acts (or their consequences). Structures of evil are absent.

resources of a theology of dual agency. They develop insights along the lines explicated more fully by authors such as Austin Farrer, Robert Sokolowski, and Norris Clarke.

[26] As I have different purposes, I differentiate practices from institutions and communities in ways Searle does not need to. See Tilley (1995: chapter 2, especially 45–53).

But the lack of an identifiable 'originary act' for the discourse of theodicy is no longer a concern.

What applies in the discourse of theodicy also applies to other claims about religious and theological significance. Sacraments, of course, are classic declaratives: sprinkling water on a person and saying the proper words in the proper context counts as baptizing or christening that person. Two pieces of wood and a six-pointed star count as a cross and a Star of David respectively. Insofar as religious symbols, texts, ceremonies, and words count as carrying religious significance, they have such status as the result of explicit or implicit SF Declarations.

If all social reality is created by SF Declarations, this may support the CD. Humans create social reality. But this is more radical than it seems. In some advanced societies *c*, status functions *y* are created even though there may be no particular bearer *x* for that status. Searle gives examples such as the limited liability corporation. Once the corporation is created, and status functions accrue to it, they accrue to no individual: no person is personally liable for the liabilities of the corporation. New deontic powers are created even though there is no identifiable and specifiable *x* that carries those powers.

Searle notes that a network of relationships effectively establishes 'status sites' in the corporation; those who occupy these places may be the bearers of status functions. Yet on Searle's account, like the chariot in Nagasena's parable, "a corporation is just a placeholder for a set of actual power relationships among actual people." (Searle 2010: 25) And perhaps that is so. But those actual power relationships depend on the *status* of certain agents created by the SF declaration, not on their antecedent *existence*, *abilities*, or *functions*. Even if the agents are not created *ex nihilo*, the relationships and status are created *ex nihilo* in the context of a sophisticated social network. In this sense, society and language are invented *ex nihilo* in the sense that new kinds of ontological items are created with new social relationships and deontic powers. Humans cannot, it seems, create matter *ex nihilo*, but they can and do create society *ex nihilo*.

Humans, by nature, are social beings.[27] Insofar as humans are social by nature, if they create status functions then they do, in certain ways, create and recreate their natures. In limited ways, humans have created themselves as social beings since they have created societies, that is, networks of status functional relationships *y* that are irreducible to beings and relationships of the 'natural' or physical order *x*. While the divine primary creator is not bound by context, it is not clear that there are other significant differences that would warrant avoiding ascribing secondary creativity to humans in a sense analogous to the divine creation *ex nihilo*.

7.2 Conclusions

If there are any resolutions of the problems of evil, they are practical, not theoretical. Perhaps a social ontology can help us understand how social evils have been created.

[27] "Yet it is natural for man, more than for any other animal, to be a social and political animal, to live in a group." (Aquinas 1949: bk 1, ch 1)

But a social ontology cannot suggest what to do about them. It does, however, show that it is possible that we together create and recreate social structures (including those that produce evils). Defences are legitimate exercises in the face of attacks on the coherence of what monotheists (of various stripes) believe. As theodicies misdeclare evils, they leave social sins and structural evils not evil at all. The real problems remain: the alleviation of suffering, the reversing of environmental degradation, the overcoming of severe and debilitating social stratification, and the reconciling of those alienated from themselves and/or others.

Ultimately, we hope redeeming evil is God's work; proximately we recognize it is ours.

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Response to Tilley

Beverley Clack

Tilley's approach to evil and suffering is extremely helpful for my attempt to develop a philosophy of religion capable of bringing about social and individual transformation. That experience shapes our engagement with evil explains my renewed interest in the theme. Elected as a city councillor in 2012, I have found myself attempting to find practical solutions to social issues whose roots are often in structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality. Being a practical politician has made me think again about the sources of evil, and Tilley's work has been important for exploring the relationship between evil and the everyday.

Tilley's paper provides the groundwork for a practical way forward which connects philosophical enquiry with lived experience. Critical philosophical analysis of language enables him to challenge habitual misinterpretations of texts used to support theodical arguments. This detailed work exposes the problem of defining evil as "piles of individual acts and omissions," thereby ignoring social structures that support evil and perpetuate suffering. Tilley's challenge to this common definition forms the basis for his critique of theodicy: "by misdeclaring the world, theodicy is itself (unwittingly) a practice that propagates more evil than it explains by effectively erasing structural evils."

Tilley does not stop at clarifying terms. His current work on the "praxes of reconciliation" offers fruitful ground for the kind of practical philosophy of religion I am attempting. That he places this firmly in a Christian context is challenging. That he speaks not of 'Christianity' but of 'the Jesus movement' is more promising, for it suggests a focus less on belief and more on practice, an approach which encourages me to think again about the relevance of Christian frameworks for engaging with suffering, failure, and loss. That Christianity might be framed as a *movement* embodying reconciling practices aimed at "making whole the fractured persons and communities that we are" suggests the advantage of thinking about faith principally as rooted in action rather than in a set of beliefs.

The presence of evil and suffering demands action; its import is not derived from the questions we might ask of God concerning its existence. Exhorting people to a practical

response reminds me of Viktor Frankl's rephrasing of the problem. According to Frankl ([1946] 1985: 131), we are all faced with moments when we are "questioned by life." What matters is how we respond. While Frankl—Holocaust survivor and logotherapist—locates his account of evil in the experience of individuals struggling to find meaning, there is no reason why we should not broaden out this perspective. How are we as social beings to transform our societies in order to address the suffering perpetuated by unjust social structures?

Tilley's praxis-based response is framed by theism. God's ability to create *ex nihilo* is something humans share, albeit as 'secondary agents'. "Is that what evolution is doing and what humans do in creating social reality?" he asks.

I want to explore this 'creativity defence', less as it pertains to God, and more as a way of engaging with the limits and possibilities of being human. What does it mean for us to 'create out of nothing'? While uncomfortable with the theodicy of those, like Richard Swinburne, who see evil as something *necessary* for the creation of good, I think there is a germ of something important here. Experience suggests that there are, indeed, moments which, far from pleasurable, become important in the history of how we have shaped our lives. Out of death, new life can come. (Just to be clear at this point, I am not saying that *all* experiences can be made 'good': sadly, while some might be 'made' by suffering, others are just as likely to be broken by it.) Tilley allows for this unpredictability. Nothing is definite, yet it is possible to find ways of defeating evil, and of founding new and creative ways of living.

Directing our attention to creativity put me in mind of Jonathan Lear's reflections on cultural devastation in his book, *Radical Hope* (2006). A nation whose values were shaped by their actions as warriors and hunters, the Crow were forced to find alternative ways of shaping the meaning of their lives in the face of European settlers, intent on claiming the land that became America. Lear reflects on the Crow's experience to ask a question pertinent to our times: What should *we* do when faced with the possibility that *our* culture might collapse?

This question and the Crow's experience might not seem immediately relevant to the issues raised by evil. Yet by placing the discussion of evil in the context of those things that disrupt and destroy our life together—environmental degradation, social stratification, and alienation—Tilley demands that we reflect upon broader cultural and social issues.

The Crow are not so different from us. Since the financial crisis of 2008, the form of capitalism that has shaped the meaning we give to our lives has come under increasing pressure. The injustices that Tilley highlights spring from a set of values determined by the belief in limitless economic growth as the solution to our problems. Are *we* able to think anew about what makes for a meaningful life? The danger is that we prefer the illusory comfort of old ways of living to finding alternative approaches that might give life meaning.

Lear suggests that creating new ways of living requires more than philosophy; it requires imagination. More than that, it requires *dreaming*. He describes a dream

that Plenty Coups, the last great Chief of the Crow Nation, saw as shaping the way in which he and his people responded to that uncertain future. It did not offer a straightforward plan for responding to the time when "the buffalo went away," but it did offer an image of hope for responding to rapidly changing times. This was the image of the Chickadee, the bird that listens (70–1), and whose deep reflection is able to make for new ways of living.

That dreams and imagination might offer us a way forward is helpful for an age confronted by the injustices of an economic system that seems to be becoming more ruthless, not less, as it attempts to shore itself up. As philosophers of religion, are we able to establish the kind of playful philosophy that enables us to create new ways of living that contribute to the flourishing of all human beings *and* to the planet? That is the challenge of evil, a challenge to which we are all called to respond.

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Response to Tilley

Yujin Nagasawa

In "A Trajectory of Positions," Terrence Tilley defends a version of so-called anti-theodicy. He criticizes theodicies by arguing that they try to "erase" unjustifiable evils other than ordinary sin and suffering, such as "structural evils" and "social sins," which are "patterns of practice like racism and sexism." According to him, theodicies declare that structural evils and social sins do not exist and purport to make them vanish from the debate over God and evil. They purport to reduce them, Tilley says, to "piles of individual acts and omissions." This is bad, according to him, because "by misdeclaring the world, theodicy is itself (unwittingly) a practice that propagates more evil than it explains by effectively erasing structural evils."

Tilley's claim that theodicies propagate more evil than they explain sounds overly dramatic to me, but I have some sympathy with a larger view on which his anti-theodicy seems to be based. Consider, for example, the free-will theodicy. Very roughly speaking, this theodicy purports to show that the evils we observe in the world, such as wars, murders, and rapes, do not undermine theism because they are caused by free human agents who can perform morally wrong actions as well as morally right actions. To take another example, the soul-making theodicy purports to show, again roughly speaking, that evils are necessary for humans to grow spiritually. If we are critical of theodicies

we may construe them as attempts to 'erase' evils, since they hold that what we consider evils are unavoidable consequences which we must accept if we are to realize or achieve something important or great, such as morally significant freedom or spiritual growth. In other words, according to this interpretation, theodicies are attempts to show that many of what we consider evils are not ultimately evil. If we exaggerate the implications of this point, theodicies can be characterized as saying that wars and murders are not really evil. I am somewhat sympathetic to the sentiment that there is something potentially morally questionable in the reasoning behind some theodicies, even though I do not agree with Tilley that theodicies propagate evil.

Towards the end of his paper, Tilley proposes what he calls the 'creativity defence', which says that the following is possibly true: "It was not within God's power to create a world in which free entities could exercise creativity and which did not contain genuine evils." Human creation of social reality is, according to Tilley, analogous to divine creation of the world out of nothing. This seems to suggest, he says, that social evils have "a life of their own." Although the creativity defence addresses social sins and structural evils which, according to Tilley, the free-will defence does not, the creativity defence is strikingly similar to Plantinga's free-will defence. In particular, the creativity defence seems to be based on all the contentious assumptions on which the free-will defence is based: (i) the libertarian conception of freedom is correct; (ii) the standard formulation of divine omnipotence is correct in saying that the actions of free humans are beyond the scope of God's power; and (iii) a world in which humans are free is better than a world in which they are not. (The creativity defence, like the free-will defence, might also have to hold the assumption that Molinism is correct in order to maintain God's omniscience in light of the libertarian conception of freedom.)

Tilley is a critic of theodicies, so he is careful enough to formulate his view as a *defence*, which is concerned with the apparent logical incompatibility between the existence of evil and the existence of God, rather than a *theodicy*, which is concerned with the actual reason why God permits evil. Yet it still seems surprising to me that, on the one hand, Tilley rejects the free-will theodicy with passion while, on the other hand, he endorses the creativity defence. Again, Tilley presents the creativity defence as follows: It is possible that "it was not within God's power to create a world in which free entities could exercise creativity and which did not contain genuine evils." We can present the free-will theodicy in a parallel manner as follows: It was not within God's power to create a world in which free entities could exercise morally significant freedom and which did not contain genuine evils. Again, defences are distinct from theodicies. For example, the free-will theodicy entails the free-will defence but not *vice versa*. But we can also think of theodicies as instantiations of defences in the actual world and defences as theodicies in a possible world. The creativity *theodicy* would say, therefore, that it is *actually* the case that it was not within God's power to create a world in which free entities could exercise creativity and which did not contain genuine evils. Tilley would reject such a view because he thinks that theodicies propagate evil and also because the creativity theodicy is parallel to the free-will theodicy, which he

dismisses. But if the creativity theodicy is so bad, how could what is described in the creativity defence even be an explanation of the possible coexistence of God and evil?

Response to Tilley

Andrew Gleeson

Of the many points raised in Terrence Tilley's interesting paper, I have had here to concentrate on just one.

Tilley affirms the "priority of practice" regarding the problem of evil (henceforth, POE). He develops a distinction, drawn from Aquinas, between the primary agency of God and the secondary agency of human beings:

> God's creation of all there is may best be construed as an act of infinite divine power . . . But such power does not preclude either the need for or the usefulness of finite powers exercised in this world by finite agents who participate in and further the agency of infinite love. God's infinite agency and infinite power are not on the same level with nor exercised in the same way as finite power. Finite and infinite power and agency cannot be in competition with each other.

"Finite and infinite power and agency cannot be in competition with each other." Correct! Which raises the question of whether, or in what way, we should think of God's power and our power as being instances of the same general phenomenon. The crucial question is whether God's power and our power have different values on the same scale, with God in top position, as if his power were a superior version of ours. I criticize this view in my Position Statement.[28] I argue it is maintainable only on a Cartesian conception of persons that is false of both us and God. Divine power and agency are radically different from ours. Unlike creatures, God cannot coherently be said to overcome resistance when he acts. If God were located somewhere on the scale of power his creatures are located on, then no matter how high he was ranked, resistance, however feeble, by beings lower on the scale would always be possible. God is the source of there being a spectrum of power at all, which is just to say in another way that he is the Creator of creatures, of things limited and particular in specific ways, things to which the notion of measuring their power—like measuring their height or weight—makes sense. God confounds any notion of measurement applied to him.

As Herbert McCabe says, God's agency does not *change* anything (change being a phenomenon of the *created* world). If you want to know why the world is like this and not like that, then (insofar as answers are available) look for causes inside the world. If you want to understand why there is a world—any world—at all, then fall to your knees in prayer (that is the peculiar logic of 'understand' here). But it is not as if we have a conception of God that is independent of asking why there is a world at all and where

[28] And in more detail in Gleeson (2010a, 2010b).

he *happens* to be the answer to that question, and *happens* not to be an answer to questions about why the world is like this and not like that. Rather, the question *Why is there something rather than nothing?* (asked in the right spirit) conditions the concept of God, the God who is not an idol (a value judgement, of course). In the same vein, any answer to the question why the universe is one way rather than another, no matter how metaphysically outré, is an answer positing an idol. The root of all this is that religion is an existential phenomenon, a response to the basic fact *that we exist at all*—which means that we exist in limited, hence vulnerable, ways, i.e., ways susceptible to evil—rather than an attempt to find expedients and strategies which minimize the damage or make life more bearable and convenient in practical ways.

How can the view that God's power does not explain anything specific (why the world is like this rather than like that) fit with the beliefs in special providence, incarnation, and miracles? Taking just miracles, the objection assumes that God's power *causally explains* miracles (*personal* causal explanation, 'agent-causation'). It is truer to say that a miracle is expressive of God's love, as a smile is expressive of happiness. It is part of the face of God. If you ask me what is the cause of miracles, in the sense of 'cause' in which we ask why the volcano erupted or why Joe decided to work at home today, then miracles don't have a causal explanation, and that is part of their point: they are events inside the created order which display in an especially direct way the creative love which lies behind there being a created world at all. Like asking why there is something rather than nothing, asking what causes a miracle is a question whose answer involves a very different kind of understanding (the kind I said is exhibited in falling to your knees in prayer) from asking questions about volcanoes and Joe's decision. Of course, it is easy to conflate the two kinds of understanding, or, in our age, to make the ordinary causal kind the dominant or only kind. What soothes the craving for casual explanation is not the idea of a causal super-explanation (a mother of all explanations that explains itself, or doesn't need explaining) but rather a gestalt shift from (what in my Position Statement I call) the mode of objectifying thought to the mode of existential thought, a shift into which one is seduced by love.

But as I have argued, this does not end the POE, only the academic POE. The existential POE, the real one, remains. But that is not I think primarily a practical problem in any standard sense of the word 'practical'. I agree with Tilley that ultimately the POE is not a *theoretical* problem, in the analytical philosopher's sense. But in an important sense I *disagree* with his claim about the primacy of practice, at least if by 'practice' he means worldly expedients for fighting evil, reducing it, living with it, and so on ("If there are any resolutions of the problems of evil, they are practical, not theoretical," he writes). Rather, the POE is an existential (a religious) problem, in the sense that it is a matter of whether we can still love the world and love God even when all our practical expedients and accommodations have been exhausted.

Where does that leave philosophy? Here I agree with Tilley: "Theologically, reason does not provide a 'foundation' for faith. Rather, seeking understanding—doing theology—is one of the practices of faith."

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Reply to Clack

Terrence W. Tilley

I find that I can take issue with very little that Beverley Clack writes in response to my essay. I can, however, respond to one point. She writes, "The injustices that Tilley highlights spring from a set of values determined by the belief in limitless economic growth as the solution to our problems. Are we able to think anew about what makes for a meaningful life?" I am not at all sure about that 'determination'.

I would claim that some of the social evils I have in mind do not necessarily spring from economic values and beliefs. I do agree that believing that the natural world sets no limits to our wealth contributes to many social and personal evils. Infinite economic optimism is ludicrous. I also agree that we need to think anew about how to live meaningful lives. But I think that there is more to the story than the lust for wealth or the belief that an increasing tide of wealth will raise all boats.

Yet such belief is deep in our bones. Nearly twenty years ago I took on the assignment of responding, at a convention of historians, to two papers on birth-control policy early in the twentieth century. One presented communist, the other Roman Catholic, opposition to birth control. Perplexed by this agreement, I asked "why?" The answer I developed from examining rather disparate counter-arguments against birth-control proponents was a deep-rooted, shared conviction in the limitless bounty of nature. The Catholics believed that God created a world that could support unlimited population growth. The communists simply accepted the assumption that the natural world would support any population growth that would occur.

Our belief in limitless economic growth as a cure for what ails us is rooted deeply in our assumptions about the natural world. It is not a recent invention. It has only been questioned when we reach natural limits, as with anthropogenic global warming.

But since I wrote the paper to which Clack has responded, I have been persuaded to distinguish more clearly between (at least) two kinds of social evils. One kind is 'structural', those evils that occur because of the political, economic, and social structures that shape us. The increasing economic disparity in the United States, for example, is clearly attributable to a system of taxation whose sails have been trimmed over the last forty years to enable the wealth of the richest to grow, and the welfare of the vast majority to stagnate or decline. Structural evil is usually, if not always, tied to particular economic values, especially the belief that the solution to our problems is to have 'more'.

But there is also 'cultural' evil, those harmful prejudices often called 'racism' or 'sexism' or 'homophobia' that have little, if any, direct connection to economic values, but afflict the society as a whole. As I write, the current political climate in the United States is afflicted with profound, virulent, and undiscriminating anti-Muslim sentiment. Many politicians have poured petrol on these flames. I do not think that this cultural evil is attributable to a self-defeating economic vision.

Cultural and structural evils are related to each other in many ways. However, they must be distinguished. Changes in policy enacted in laws or regulations can ameliorate structural problems, such as laws forbidding racial discrimination in housing. But neither policy nor law can convert racists' hearts, the evils that they do, and the caustic effect their values and actions have on their very souls.

Eleven years of working as a male nurse's assistant did much to remedy my own racism, sexism, and homophobia. Working under female managers, working as equals with people of many ethnicities, and seeing how lesbian women and gay men were as ordinary and extraordinary as straights, challenged the cultural prejudices I had imbibed. But I know that aspects, at least, of these cultural evils still infect me forty years after I changed careers and became a professional academic.

The remedy for cultural evils is, as Clack suggests, a reimagination of how we can live together. The problem is that we fear we will 'lose' something. Hence, we innoculate ourselves against such new forms of beliefs, values, and visions. We fear that the pattern of Marxian hope trumped by Stalinist 'realism' will be repeated in every imaginative reformation or revolution. Hence, we resist structural and cultural changes that would make new meanings possible for the lives we share.

Religious visions of peace abound. But we resist these because they place multiple demands on us. We refuse the risks we would have to take. We resist the humility and the moderate asceticism they require. It is not that we have failed to imagine other ways to live; it is that we have not had the courage to live in and live out these ways.

Reply to Nagasawa

Terrence W. Tilley

I very much appreciate Professor Nagasawa's thoughtful response to my paper. I would like to respond to two issues that he raised.

First, Nagasawa is not fully convinced that theodicies 'erase' evils and thus propagate more evils. Let me clarify my position. While I am extremely chary of soul-making theodicies, as is Nagasawa, I have not found anyone who would say that "wars and murders are not really evil." The problem is theodicists' *individualism*. Acts of war and of murder are evils perpetrated by individual agents on individual victims. Theodicists, however, cannot construe wars or murders as structural and cultural evils that have a power beyond individual acts or agglomerations of individual acts. Yet there are

important social evils, which have a power beyond individual acts and effects beyond individual sufferings, that theodicists ignore. Let me give an example: the concept of 'white privilege'.

In recent years, this concept has been deployed to describe the cultural evil of racism in the United States. Statistically, a far higher proportion of African Americans than whites are stopped by police on the streets with minimal or no cause, are pulled over by police while driving, are incarcerated, are viewed askance when shopping in upper-echelon stores, are likely to be victims of violence, are unlikely to be able to get mortgages or other loans, are discriminated against by privately owned bed and breakfasts, etc. While the causes of these patterns of behaviour are surely quite varied, an identifiable 'privilege' accrues to simply being 'white'. Poor whites have far less 'privilege' than rich whites, but even when one factors out class status, this concept does describe patterns of behaviour (although it does not *explain* those patterns or particular acts arising out of prejudice).

It has also become clear in recent years that this 'privilege' or hegemony is being dismantled by the increasingly multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious (and nonreligious), and multilingual population of the United States. Many whites displaced by structural economic changes have felt a profound sense of loss of economic and cultural power. They have developed a serious resentment of these changes. We have seen that such displaced white men (and women, too) are easily swayed by political demagoguery that nostalgically evokes a time when such privilege was supposedly intact in a 'Christian' or 'Judaeo-Christian' nation. The demagogue promises to work to restore it and evokes the admiration—and attracts the votes—of much of the culturally and economically displaced white populace.

In my view, 'white privilege' is a social evil. It has structural components (racial profiling, predatory lending, etc.) and cultural components (prejudice). Its reality generates a further social evil, a sense of loss and resentment that afflicts one group of citizens far more than others. My problem with theodicists is that they cannot recognize or account for the power of such evils, which goes far beyond particular evil choices and acts. Such reductionism of social structures to individual acts perpetuates the evil of blindness to social imaginaries that permeate a populace. Such blindness is an evil: it disables good people from working to remediate them because they cannot see them. So I do think that theodicies propagate evil—not in the sense of being sufficient causes of such evil acts and patterns of behaviour, but by blinding people to their nature as social (structural and cultural) evils, rather than individual evil acts and sufferings. This is a key evil of theodicy.

Secondly, Nagasawa concludes by asking, "But if the creativity theodicy is so bad, how could what is described in the creativity defence even be an explanation of the possible coexistence of God and evil?" But the point is *not* to 'explain' how God and evil both exist, but to demonstrate that the claim that 'if there is (so much) evil in the world, then there can (probably) be no God' can be rebutted. (The claim without the parenthetical remarks refers to the logical problem of evil, while the claim with the

parenthetical remarks refers to the existential or evidential problem of evil.) All a defence has to claim is that there is some *possibly* true proposition that shows that 'God exists' and 'Evil exists' (with all the logical and evidential bells and whistles that precisify these propositions) are not inconsistent with each other. The creativity defence does that, while recognizing social evils as part of the picture.

Evidently Nagasawa wants an explanation. But some things are simply inexplicable. As Harry Stopes-Roe has shown, the attempt to formulate 'terminal questions' that seek ultimate explanations always must end up in the inexplicable.[29] A naturalistic atheist might say, 'The natural world exists; there is nothing else.' But then, 'Why is there a natural world?' cannot be answered by the naturalist; the natural world is inexplicable. It just is. A theist might say, 'There is a natural world; God made it; that is why it exists.' But then, 'Why is there a God?' cannot be answered by the theist ('aseity' is not an answer to that question, but an admission that the question has no answer). God just is. God is finally inexplicable (or incomprehensible in the divine nature, if one prefers).

There is no explanation for God. For theists, God is beyond human comprehension. There is no explanation for evil. The inexplicability of the 'first evil will' afflicts theodicists from Augustinians to Austin Farrer (and beyond). Ultimately, evil is an inexplicable surd for the theist and, as Nagasawa shows in his position paper, is simply part of the nature of things for the naturalistic atheist. Theodicies seek to explain the inexplicable. Theodicies explain, defences do not. Attempting to explain the inexplicable is a confusion afflicting theodicists, not defenders. A creativity theodicy, then, would be confused; and is that not also an evil?

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Reply to Gleeson

Terrence W. Tilley

I cannot object to almost anything in Andrew Gleeson's reply to my paper. At one point he disputes my claim that the only worthwhile response to the problem of evil is practical. But I believe that he misunderstands how I use 'practice'. Let me explain.

"Worldly expedients for fighting evil" are a component in one's religious practice. If one asks why there is something rather than nothing and fails to notice the sin, suffering, structural sins, and cultural prejudices in what there is, then one is blind. If someone

[29] See Stopes-Roe (1977: 44–71, especially 62–4).

says that God is loving or just and also fails to work to overcome injustice, hate, or selfish indifference in practice, then one is, at best, insincere. If one sees the evils in creation and does nothing about them, then one is part of the problem, not part of the solution, like Peter the Apostle who was on 'the wrong side' in Caesarea Philippi.

Practical expedients and accommodations are not sufficient, of course. But they are, in my view, necessary for authentic religious practice—and even for the moral integrity of those who do not believe in God. Can one "still love the world and love God even when all our practical expedients and accommodations have been exhausted"? That is the real question. Andrew Gleeson asks it well.

My answer is that I do not know the answer. I don't think any of us can, at least this side of the grave.

As I write from her hospital room, my beloved spouse of forty-six years is fighting metastatic pancreatic cancer with multiple secondary complications that have left her debilitated and frequently in much pain. By the time this rejoinder is published, she will be dead. Her deepest belief is that a good death is more important than a long life. We both pray for what we Catholics call 'a good death' for both of us.

Will she still love the world and God when all her practical expedients and accommodations are exhausted? Will I? Would I if our situations were reversed? I cannot know the answer to such questions. But I can hope that the answer is 'yes', that because of and in spite of it all we will believe that it is the unimaginable power of infinite love that is the answer to the question of why there is something.

Were I not to visit her in the hospital, nurse her at home, arrange for and drive her to her medical and therapy appointments, cook and clean for us, or use whatever resources we have to help her remaining days be good and to support her achieving her goal of a good death, and were I still to say I believed in God, what would I be? Perhaps the most evil person of all, one whose failure to care would contribute to the undermining of another's faith. If I failed to practice 'works of mercy' for one I claim to love, would that not show my claim to love the One Who Is to be hollow? Might such faithlessness to my dearest neighbour even hollow out her faith? 'Practical accommodations' are necessary components in practicing one's faith.

No one can fight all evils, just as no one can pick up every stranger in every ditch. What we can do is to see, have compassion for, and act on behalf of those we come across with what skills we have. None of us can remedy every evil. None of us has the time or the skills to do so.

Some of us have personal, political, educational, or social skills to remedy particular evils. A component of worshipping God is to realize, even in small ways, the reign of God in practice. We do this by working to overcome or redeem the evils we encounter insofar as we can do so. Those who fail to practice any remedies for the evils they encounter cannot worship the living and true God. I might add that those who are humanists also would not display authentic commitment to humanity if they didn't work to alleviate the evils of the world we inhabit.

We Christians can hope that we will remain faithful to the end and that in the end God will—in some unimaginable way—redeem all creation from the evils that afflict it. We can hope for, even if we cannot imagine, the full goodness of a fully realized, universal divine reign. But we cannot know whether or how that will come to pass. Nor can we know whether we will remain faithful.

Learning how to practice the virtue of hope is the ultimate component of religious practice in the face of evil. Hope is a 'practical expedient' in the face of evil, a practice that endures as optimism fades, a truly religious practice that is shown in our worldly practice.

8

God and Evil without Theodicy

Andrew Gleeson

8.1 Greater Good Theodicy

Theodicy tries to show that the existence of God is compatible with the existence of evil. This issue arises for many conceptions of God, but the first section of this essay is confined to the conception of God as (i) a necessarily existing, omnipotent, omniscient, disembodied, perfectly good moral agent, who (ii) loves the rational beings he creates in a sense of 'love' for which the love of human parents for their children is a close model. The first assumption agrees with what most analytic literature on the problem of evil (POE) assumes, and the second is in line with Christian belief. In this section I treat these assumptions anthropomorphically, by which I mean that God's power and knowledge, for example, are limiting cases of human power and knowledge: some of us know a bit, and some of us know a lot more, but God knows everything.

Some theodicies reconcile God and evil by adjusting or rejecting these assumptions, or by finding a non-anthropomorphic understanding of them. In section 8.2 I discuss one of these views. But for now I confine myself to theodicies that do not tamper with the assumptions. The theodicies I criticize turn on what Nelson Pike calls a 'morally sufficient reason' (MSR) for God to create the world (Pike 1963). They seek either the plausibility of an MSR or the mere logical possibility of one. (The latter case is called a 'defence'. Since the distinction is not essential for my argument, I refer to both theodicies and defences as 'theodicies'.) The former is designed to meet the 'evidential' POE, which claims that God's existence is unlikely in view of all we know or find plausible; the latter tries to meet the 'logical' POE, which claims an inconsistency between God as just defined (often just by the first assumption) and evil. I argue that the central MSR employed by these theodicies—the greater good—is fatally flawed. This does not mean that I think there is a sound atheological argument from evil. In fact, in sections 8.2 and 8.3 I sketch two escapes from two different forms of the POE.

It will be helpful to draw this tripartite categorization of kinds of evil:

Natural evil: the pain or suffering of living things which arises exclusively from natural causes, i.e., not from the acts of rational creatures.

Non-natural evil: the pain or suffering of living things which arises partly from the acts of rational creatures.

Moral evil: the wrongdoing, bad character, and morally disordered inclinations of rational creatures.

One strategy says that God makes use of natural evils and non-natural evils as logically necessary casual conditions of greater goods. Familiar examples include that pain and suffering are necessary for fortitude and sympathy, and for moral and spiritual growth (Hick 2001); or for our free decisions to be weighty, thus conferring the good of being responsible for and 'of use' to one another (Swinburne 1998, 2010: ch 6); or for the overwhelming goods of incarnation and atonement (Plantinga 2004). These goods are held to 'outweigh'—be greater than—the evils paid for them, and that outweighing is held to be at least one significant element justifying God's creation of the world, as opposed to his not creating at all, or creating a lifeless world, or one without life more sophisticated than insensate vegetation. The strategy depends on rational creatures freely responding virtuously often enough to natural and non-natural evil, so it seems there is no guarantee that God will actually secure the desired greater good. But these theodicies can and often do carry the assumption that God's omniscience includes knowing in advance of creation the moral choices of his rational creatures, or at least knowing there is a high degree of probability that enough creatures will respond virtuously often enough to secure the required amount of good (I shall argue that there are unacceptable consequences in not assuming this). On this assumption of foreknowledge, even in the case of moral evil and consequent non-natural evil, where it might seem God merely 'permits' these evils—since they are the work, and the result of the work, of free human choices foreseen but undecided by God—God still chooses to create what he foresees, and thus bears as real (though not exclusive) a responsibility for these evils as for the natural evils he does decide.

Suppose I foresee (from my knowledge of his character) that if I, the president, appoint a particular general to head the army, he will prosecute an aggressively murderous war against a small country. The conquest will secure greater goods for my country and the world at large (and, eventually, perhaps even for the victim nation), goods that cannot be secured by less evil means, and for the sake of which I appoint him. Foreseeing the general's actions, I must take blame for facilitating them by making the appointment; if so, then God must take blame for the evil-doings he foresees his rational creatures will perform, and for their consequences. Of course the analogy is imperfect, but insofar as it is enlightening the imperfection tells *against* theodicy, for it consists in the fact that God *creating* the world—as anthropomorphically understood by theodicists as an action for which God can earn moral credit or discredit as humans do in their supposedly analogous actions—is a more intimate relationship than one creature facilitating the action of another, and presumably, therefore, entails a deeper responsibility. Moreover, it makes perfect sense to say that I *intend* to use the general as a means to the realization of the greater goods. Consequently, God intends

the evils he foresees (non-natural as well as natural) as *means* to the greater goods (in those instances where they result in such goods).[1]

The moral objection to this idea is that it supposes God to sacrifice the lives of often innocent creatures, including human children, for the sake of the greater goods. Instrumental justification is not objectionable in itself. It is not objectionable for human parents to send their children to school to secure the greater goods this serves. But it is a world apart to suppose that it is also justified for a human or divine parent to inflict a painful and degrading disease on children, or send them to Auschwitz, for various greater goods this might secure. Yet theodicists sometimes move from innocent examples to these outrageous ones with barely a blink. If God creates a world with these evils for the sake of the greater goods, then he *inflicts* the evils, not only the natural ones but also the moral ones humans freely choose (and their non-natural consequences), just as I, as president, can rightly be said to inflict the war atrocities by appointing the general to his position, given that I act knowing what he will do and even willing it for the sake of the greater goods ('he who wills the end, wills the means').

Things might be different if the infliction of such horrors were the only way to avoid an even greater evil. But that is not the situation faced by God when he decided whether to create a world and which world to create. As I have pointed out, it was open to him not to create, or to create a lifeless world, or one without life more sophisticated than insensate vegetation. So he cannot appeal to *avoiding a worse evil* to justify the evils he creates; he can only appeal to the notion of taking an already good, or at least not bad, situation—God alone existing—and making it better. That will not bear the justificatory weight of creating horrors. (I am not condoning doing evil to avoid worse evil, nor am I condemning it. I am pointing out that the objection here is not committed to a controversial moral absolutism.) I do not deny that controlled hardship can 'build character', or holiness, nor that *sometimes* horrors do so. The question is not that factual one, but the moral question of what the facts justify. The instrumental idea under discussion treats the lives of God's children, and that of course includes actual human children, as commodities on sale to the world able to bid the most good for them. But for a loving parent (as God is likened to), or indeed a decent human being as we understand that to be informed by normal responses of sympathy and compassion, the lives of human beings—especially children—*are not for sale*.[2]

Of course, many theodicists don't rely exclusively, and in some cases don't rely at all, on the instrumental strategy I have been discussing. There is another version of greater-good theodicy which is not instrumental. The idea that God's creation of this world with its evils is justified by the evils' being a logically necessary causal means to greater goods, can be supplemented, or replaced, by the idea that the creation of evil is justified by the evils being a causal *consequence of* (rather than a *means to*) a greater

[1] Theodicies vary as to the proportion of natural and non-natural evils that result in greater goods. Theodicists need not hold that every evil occasions some good, nor that each such good outweighs the evil that occasions it. They need only hold that the overall balance of good and evil favours good.

[2] The objection is not original. Famously, it is that of Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov.

good, a causal consequence that it is not within God's power to prevent short of not forsaking the greater good. That greater good is (libertarian) free will. Simplifying considerably, Plantinga (1974) argues that if God creates a world W which includes rational creatures endowed with free will—in which case God leaves it up to them what choices they make—and it is true that if God creates W at least some of the creatures in W will do wrong, then God cannot create W without some of the creatures doing wrong (a fact which God foresees). It is a logical possibility, Plantinga argues, that the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are such that God, if he creates any world with any free creatures at all, must create one wherein (i) those free creatures do evil as well as good, and (ii) the resultant worldwide balance of good and evil is no better than in the actual world. Plantinga thus accounts for (in my terms) real-world moral evil and its non-natural evil consequences. He also accounts for natural evil by assuming that it is logically possible that such evil is due to the free acts of other created agents. If it is logically possible that the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are like that, then it is also logically possible that God cannot create a world with the greater good of free will but without real-world evil, even though such a world is a logically possible world.[3] But if that is logically possible, then there is no inconsistency between the propositions in my original definition of God and the proposition asserting the existence of real-world evil.

Many philosophers believe that Plantinga's argument solves the logical POE. I disagree (though I do not resurrect the logical POE). The only substantial difference between Plantinga's defence and the instrumental strategy (considered as a response to the logical version of the POE) is the shift from evils being a means to greater goods to their being a consequence of them. But this shift does not escape the indictment, which doesn't turn on the evil/good relation being means/end. The crux of it is that it is morally objectionable to knowingly *exchange* the lives of innocent people for an improvement to a situation that is already good or at least not bad; or (to use language that makes the moral point) to *sacrifice* those people for the greater good. Plantinga's scenario involves that exchange as much as the instrumental one. God's children are not for sale. The point can be made with particular clarity if we focus on the second property I ascribed to God at the beginning: that he stands to his rational creatures (*inter alia*, of course) as loving human parents stand to their children. Consider human parents offered the choice of sending their child to Auschwitz in exchange *simply* for a tremendous good someone will bestow on the world ('simply' indicates that the status quo is a good or at least not-bad one, and that there is no question of avoiding some worse evil). If they are loving human parents (not subject to some disordering passion), and we suppose nothing is in favour of the exchange except securing the greater good, there will be *no question* of their agreeing. It is not something they will consider, weighing the pros and cons, as they might when deciding whether to send their child

[3] Plantinga does not believe that free will itself will outweigh real-world evils; he says it is also necessary that created rational agents freely perform more good than evil actions.

to a certain school, but something they will reject automatically as unthinkable. Nor is the matter different if we imagine their being invited to *conceive* a child on condition of this exchange: the idea of agreeing to consign a prospective child to Auschwitz for the sake of greater goods is no less repugnant to parental love than that concerning an existing child.

Matters are different if we think of parental love as like the universal beneficence of an ideal observer willing to crunch the numbers for a maximizing outcome, or of God as such an observer in distinction from a loving parent. And indeed theodicists *do* tend to assimilate divine love to a sort of cosmic beneficence. If they are willing to cling immovably to *that* view, then my critique of theodicy will fail. But that means either distorting our understanding of parental love, or abandoning it as an image of God's relation to his creatures. Real human parents care nothing for what a Martian like the ideal observer thinks and neither does our heavenly father, who cares like a father even for each sparrow that falls, let alone for human beings, who are worth much more (Matt 10: 29–31). The ideal observer is in the most telling sense *inhuman*. If the image of God as heavenly father has any content at all, then it is not consistent with treating (in respect of the matter under discussion) what is intolerable in a human parent as a virtue in God.

Importantly, the point does not depend on the analogy of God with a loving human parent. Ordinary human sympathy and compassion are just as incompatible with sending a stranger's child, or an unknown child, to Auschwitz simply for the sake of greater goods. Insofar as moral decency is informed by these responses, as surely it is, we can say that accepting such a proposal is morally unconscionable. Then, since, by the definition I started with, God is a perfect moral agent—meaning he is subject to the same morality to which we are, as it applies to his uniquely exalted position (an assumption without which most theodicy would be unrecognizable)—it follows that God too will find such a proposal morally unconscionable. That is, unless there is some relevant difference in his unique situation (or unless, again, he is just the ideal observer). But, *ex hypothesi*, all that is relevant and favours the proposal is the achievement of the greater good, and the only difference between humans and God bearing on the greater good is that God can guarantee delivery and make the good vastly better than we can. But it is a misunderstanding of the *moral* nature of this objection to think it is sensitive to *these* issues. The decent person's revulsion does not arise from fear that the greater good may not be forthcoming, or that it may not be great enough. The lives of children are not for sale—period.

Theodicy's resources are not exhausted, however. There are two strategies that can be used to resist this objection. The first appeals to a postmortem eternal beatitude. This is sometimes construed as the natural culmination of spiritual growth under God's tutelage and with the discipline of suffering that constitutes the pilgrimage of our present life, as in the Whiggish theodicy of John Hick. And sometimes it appears almost as a *deus ex machina*, conferred by God in the hereafter on the victims of horrors as compensation (Adams 1999). Either way, we can suppose that children sent

to Auschwitz are included in this blessing, included, perhaps in a special way, in the greater good that the earlier (pre-mortem) stage of their lives is sacrificed for. Does this make a difference? Again, it certainly does to an ideal observer, even one who considered only the lives of the children and no one else's: for such an observer, the 'early (pre-mortem) stage' of a life is something that can be traded for later goods if the sums favour it. But, to repeat, human parents are not ideal observers, and if the analogy with loving human parents means anything, neither is God. God will see things as the parents do: however great the pot of gold on the other side, however inflated to a nebulous infinity, if the children have to have the 'early (pre-mortem) stage' of their lives ruined by going through Auschwitz to get there, then the deal is 'not on'. The lives of children are not for sale.[4] There is something particularly dubious about trying to seduce parents into agreeing to the deal by promising all manner of good things for the children at the end, if only they (the parents) will do the evil now of subjecting their children to degradation. Ironically, the point may be clearer if the evil inflicted on the children is much less in tangible terms: imagine being offered an inducement, in the form of your child's guaranteed eternal happiness, to spit on their grave. Any decent parent would prefer the child take its chances for happiness.

The second strategy is to suppose that the victims of evil will, or would if they could, consent to the exchange. Adams (1999) supposes a retrospective consent, in which, from the perspective of an eternal beatific intimacy with God, we no longer wish we had not suffered the horrors we did, now seeing their 'positive aspect' as points of contact with the incarnate, suffering God in Christ. Plantinga (2004) supposes a hypothetical, ideal consent. If we could see the whole story as omniscient God does, unswayed by distorting human passions, we would see the great good our children stand to gain in return for their suffering as forcefully as we see the (by comparison minor) evils they suffer, and we would agree to the deal. We can't do this, but God can, and so to speak (this is not an expression Plantinga uses) he consents for us; his creating the world is morally licensed by this hypothetical consent. But Plantinga's supposition is just a reversion to God as ideal observer, now appearing as ideal consenter. If God is not an ideal observer, but is more like a human parent, he will not be impressed by this hypothetical consent. Regarding Adams' position, the crucial point is that a retrospective consent—even if it could be seen as morally legitimate, and not just psychologically actual—is simply another addition to the bag of goods being offered for the child's life. No loving parent, and no compassionate moral agent, can agree to the degradation of their child, or a child, simply on the basis of what the child can one day be persuaded to agree to.

This is a critique of the main strategies of theodicy over the last 65 years or so, but it does not exhaust them. I have already mentioned concepts of God which depart from

[4] In fact, the degradation is not something confined to any stage of the child's life. Psychologically, it may be. But *morally* it stains the parent–child relationship *forever*, and there is no coherent way of weighing it against future goods.

the definitions I've given and/or from an anthropomorphic reading of them. Moreover, I have so far been discussing theodicies which assume that God's omniscience includes his knowledge (before he creates) of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Not all do this. But if God has no idea whether his creatures will make the free choices required to realize the greater good often enough to actually realize it, then in creating the actual world God takes a reckless gamble: he plays Russian roulette with the lives of his children. The actual world has evil enough, but if God had no idea what his creatures would do then for all he knew when he created the world it could have turned out much worse. Now, one can take a hard line on that. It is the creatures who choose evil: *we* are to blame, not God! *That* appeal to free will is genuinely an alternative to greater-good theodicy (as Plantinga's use of free will is not). But it is not convincing. If the United States hands out nuclear weapons to a country it cannot know anything about (as, say, we once were able to know little about inhabitants of remote lands) and that country turns out to be akin to (say) North Korea and launches a nuclear war, then the United States bears some of the blame. Matters are different if we assume God can have knowledge of *levels of risk* about rational creatures misbehaving. In particular, if we assume that the initial risk of misbehaviour was quite low, and that God knew this, his action in creating the world might fall below a morally acceptable level of risk. Without entering into deep and treacherous issues of metaphysics (or rather, in the critique of metaphysics), I don't see how this theodicy can be refuted, at least in relation to moral evil.[5]

That admission made, I maintain that the critique of greater-good theodicy I have presented is sound. But this does not mean that no theodicy can succeed. Not only is there the possibility just mentioned, but maybe there are other non-greater-good strategies I have not thought of. In any event, such approaches share with the greater-good idea a radically mistaken picture of God. The next section challenges that picture and describes how a truer picture affords a dissolution of the POE as philosophers generally understand it. The last section argues that this does not resolve the POE *simpliciter*; rather it points to the problem's real nature as a religious or existential one, not a metaphysical one. The characterization of God as loving parent provides a possible way forward.

8.2 God without Anthropomorphism

At the heart of the mainstream debate is an anthropomorphic Cartesian conception of God. God's knowledge is the limiting case of the kind humans possess, his power the same kind as ours taken to the maximum. Of course, God does not have a body. But that does not undo the anthropomorphism, for it rests on a mistaken human psychology which treats bodies as ultimately irrelevant to agency or even as encumbrances to it. God creates the world by *willing* it to be, as I raise my arm by willing it. Or do I? If I 'will' to raise my arm, what exactly do I will? That my arm *rise*? That is not specific enough: my arm can rise without my raising it. That I *raise* it? But I do not normally

[5] But see Trakakis (2008: 168–71).

have to *will* myself to raise my arm; I raise it effortlessly. If we insist that every raising my arm is willing that I raise it, then the willing will not be distinguishable from a certain mode, the effortless mode, of raising my arm, a *bodily* action. So if God creates worlds as we raise our arms, he needs a body—and God does not have a body. Alternatively, we can follow the normal way of speaking, in which talk of willing myself to raise my arm implies resistance, difficulty and effort, and the possibility of failure. But now the problem is that God cannot encounter resistance. He does not need to make an effort to create the world, and he cannot fail in creating it. The attempt to understand God's creation of the world as literally the same phenomenon as human 'acts of will', just on a larger scale, founders.

That leaves us with an image—God is *like* a human creator, *like* the potter crafting his pot, the architect of the heavens and stonemason of the Earth—but without any way of cashing out the image in literal (that is, in the context, human) terms. How then does the image get a useful foothold? Recall the earlier image of God as loving parent. Parent and artist bring forth their creations as acts of love. This is not an empirical claim about the motives of actual parents and artists. It is a conceptual claim about the ideal of parent or artist, the ideal normative for the practice. The point of bringing these images together in talk of the world as a loving father's creation is to see the world's 'gratuitousness', its and our being here at all (as opposed to blank nothing) and of our being able to take no credit for this (the world comes to us as sheer gift), as itself a kind of love, one resembling a union or intersection of the two human loves.

But what about truth? Isn't this account just inspiring metaphor? It isn't scientific or factual truth, or truth acquired in abstract reasoning like that of mathematics, logic, and metaphysics. These fields require only 'objectifying' responses. Inquirers do not need to draw on their individual sensibility. It doesn't matter *who* conducts the inquiry, because the right answer is sensitive only to qualities definitive of rational agency in general as philosophers tend to conceive it: logic, rationality, factual knowledge, scientific method, etc. But we should not assume that this kind of truth is the only kind. Rather, we should be sensitive to the different forms that truth and understanding take in different contexts. In some areas it is an objectifying matter. In morality or art or religion it is very different. With regard to God or religion, it is a matter of trying to find ways of understanding the world that are most faithful to our 'existential' (or 'religious') experience. It is a matter, for example, of coming to see the point in a practice such as saying grace before a meal. One doesn't see that by conducting a scientific investigation—or a metaphysical one. (This does not mean of course that one need not respect logic, fact, etc. where these are relevant.)

The *form* that truth takes in existential contexts renders certain questions about God conceptually improper. Unlike televisions and mongooses, one cannot ask what God is made of or what processes he uses to create things. Theologians call this divine *simplicity*: God has no internal structure or processes. Consequently, God does not have a body, but he is not an invisible Cartesian consciousness either. He is neither visible nor invisible, embodied nor disembodied, conscious nor unconscious: these

concepts have no application to God. God is unlimited and unconditioned; but this is not a matter of his extending to the horizon like the ocean, only going on 'forever'; the notions of being limited and conditioned have no application to him. God is not a member of any kind, a *this* or a *that*. These 'negations' of theology are not ways of describing some mysterious object. They indicate that any such descriptions should not be confined to, or be principally sensitive to, the kind of criteria (logic, rationality, factual information, scientific method, etc.) definitive of the objectifying conception of reality (they do not themselves tell us what conception of reality *is* relevant).

This has an important consequence for the POE: it dissolves it. Herbert McCabe explains that, as an argument against God, the POE is a conceptual confusion based on the failure to understand the radical transcendence of God, applying to him concepts, like deficiency as a cause, which have application only to creatures. McCabe writes that the POE is:

> . . . a typical metaphysical muddle. That is to say, it contains phrases that seem to make familiar sense but that on examination turn out to be senseless because they employ words outside their proper context. The problem of evil is stated by asking questions about God that can only intelligibly be asked about creatures. It derives its apparent force not from its intelligibility but from the exigencies of the imaginative picture that we inevitably have of God and the world.
>
> (McCabe 2010: 111)

According to McCabe, God's creation of the world is not a *process* that *makes changes* to the world like causes inside the created world. If it were, God would be a kind member, able to affect and be affected by members of other kinds, according to his and their distinctive kind-essences. Then his causal activity could be appraised as more or less *efficient* or *skilled* or *successful*. He could be appraised as a more or less good member of his kind. But God is not a member of a kind, has no essence, and his causal activity is not a process that makes changes to the world, so it *cannot* be appraised in these terms. The radicalness of God's creative relation to the world makes it meaningless to speak of creation as a special instance of what creatures do when they make things, so *there is no sense in drawing inferences from deficiencies in created things to deficiencies in their Creator*, the way we can with causal relations *within* the world. There is no index of success or failure, and thus for excellence or deficiency, for *creating* the world the way there is for *making* within the world. The Creator cannot be *good* or *bad qua* Creator because there are no criteria for appraising the act of creation.

8.3 The Problem of Evil Redux

I believe McCabe's argument dissolves the POE as discussed in section 8.1, what I call the *academic* POE. Theodicists routinely distinguish the intellectual POE from the personal, practical, or existential problems: how to cope with evil, how to maintain faith, etc. They say their concern, *qua* philosophers, is with the intellectual problem, leaving the other problems to pastors and psychologists. I talk of the academic problem and the existential problem. If one thinks of religious truth as objectifying, one

will think that properly *cognitive* inquiry about God and evil ends with McCabe's dissolution of the academic POE. Then the existential problem will appear as merely an instance of human irrationality; we fret over God and evil without a rational basis. But if we think that the existential problem has its own forms of truth and understanding, then we can see that McCabe has not gone far enough. It is not only the conception of God that is faulty in the standard debate, but also the conception of evil, and of how a conflict arises. Both the anthropomorphists *and* McCabe assume that the POE arises because we draw an inference from a fact about creation—that it contains horrors—to a conclusion about God. McCabe blocks the inference by showing that a proper understanding of God precludes it. But the existential POE *does not rest upon an inference*. The parent who has lost their child rages against God. The rage, to be *against God*, must be *existential*, by which I mean one that cannot be appeased by practical accommodations or expedients (having another child, finding other interests, or supposing the child has died for a greater good), because it arises from a grief that blackens the parents' whole world, which disables their ability to savour it as something beautiful and welcome, *no matter how else one fills in the details of that world* (the accommodations and expedients). God is the intentional object of our hosannas and prayers. Similarly, he is the object of our existential terrors and grievances.[6] These are not the conclusions of practical inferences from a prior metaphysical understanding of God as a 'perfect being'. They are basic human responses that form the raw ingredients of an understanding of God. 'God' is the address to which existential responses are sent. Indeed, I would say that God is not God without the existential POE, just the idol of a certain conception of philosophical inquiry. If McCabe is right, then the existential POE has been the real problem all along, and the academic problem a distraction. His solution to the academic POE is powerless against the existential problem.

Back to the image of God as a loving parent. Loving parents are not perfect beings. Yes, they love their children and want what is best for them. But they also get exasperated with them, get mad at them, yell at them, curse them and not talk to them, and go mad with grief at losing them. And they and the children sometimes quarrel and are estranged and reconciled, and then quarrel again, and on it goes. They do enormously brave and loving things for one another, but also, sometimes, in the anguish of their love, they do cruel and terrible things. *That* is how this sort of love is. It is not cool or impartial, it is not always pretty and benevolent, and it takes vast and dangerous risks, including some that an austere morality may disapprove of. In section 8.1, I argued that a God imagined as a loving parent could not agree to create a world he knows will consign his children to horrors simply for the sake of making a good or not-bad situation better. I believe this is consistent with holding that he may well create such a

[6] Consequently, the grievances need not take the form of assuming that God is deficient *qua* his essence as the member of some kind, as McCabe seems to assume. When you are indignant with me for slighting you, your concern is not primarily with *my character*, with how good or bad I am according to the essence of the human kind; foremost, you are indignant with *me*. Of course, the question of character can arise, but this is not so with the existential responses to (the non-anthropomorphic) God.

world from the same impulse of creative love that has led so many parents to create children they love, even knowing that the chances are heavily on the side that they will die in infancy of painful diseases.[7] Despite a superficial similarity, that is a very different thing. It is all the difference between a distant, cold bureaucracy and a passionate love. *Of course* such parents and God are subject to moral criticism. But does morality *have* to have the last word? I have no argument to show that anyone who thinks it does is mistaken. Those who stand with the burning children to condemn God take a noble stand, but perhaps not the only defensible one. What do we really want in a heavenly father? What we want in an earthly one, I suggest. Not a perfect being, supervising the family or the universe with a cold, beneficent efficiency, ready to treat his children as tokens in the cosmic barters recommended by theodicy. But a parent who loves us enough to argue and fight with us, be driven mad with us, risk everything for us, and even bust up with us forever with an inconsolable grief or a blackened heart—all and only because *we matter that much*. Parent and child can continue to love each another even when one or both has done terrible evil; and even when a permanent break is made, the love marks both parties forever (the depth of the break is the measure of the mark: 'I'll never speak to him/her again').

None of this can happen with the perfect being of theodicy. That being is shaped in the form of our aspiration to *make sense* of all the messiness, contingency, absurdity, and evil of life. By definition, theodicy tries to give an account of how that sense is made. But it is central to what is repugnant about evil that it does *not* make sense. So perhaps all theodicies are ultimately instances of that which holds that evil is unreal. If that is so, then they face the charge of palliating our sense of evil—and with it, cheapening our sense of goodness.[8]

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[7] I am assuming, what I have no space to argue, that human-like love is not logically possible without being subject to serious evils.

[8] Much of the argument in this paper summarizes and builds on that of Gleeson (2012a, 2012b).

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Response to Gleeson

Beverley Clack

Gleeson's critique of theodicy centres on discussions surrounding the 'morally sufficient reasons' that God might have for creating a world like this. Invariably, such arguments revolve around the question of what it might mean for God as a loving parent to 'allow' humans to suffer. Keen to absolve God from blame for suffering, proponents of this approach see God as *allowing* evil to persist in order that certain 'greater goods' might flourish.

In probing the image of God as loving father, Gleeson establishes its problematic uses by theodicists. When parenthood is applied to God, theodicists seem content to allow God's parenting skills to fall well short of what would be expected of loving *human* parents. For Gleeson, this is not good enough: a God who is distant and removed, and who calculates the amount of suffering against the good to be achieved, is not sympathetic and compassionate, and thus fails to conform to even the most basic requirements of what is expected of human parenting. As Gleeson notes, "If the image of God as heavenly father has any content at all, then it is not consistent with treating . . . what is intolerable in a human parent as a virtue in God."

These critical comments pave the way for his wider critique of the philosophers' God. This God suffers from being both too abstract and too anthropomorphic. As a result, the problem of evil is misrepresented as an academic one, based upon an inference from creation that leads to a conclusion about God. For Gleeson, rightly I think, the problem is better framed as a religious or existential problem: Why is this happening to me? Why is the world such that my child has to suffer? These questions are of the kind that arise from suffering. They are deeper than the merely intellectual, for they strike at the very heart of our being. And as Gleeson notes, all too often the academic problem becomes a mere distraction from grappling with the painful experience of living.

Where I find myself most in agreement with Gleeson—perhaps surprisingly, given that I say almost nothing about God in my paper—is when he reflects on the kind of God grounded in experience of the world. "God," he writes, "is the intentional object of our hosannas and prayers. Similarly, he is the object of our existential terrors and

grievances… 'God' is the address to which existential responses are sent." This is the kind of rich, perplexing, and thought-provoking comment that emerges from good theology: it makes us think about the nature of the world and our place in it.

Gleeson asks us to think differently about how we understand that word 'God'. The comments I've just referred to remind me of some comments on religion made by the playwright Dennis Potter that I have found extremely useful for framing my own work on the subject. Potter's plays were controversial; at times they were judged even blasphemous by the religious. They deal with shocking themes: for example, in *Brimstone and Treacle* a demonic visitation is framed as having a 'good' outcome. This might lead us to think that Potter had no time for religion: quite the reverse. In his last interview, given six months before his death from cancer, he reflected on how important religion was to him. In claiming this, he began by rejecting a religion founded on fear: "what kind of cruel old bugger is God, if it's terror that is the ruling edifice, if you like, the structure of religion?… Now that to me isn't religion." (Potter 1994: 5) He went on: "religion to me has always been the wound, not the bandage." (5) We might mishear that, particularly as a popular view of God would be that 'he' is the only sufficient balm for the ills of life. So again: Potter says, "religion is the wound, not the bandage."

We might decide that Potter is making mischief by pointing to religion as the cause of all the trouble in the world. I don't think we should read him in that way. I think something similar is going on for Potter and Gleeson. What might it *mean* to see God as the wound, not the bandage? Perhaps something like this: that religion arises from deep engagement with the depths of the world; that God emerges from the point at which we discern the limits of our imaginings, or the sheer givenness of our being. We realize that there is much we cannot make sense of, that so much of our life is limited to the surface, and we have to try to find some way of accommodating ourselves with that newfound understanding. Here is the rub for theodicy: in seeking to 'tidy up' the messiness of things, theodicists fail to accept that the world is *not* tidy and that there are things of which we can make little sense. Evil is one of those things, as is love: a phenomenon that defies logic and yet is central to our experience as human animals.

I'm not sure how far Gleeson wants to run with these comments that I find so fruitful. I'm not sure how radical he wants his theology to be. Indeed, there were places in his conclusion which suggest he remains wedded to the very model of God as Creator that gets the academic problem of evil running in the first place, albeit with significant modifications that allow for the more intensely personal God that permeates his conclusion. His Creator is a loving parent who gets mad, yells, curses, goes mad with grief, is brave, loving, etc. I am assuming that this fleshed out—and fleshly—Creator God is grounded in the texts, practices, and rituals of his own religious tradition.

If this is the case, however, I am not sure whether Gleeson can escape some kind of academic grappling with the question of the evil found in that God's creation. Just how far is Gleeson willing to go to challenge the habitual models which have shaped the philosophical account of God, and what *does* it mean to use the word 'God' in the first

place? These remain important questions for those of us critical of theodicy and wishing to shape the discourse surrounding evil differently.

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Response to Gleeson

Yujin Nagasawa

In his position paper, Andrew Gleeson distinguishes two versions of the problem of evil: the intellectual problem of evil and the existential problem of evil. (He calls the intellectual problem the 'academic problem'. This term, however, seems problematic. The very fact that Gleeson addresses the existential problem as an academic philosopher suggests that the existential problem is also at least partly an academic problem. In what follows, therefore, I adopt the more commonly used term, 'intellectual problem'.)

The intellectual problem is a problem concerning the apparent incompatibility between the existence of evil and the existence of God. Sometimes it is formulated in terms of strict logical compatibility, but it has also been formulated as the question of how one can be justified in believing in the existence of God in light of the existence of evil. Either way, it is a conceptual problem which demands theodicies in a broad sense—i.e., rational, logical responses to the problem from a theistic perspective. The existential problem, on the other hand, is concerned with existential terror and grievances that are raised by victims of actual occurrences of evil.

As Gleeson argues, theistic philosophers have worked primarily with the traditional concept of God as an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being, and have focused predominantly on the intellectual problem. They seek to understand how God can create a world that is full of pain and suffering or how God can allow pain and suffering, given the assumption that God is an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being. Gleeson claims that the notion of a perfect being on which theodicies are based cannot resolve the existential problem of evil because, while "[t]hat being is shaped in the form of our aspiration to *make sense* of all the messiness, contingency, absurdity, and evil of life . . . it is central to what is repugnant about evil that it does *not* make sense" (emphases in original).

There are many points that Gleeson makes or implies with which I agree.

First, I agree with Gleeson (or with what he implies) that it is important to recognize the distinction between the intellectual problem and the existential problem. For example, when parents who have lost their child in a tragic accident cry, 'How could there be a God if he is totally silent in response to our pain and agony?', it would be a

mistake to construe this as raising an intellectual question such as, 'How could the existence of God be consistent with the existence of our pain and agony?'.

Secondly, I agree with Gleeson (or with what he implies) that existential concern is the core or root of the problem of evil, even though many philosophers extract the intellectual problem from it. Notice that most examples of the problem of evil found in the Bible are concerned mainly with the existential problem.

Thirdly, I agree with Gleeson (or with what he implies) that it is unfortunate that the existential problem of evil tends to be overlooked by philosophers, especially in the analytic tradition. Analytic philosophers of religion often concentrate on the intellectual problem and end up addressing highly technical sub-issues in epistemology and metaphysics that are detached from the existential core of the problem of evil raised by victims of evil in the actual world.

Despite my sympathy for Gleeson's overall approach, there are also some points that he makes or implies with which I disagree. First, I do not think that the existential problem is the only problem of evil, or that the existential problem is more important than the intellectual problem. Gleeson tries to sketch a response to the existential problem by appealing to a concept of God that departs from the traditional perfect-being concept typically assumed in theodicies. He claims that what we really want in light of the existential problem is that God be analogous to an earthly father. In other words, we do not want

> …a perfect being, supervising the family or the universe with a cold, beneficent efficiency, ready to treat his children as tokens in the cosmic barters recommended by theodicy. But a parent who loves us enough to argue and fight with us, be driven mad with us, risk everything for us, and even bust up with us forever with an inconsolable grief or a blackened heart—all and only because *we matter that much*. (emphasis in the original)

Gleeson adds: "none of this can happen with the perfect being of theodicy." However, even if we accept Gleeson's response to the existential problem we would still feel unsatisfied, because his response raises further questions that are of intellectual concern: How can we say that the being described in this quote is God if he is imperfect in the same way as earthly parents are? Why does God not try to rescue victims just as loving earthly parents would try to rescue their children in danger? and so on. These questions are not of existential concern but they are nevertheless important to theists. So even if Gleeson focuses on the existential problem and succeeds in responding to it through his existential approach, he still cannot avoid important intellectual problems. Gleeson has shown that the existential problem cannot be avoided, but neither can the intellectual problem.

Secondly, while I agree with Gleeson that theodicies cannot entirely eliminate the existential problem, I hold that they can in principle eliminate some portion of it. For example, the theodicy according to which God will confer a postmortem eternal beatitude on victims as compensation, or the theodicy according to which God has good reason to allow pain and suffering but we do not yet understand that reason, could

offer some consolation to victims of evil. Theodicies do not have to be dry and detached, as Gleeson (and critics like him) seem to think.

Response to Gleeson

Terrence W. Tilley

Andrew Gleeson makes some important—and I believe correct—claims in his essay. Talk of God begins not with philosophy, but with prayer and awed gratitude ("hosannas"); we must begin with concrete religious talk of God, not philosophical abstractions. Theodicies tend to palliate evil (a point I have argued in a different way; indeed, I think Gleeson understates his case here). Moreover, they distort our view of God rooted in our religious lives.

However, Gleeson begins his essay by claiming that the distinction between a theodicy and a defence is irrelevant to his case. Perhaps the irrelevance is that he finds that theodicies and defences deal with anthropomorphic images of God and his own preferred approach does not. This point seems less plausible and needs exploration.[9] His argument is that accepting the omni- attributes of God constitutes an irreligious (I think) anthropomorphism. Is that so?

Gleeson's argument is that any attempt to understand the omni- properties founders on the shoals of human projection—that any image of God in theodical discourse that has this or that omni- property is merely an image of a human person writ large. Evidently the reason for this is that Gleeson finds all talk of God involved in theodical discourse to be merely a 'similitude', or perhaps 'metaphorical'. As he writes, "That leaves us with an image—God is *like* a human creator, *like* the potter crafting his pot . . . but without any way of cashing out the image in literal (that is, in the context, human) terms" (emphases in original). But is this claim accurate?

On the surface, it seems plausible. Consider omniscience.[10] Philosophers typically attempt to define omniscience as knowing every proposition as true if and only if it is true (or some such propositionalist understanding of knowledge). And if God is nothing but an infinite database that has all true propositions in it, the analysis seems to hold.[11]

[9] Defences show simply that belief in a God who has the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect goodness is compatible with the belief that there are real evils in the created world. If defences are successful, then what is shown is that the two propositions are both possibly true. I have argued that theodicies claim that the propositions that compose them are *actually* true or *probably* true. I also disagree with Stump's differentiation of theodicies from defences, as does Bill Hasker (2011: 433): his analysis seems to reflect the philosophical discussion more accurately.

[10] That omniscience may be a concept so tricky that, like omnipotence, all attempts to define it founder, is not the issue here. If we can have some concept of divine omniscience (which may be counterfactual), then this analysis works. As I shall argue, an analogous understanding, rather than a metaphorical one, of omni- properties may be possible, which in turn makes possible this sort of analysis.

[11] Some analogue of Stump's distinction between Franciscan and Dominican knowing seems needed here.

An alternative is a Thomistic practice of analogy. Analogical talk of God involves first denial (the apophatic moment) and then affirmation (the kataphatic moment). God's knowledge is beyond our ability to know literally, but it is greater than the propositional omniscience of the philosophers' definition. The point is not to reduce the infinite to literal terms, as Gleeson seems to think, but to seek a graceful, human analogical understanding that is neither metaphor nor similitude. Do analogical affirmations of God's omniscience entail the philosophers' claims?

Is it that, as McCabe (as quoted by Gleeson) put it, theodicists ask "questions about God that can only intelligibly be asked about creatures"? And for most theodicists and defenders, McCabe seems correct. However, is his claim true for all? I think not. Consider two points.

First, Ian Ramsey, in *Religious Language* (1957), attempted to update a doctrine of analogy by his introduction of 'models and qualifiers', arguing that our talk about God was inevitably 'modelled' on what we know of limited creatures and applying it qualifiedly (I would say analogously) to God. Our knowledge is finite, God's is infinite; our power is finite, God's is infinite; our love is finite, God's is infinite. Since we are finite creatures and know nothing but finite entities, nothing but things that can be placed in a species—and God is neither of these—our understanding is flawed. However, our talk is not 'literal' or 'equivocal', but analogical. What Ramsey's analysis helps us understand is that we cannot say anything at all about God except by a *manuductio* that gracefully bounds across the humanly unbridgeable gap between the finite and the infinite. Either we are condemned to absolute silence about who and what God is, or we are forced to rely on our imaginations; the question is not *whether* we must imagine God, but *how*.

Gleeson rejects silence. He says that we can speak *to* God in "hosannas" and "prayers," as the object of our "existential terrors and grievances." But if we have no way to speak *of* the God to whom we speak, then these intentional attitudes and actions are addressed to 'something we know not what'. Perhaps we unwittingly 'hosanna' the universe (or the sum of the multiverses) itself (which from a materialist perspective belongs to no genus, just as does God from a religious perspective). If we have no way to speak *of* God, how can we rightly urge people to worship or pray *to* the great unknown, which might as well be utterly indifferent to us as far as we can say? I don't see how Gleeson can solve this problem—perhaps by an appeal to revelation, but then one asks 'which revelation?' because there are many, varied, and controversial revelations.

Secondly, why accept some atheologians' construal of God's knowing as if it were propositional? Humans *know that* propositions are true (if they are), *know other people* (a form of knowing inexhaustible by propositional knowledge), and *know how* to accomplish their aims (at least some of them some of the time). What if we claim that God's infinite knowledge is perfect, that God can and does accomplish all the divine aims, and that as creator and sustainer of all knows every creature even better than any creature knows his, her, or its self. The flaw in theodical talk, I submit, is not merely that it reduces analogy to metaphor or univocity, but also that theodicists fail to consider even the full range of clashing models for omni- predicates.

Moreover, we learn to pray and worship by that very process that carries analogy, the work of *manuductio*. We say that God does not 'answer' our prayers as a parent might. We say that God does not 'need' our worship, but we give it joyously and freely anyway. We learn what it is "to know, love and serve God in this world and be happy with [God] forever in the next" (as *The Baltimore Catechism* has it) by learning how to know, love, and serve in finite situations and then go beyond them. We are 'led by the hand' into understanding how to live before God.

In sum, my first concern is that while rejecting theodicies seems right and just, perhaps defences (properly understood) can at least show the cultured despisers (and the cultured despiser in each of us) that we are not necessarily confused. Gleeson's blanket approach jettisons far too much. Perhaps that than which no greater can be conceived, that which is beyond specification, is an indifferent universe; but at least we can show that we are not deluded in thinking otherwise. My second concern is that Gleeson's refusal to admit some form of analogous practice in talking *of* God (rather than merely attacking bad practices) can all too easily bleed over into good reasons to refuse religious practices of talking *to* God. To understand something, however minimal, of the God *to* whom we speak, we must understand, however minimally, the God *of* whom we speak. I do not know how to avoid this move from second- to third-person talk of God, and a Thomistic account of analogy crossed with Ramsey's qualified models approach seems a helpful way to make such a move without falling into equivocation or literalism in talking of God.

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Reply to Clack

Andrew Gleeson

Beverley Clack states that I picture God as "a loving parent who gets mad, yells, curses, goes mad with grief, is brave, loving, etc." She fears this implicates me in "the very model of God as Creator that gets the academic problem of evil running," and challenges me to explain what it means "to use the word 'God' in the first place." Here I sketch an answer.

Discussions of the problem of evil typically see God as a beneficent ideal observer, not a loving parent, a very different conception. In preferring the latter understanding I distance myself from those discussions. How then am I implicated in the theodical

picture of God? I and theodicists have something *negative* in common. We do not think God is literally a human being. The theodicist does (usually) think God is literally a disembodied mind, a Cartesian conscious self. But that's not my opinion. I do not think this anthropomorphic view is so much as coherent. But *given* these repudiations, what sense can be attached to speaking about God as a person and the creator, as loving, angry, grieving, etc.? Must I not admit this is metaphor, or endorse Cartesianism? One alternative is a strongly apophatic view of God. To speak about God we must compare him figuratively to mundane things; attempts to describe him as he is 'in himself' confound us. This need not mean agnosticism. Failure of literal *description* does not mean failure of *knowledge*. There is knowledge by acquaintance as well as knowledge by description: we know God in prayer and transforming grace. And we often address God directly by a *proper name*: 'God'. The figurative/non-figurative distinction has no application to names, and so gives no reason to think 'God' fails to reach directly to God. One response to Clack, then, is that 'God' gets its meaning in our encounters with God.

There is something fittingly humble and chastening in the apophatic view. The creature must approach the Lord's throne looking away. Philosophically, that indirectness typically takes the form of holding that descriptions of God are at best figurative: he is known by description only through metaphor or analogy. I have grown unhappy with this. I give some reasons in my reply to Professor Tilley. There I also sketch a non-figurative account of talk about God. The gist is that God's nature is exhausted by love, and so there is no true literal description of him over and above talking of his love (his power, wrath, forgiveness, etc. are modalities of this love), in contrast with the way there is of you and me (description of our physical bodies). So if this talk of God's love is non-figurative, is it therefore literal? Yes and no! Here are two reasons why this talk is not figurative. First, figurative description of something requires further independent and non-figurative description of that thing for its aptness. But my account says that describing God as love rests on no independent description of God (again, his power, etc. are modalities of his love). Secondly, the word 'love' need not be first acquired in its use of human beings and then applied, derivatively, to God. In religious families children may learn to use 'love' as much through hearing it used of God as of human beings. If the language we have for God is learned in our encounters with him, and is not simply adapted from another context (as in metaphor), there is less reason to say that the language does not describe God 'in himself'; and consequently less reason to think, as one must on figurative views, that there have to be further non-figurative descriptions of God 'in himself', descriptions of an enigmatic, unknowable *x* (again, see my reply to Tilley).

So is the language we use of God literal? Only in that it is not figurative in the respects just identified. The problem is that when we think of non-literal language we tend to think of figurative language (a bubbly personality, for example) that compares one literal description (vivacious personality) with another (effervescent drink). That is the assumption that introduces the hidden *x*, God as he is 'in himself', behind our usual language which is derogated to figurative status. The important distinction is between sensibilities which I describe as *objectifying* and *personal*. Language used in

the objectifying way makes no demands that are inescapably answerable by me only; its demands are ones I can pass over to other people (experts) without incurring blame if they get it wrong: fixing a car, treating an illness, etc. By contrast, writing a love letter, deciding how to live, and confessing my sins to God make demands on my seriousness and integrity that preclude handing these tasks over to others. They are essentially personal activities and when the relevant language is used in full cognizance of that personal nature, the language is being used personally. Philosophers sometimes confuse the *literal* with the *objectifying*: the literal is conflated with the real (versus the figurative) and then we demand an objectifying description of God, fearing that otherwise he won't be real. That gets us into a muddle, for of course the description is not of a physical object, and so we make it the description of a sort of ersatz physical object: a shadowy thing like the Cartesian self, or the hidden *x*. We now see the important sense in which religious language is not literal: it is not objectifying. This is consistent with the senses in which I have said it is not figurative either.

I am entering a plea for naiveté. We can use our ordinary words for God with good conscience. The most important word is 'love'. Clack quotes Dennis Potter saying that religion is "the wound, not the bandage." This gets at an important truth. As Christopher Cordner has remarked, to love is to make oneself vulnerable to suffering. In creation and incarnation God has opened his wound and from it the world and its salvation are born.

Reply to Nagasawa

Andrew Gleeson

Nagasawa agrees with much of what I say about the existential problem of evil, but argues that this does not free me from what I call 'the academic problem', the standard conundrum about God and evil. If we think of God as a loving parent rather than a perfect being, then how, he asks, do we explain why God does not "rescue victims [of evil] just as loving earthly parents would try to . . . rescue their children from danger." But to talk of God as a loving parent is not to say that he is a human being. That advice seems superfluous. Who thinks of God as a human being? But something remarkably like that assumption is present in the powerful tendency to think that we humans are essentially immaterial minds and that God is the limiting case of such minds. I reject this picture. As I explained in my Position Statement, drawing on the work of Herbert McCabe, God's creation of the world is not a kind of *workmanship*, so we cannot draw inferences from the world about God's 'power' or 'person', his intentions or skill as a creator, in the way you may draw conclusions about me from my words and deeds. This disposes of the academic problem of evil, regardless of whether you think of God as a perfect being or as a loving parent.[12]

[12] What I call 'the academic problem', Nagasawa calls 'the intellectual problem'. But the existential problem has its own intellectual dimensions: see my comments on Beverley Clack's Position Statement.

But if God's power, person, knowledge, love, etc. are so radically different from ours, then what is the point of using such language? Religious speech uses words like 'person', 'power', 'knowledge', 'love', and 'action' in ways that seem strange compared to their use in non-religious contexts. Believers say God is present when they meet, though no one they call 'God' can be seen. They say God hears their prayers, though nobody is in earshot. If I say I made a cake you readily understand me, but if I say someone made the world what do I mean? What was it made *from* or *with*? *Nothing*, we are told! If I say I will stay till the end of the week, you understand. But if I say "Lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world," you will be perplexed. Language used about things *inside* the world is being used about the world as a whole, or about something that does not seem to be 'inside' the world.

There are two ways of responding. A minimalist response models the religious language as closely to non-religious use as possible. This yields the anthropomorphic dualism I have mentioned. It assimilates 'creating the world' to a process in which one bit of it (a disembodied consciousness) brings the other bits into existence. It construes 'the end of the world' as a special event within the timeline of the world. And so on. The familiar processes of the actual world are re-enacted in a mysterious shadow-world. It is an incoherent attempt to be radically different yet still the same. The incoherence shows in the intractable puzzles of religious metaphysics, such as the academic problem of evil. But it is feared that if we do not take this view then we can speak of God only figuratively, and our language about him will have no actual reference. The fear rests on mistaken assumptions about language and reality. We don't learn to speak by *first* learning the referents of words. A child may be taught to utter 'rabbit' in the presence of rabbits, but unless the utterance is part of a wider activity-with-rabbits there is no fact about what he is referring to: rabbit-parts, rabbit-stages, rabbit-shapes, or perhaps just a reflex throat-clearing triggered by rabbits? (Quine saw the point, but not its significance.)

The alternative way of responding to the oddity of religious language recognizes that we learn language as an integral part of learning *ways of living*, encountering realities—from refrigerators to God—by interacting with them in their distinctive ways. That way of living-with-realities creates the reference of our words to those realities. The first response clings to what we might call an old language use; more exactly, an old life-with-a-language-use. The second response exhorts us to become literate in a new language use, one largely spoken with old words. It says: stop looking for the reference of words predicated of God and look instead for the way-of-living that speaking this language is an integral part of, viz., the responses and practices of prayer, worship, repentance, conversion, etc. Do *that* and you get the reference after all: for just as attending to life-with-refrigerators necessarily involves attending to and learning about refrigerators, attending to life-with-God necessarily involves attending to and learning about God. (In both cases, if you have little appreciation of the life you won't see what is being spoken of.) God is what the practices of the religious life are directed towards, but we do not have an understanding of God that is independent of these practices (which is *not* to deny that *God* is independent of them). It's not as though we

have the practices on one hand, and God as conceived by our understanding (quite separately from the practices) on the other, and we then find they fit like two interlocking jigsaw pieces.

The idea that we understand God independently of an understanding of religious practice naturally encourages the thought that there must be some better, more *accurate* language to use about God than that believers use all the time. I would like to say squarely that this is as confused as thinking there must exist some better way of describing refrigerators than that which we use every day. But that is too simple, for we *do* have other (not better) ways of describing refrigerators: scientific descriptions of the matter they are made of. That's important, because the matter makes the refrigerators real; they would not exist without it. And we feel there must be some analogue of matter's role in relation to refrigerators, something that makes *God* real. (Notice that if there were, we would not be speaking about God: it is God who makes things real.) Some people say this is literally the same (non-physical) mental stuff that we are, only on a vaster scale. Others treat God's reality as an unknowable thing-in-itself. In the first case our non-religious use of language is deemed sufficient; in the second it is deemed insufficient but what *would* be sufficient is an epistemic mystery. In both cases, what is missing are the *religious* human practices, the *religious* life-with-a-language-use which alone turns our attention *to God*. To ask of the descriptions of God in that life-with-a-language-use if there is some better description of God is a confusion in the same way that it would be confused to seek better ways of describing matter than those we have in science. Matter and God are basic in that way (refrigerators are not, though they served as a handy example to make the point about life-with-a-language-use). Of course, no one actually doubts the reality of matter. But people do doubt God, and often reach back to non-religious language to try and convince themselves of God's reality. The result is the shadow-world already mentioned, populated by pseudo-physical objects, pseudo-causal processes, and so on: a phantasmic simulacrum of materialism. One of the deeper reasons for rejecting theodicy is its complicity in this reactionary response.

Reply to Tilley

Andrew Gleeson

Terrence Tilley writes:

> To understand something, however minimal, of the God *to* whom we speak, we must understand, however minimally, the God *of* whom we speak. I do not know how to avoid this move from second- to third-person talk of God (emphases in original)…

Certainly we must speak *of* God. We do that when we say God created the world and so on. Tilley holds that this language needs elucidation in a theory of analogy. Is there

something unsatisfactory about our ordinary words for God? One reason to think so is that we say God loves us and hears our prayers, but then deny he has a body with which to embrace us, or ears to hear our prayers with. Perhaps God is a bodiless self with love-feelings and auditory sensations, but Tilley rejects this. He reaches for analogy theory as interpreted by Ian Ramsey.

Analogy depends on literally understood properties of both the analogue and the thing analogized. Henry Kissinger warned Richard Nixon that withdrawing US troops from Vietnam would be like giving the American people a pack of salted peanuts. Understanding this depends on grasping the different literal-minded features of troop withdrawals and peanuts which make both addictive. True, I can say of an *unknown x* that it is like a pack of salted peanuts. Imagine a children's game: I give analogies and the children guess what *x* is. We appraise the answers depending on *non*-analogical descriptions of *x*. However, analogy theory says not that God is contingently unknown, but that he is *unknowable* except through analogies. But if *non*-analogous descriptions of God aren't available to us, we cannot know in which respects *x* (God) is like a loving father. We can say that God's love is creative and tender, but analogy theory says that these too are analogies. God is an unknowable *x* on the far side of analogy. This does not look like understanding "the God of whom we speak."

Tilley worries that, without analogous ways of talking of God, the "intentional attitudes and actions" of my prayers and hosannas might be addressed to "something we know not what." Certainly they can be misdirected. If my ostentatious prayers are just for show, I am not really addressing God. That implies criteria for when I *am* directing my attention to God: my prayer can be humble and contrite. We must acknowledge such criteria on pain of losing a line between genuine and spurious faith. This helps show how my *words* are about God even when my attention is not on him, including when they appear in books long after I am dead. The words get their sense from the way they are learned and used in intimate connection with the experiences, reactions, and practices in which we encounter God. The criteria for the directedness of my attention in my attitudes and actions will include the action of speaking or writing the words. They are thus criteria for 'knowing what I am talking about'. 'God' referring to God is nothing more mysterious than there being criteria for using 'God' as part of a practical know-how for attentive dealings with God. (The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for reference to chairs and tables.) When enough people, or people in a certain position of authority, use the words with that know-how often enough, then others can take the reference the words have—have even when used without the relevant know-how, including use in the absence of any speaker or writer (e.g., in a book or recording)—as being that which they have when they are used *with* that know-how. Speakers take the use-with-the-know-how as normative for correct reference on standard occasions.

But the question remains: What is this thing called 'God' that has the properties of creating, loving, judging, etc.? Plausibly, just to say what God does is not enough to characterize him (or anything). Doings need doers, and we have to characterize the

latter independently of the former. This is certainly true of human beings. But God is not a human being, or a bodiless, conscious self, or anything of which we can say what it is made of, what its laws of operation are, and so on, as Tilley realizes. God's love is very different from our love. We need not think it resembles a (supposed) human-like 'mental act', which requires an independently describable mind or agent. Thus we say God *is* love, meaning that love exhausts his nature. This is not to deny that our love is in the image of his: both are compassionate and forgiving, as the parable of the prodigal son teaches us. I do not refuse analogous practice in talking of God (like the parable) so long as God's love is not treated as human love non-literally (or literally) attributed to God. The love of the prodigal son's father is an analogy to cast light on God's love, the latter non-analogously knowable by acquaintance. This is not even to deny that grasping such analogies plays an important role in making that acquaintance, and learning the language. The crucial insistence is that the acquaintance is not with, or the language about, an epistemically remote *x*, but, simply, with and about God.[13]

God's mystery remains, but it resembles in one way how other human beings are mysterious to us. Sometimes understanding others is not a matter of gaining more literal knowledge about them, but of opening our hearts to them, of loving them better. Analogy theory substitutes the enigma of an unknowable literal truth about *x*. If anything fits the description 'something we know not what', *x* does. But God is not unknowable, or knowable only by analogy. People experience him every day. The forgiving and refreshing love—the "amazing grace . . . that saved a wretch like me"—is a reality that lifts fogs of vain illusion, enabling the most lucid perception we can have.

[13] This does not mean the language is literal in an unqualified sense. For more, see my reply to Clack's response to my Position Statement.

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