‘Free-Process’ and ‘Only Way’ Arguments

Introduction

In this chapter I shall consider the problem of ‘evil’ in evolution through approaches that acknowledge the ambiguity of the natural processes concerned. The same processes that have given rise to this remarkable natural world, with its extraordinary creaturely diversity, intricacy, complexity and beauty – also involve vast amounts of suffering[1] among creatures, many of which are denied, by predators or parasites, any possibility of flourishing.

I identify the theological problem associated with ‘evil’ in evolution as being this: there seems to be so much disvalue, so much suffering, alongside the values that have arisen within the creation. The specific disvalues that concern me are not pain in and of itself, or death, or yet ‘waste’, but the suffering engendered by predation and parasitism, and the extinction of species, driven by natural selection.[2] How could an all-loving God have created a set of processes that gave rise to ‘nature red in tooth and claw’? Worse, might there be a sense that God has used the suffering of creatures, and the wholesale extinction of species, as a means to an end?

I will consider two main types of arguments that seek to address this problem:

i) types of argument that suppose that the *freedom* within the processes behind evolution *is a good* that can be a counter-weight to the disvalues that arise from the processes. I group these under the heading ‘Free-Process’ arguments, even where the author concerned has not used that precise term.

1 For a justification of the term ‘suffering’ as applied to creatures possessed of sophisticated sentience see Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, evolution and the problem of evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 4-5, 136-7.

2 Southgate, *Groaning*, 7-10.

ii) types of argument that suppose that this ambiguity of process was the *Only Way* in which God could have given rise to a biosphere containing all this value and beauty (including the eventual evolution of a species capable of bearing the image and likeness of God). I call these 'Only Way' arguments as that term is increasingly being adopted in the literature.

Two starting presumptions need to be acknowledged. First, that the scientific consensus arrived at in the hundred years after the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection represents, in broad terms, the truth about how species have arisen, evolved and gone extinct. Evolutionary theory is a much-contested area of science, which has seen some exciting expansions in recent years.[3] However, these disputes are all conducted within an overall neo-Darwinian frame. Note that the recent interest in co-operation in evolution[4] does not dissolve the problem that successful creaturely characteristics are refined by the (often very painful) defeat of the unsuccessful. Co-operation only changes the pattern of winners and losers – natural selection works because there are always losers.[5]

Secondly, and crucially, Free-Process and Only Way arguments all take as their starting point that *God* created these ambiguous processes, and that *the disvalues in creation cannot be attributed either to the first human sin, or yet to some primordial event in which some force antithetical to God prevented creation being free of these disvalues*.

This is a point that I have discussed extensively in a series of articles.[6] It is vital to grasp as a basis for approaching the more difficult notion that God must bear

[3] See e.g. Eva Jablonka and Marion J. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions: Genetic, Epigenetic, Behavioral, and Symbolic Variation in the History of Life* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 2006).

[4] Elegantly analysed by Sarah Coakley, "Sacrifice Regained: Evolution, Cooperation and God", http://www.abdn.ac.uk/gifford/about/2012-giff/, accessed August 4 2015.

[5] See Christopher Southgate, "God's Creation Wild and Violent, and Our Care for Other Animals", *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, Nov 2015.

[6] Christopher Southgate, "Re-reading Genesis, John and Job: a Christian's response to Darwinism", *Zygon* 46.2 (2011): 365-90; "Does God's care make any difference?:

responsibility for the disvalues within creation. The problem under consideration would be much easier if another force could be blamed for these disvalues. I give my reasons for rejecting 'other-force' arguments briefly here, with all due respect to their proponents writing in this volume and elsewhere.

The key problems with human-sin arguments are chronological and theological. The fossil record makes clear that animals were tearing each other apart, and suffering from chronic diseases such as arthritis, long before human beings evolved. To blame these phenomena on human sin means either rejecting this very well-established chronology and resorting to a young-earth creationism for which there is no support within the peer-reviewed scientific literature, or invoking some contorted account of cause and effect in time[7] or space.[8] Dembski's God inflicts vast amounts of proleptic suffering on creatures because humans will one day sin; Webb's has seemingly abandoned the sphere of creation outside the 'dome' of Eden to the pervasive influence of Satan. Not only are these accounts problematic in themselves, but they do not seem to me to succeed at all in preserving the goodness of God in the face of creaturely suffering.

The key problems with primordial-fall arguments, based on another force operating against God before the time of this universe, are again theological, and also scientific. Such views are deeply difficult theologically not only because of the lack of biblical

theological reflection on the suffering of God's creatures", in *Christian Faith and the Earth: current paths and emerging horizons in ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Denis Edwards (London, Bloomsbury, 2014), 97-114; "Cosmic Evolution and Evil" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil* ed. Chad Meister and Paul Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

[7] William Dembski, *The End of Christianity: finding a good God in an evil world* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009). For a yet more complex trans-temporal account aimed at securing a literal reading of Genesis 3, see Hud Hudson, *The Fall and Hypertime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[8] Stephen Webb, *The Dome of Eden: A New Solution to the Problem of Creation and Evolution* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2010)

evidence that the world is so corrupted, but also because they assign to spiritual entities opposed to God more power than Christian theology has been willing to concede. God's sovereignty is severely compromised in schemes in which God set out to create straw-eating lions and was prevented from doing so. Furthermore, it is deeply difficult for theology in conversation with science to dissect out some elements of the physical world and assign those to malefic influences, while attributing all beauty, order and creativity to God. The whole essence of the scientific picture as it has emerged since the 19th Century is that it is the same processes – tectonics, creaturely decay, mutation, natural selection, to name only a few – that generate the suffering as also generate the beauty, ingenuity and diversity of the world of creatures.

It is very important to grasp that Free-Process and Only Way theodicies become necessary because a scientifically-informed theology has to part company with these various versions of the 'ancient Christian answer'[9] that what we find ugly or disturbing about nature can be assigned to the activity of a force other than God. Incidentally, it is worth reflecting that the diverse witness of the Hebrew Bible also tends to reject fall-based accounts of disvalue in nature.[10]

I do not aspire to have a neat or complete solution to an unfathomable problem. All theoretical theodicies have some sort of way of balancing good and harms. Andrew Robinson and I have divided approaches into three kinds:[11]

9 John Polkinghorne, "Pelican Heaven." *Times Literary Supplement*, April 3, 2009.
10 See William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science and the Ecology of Wonder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) on the range of accounts of creation in the Hebrew Bible. On the cursing of the ground in Genesis 3 (and its reversal in Genesis 8), see Bethany Sollereder, Ph.D Thesis, University of Exeter, 2015.
11 Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson, "Varieties of Theodicy: An Exploration of Responses to the Problem of Evil based on a Typology of Good-Harm Analyses" in *Physics and Cosmology: scientific perspectives on the problem of evil* ed. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell and William R. Stoeger SJ (Vatican City and

i) property-consequence good-harm analyses, in which the presence of a property that may be deemed good has a likely consequence of a range of harms. The classic example is the free-will defence against moral evil. The possibility of self-conscious freely-choosing action informed by an understanding of other creatures, in a creature such as a human, is taken to be so great a good as to balance the very many harms that may arise from the use of that freedom.

ii) developmental good-harm analyses, in which a process through which various types of value develop may also lead to disvalues. These may arise as a by-product of the value-generating process, or they may be instrumental in furthering the generation of value. An example of a harm as a by-product would be the exhaustion of a runner on a training programme towards a marathon run for charity. The exhaustion is not an instrument of stamina development but a likely by-product. An example of an instrumental system would be a student assessment scheme with severe penalties for plagiarism or excessive word-count. The harms, or possibility of harms, are instrumental to the development of the habits of a good scholar.

iii) constitutive good-harm analyses, in which the good is inseparable from the harm. This most elusive and enigmatic possibility can be glimpsed in the experience of some human sufferers that only in and through their suffering did a certain closeness to God become possible. I have explored a possible application of this to the non-human creation,[12] but will not pursue this further here.

Free-Process Arguments

It is important to be clear that proponents of Free-Process arguments are not the same as 'Process Theologians'. Process thought in most of its variants regards processes, at

Berkeley: Vatican Observatory and Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 67–90.

[12] Southgate, "Does God's Care", 112

their most fundamental, as co-eternal with God. (This gives rise to an alternative type of theodicy.[13]) Free-Process arguments, in contrast, regard God as having created natural processes and endowed them with freedom. These arguments regard freedom of process in nature as a good, which might balance the harms to which that freedom gives rise. They begin with the early theological responses to Darwinism, in which it was said, by for example Charles Kingsley, that it was a good that God had made creation make itself.[14] The realization that adaptation of creatures to their environment was a natural process, rather than a series of individual divine designs, enabled theologians to distance God from the detail of the unfolding of the process. God might then be distanced from direct responsibility for those adaptations (for instance sabre-teeth) that gave rise to creaturely suffering.

A contemporary example of this type of argument is that of Ruth Page in *God and the Web of Creation*.[15] Page writes:

> I cannot imagine a God responsible for natural evil any more than one responsible for moral evil...To those who wish to affirm full-blooded...(divine) making and doing, (my) version will appear anaemic. But the consequences of belief in a more virile God, who has to be responsible for the removal of around 98% of all species ever, but who fails to do anything in millions of cases of acute suffering in nature and humanity, are scarcely to be borne.[16]

Rather, Page wants to think of God as creating possibilities and then letting them be - a very open form of making creation make itself. I am not clear that this altogether relieves God of responsibility in respect of natural evil. After all, in this model, God created, and continues to companion, particular possibilities, and therefore still bears responsibility for their existence and for the suffering to which they give rise.

[13] Described and evaluated in Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); see also Southgate, *Groaning*, 22-25.

[14] John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion; some historical perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 293-4.

[15] Ruth Page, *God and the Web of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1996).

[16] Page, *God and the Web*, 104.

But that very phrase about making creation make itself reveals an ambiguity within Free-Process arguments that needs further investigation. Is the freedom of natural processes the good in itself, against which the harms that it causes may be balanced? This would be a property-consequence analysis in the terms given above. The alternative is that the freedom of process within the creation is a good because it allows values to develop, and hence furthers God's purposes in creation, making it possible for entities and systems to arise in a way more conducive to flourishing than if God had created them directly. The freedom would then be a developmental good.

Given Page's rigorous rejection of long-term divine ends, and her focus on 'teleology now',[17] I conclude that her model must be placed in the first category, a property-consequence Free-Process argument. As I implied above, there must be some question as to whether this is effective as a strategy in theodicy. First, because it does not 'get God off the hook', because God remains responsible for the existence of the processes. Second, because it is not clear to me that freedom of natural processes *is*, in the absence of divine goals, a 'good', certainly not a good that might balance myriad instances of creaturely suffering. Remember that the Free-Process argument is that natural processes are free, not simply that the living creatures that result from the operation of the processes have a degree of autonomy. The latter does seem to be an evident good.[18] This autonomy of living creatures is enabled to *develop* through a) God having given the creation laws that make the universe fruitful for life, laws to

[17] Page, *God and the Web*, 63-73.

[18] I am however not at all convinced by efforts such as those of Joshua Moritz to propose that the choices made by creatures are themselves an explanation for 'evil' in creation. (Joshua Moritz, "Animal Suffering, Evolution, and the Origins of Evil" *Zygon* 49.2 (2014): 348–380.) There may be isolated instances in which a creaturely 'choice' directed a particular evolutionary trait down a particular path, but predation and parasitism are far too general phenomena, and (in the case of predation) far too generative of value (see Holmes Rolston III, 'Disvalues in Nature', *The Monist* 75 (1992): 250-75) for this type of explanation to be satisfactory. Is it meaningful to think of the tiger 'sinning' as it stalks the buck?

which God remains faithful[19] and b) God allowing some processes to which chance is intrinsic (such as mutation) to further the processes of evolution. But those seem to me developmental values, rather than goods in themselves. The freedom of natural processes, viewed instrumentally, in Free-Process Defences turns out not to be as closely analogous to the good of the freedom of freely-choosing rational agents to make those choices in free-will defences as is sometimes supposed.

I now turn to the author of the phrase 'Free-Process Defence', the scientist-theologian John Polkinghorne. In *Science and Providence* (1989) Polkinghorne writes that:

> In his great act of creation I believe that God allows the physical world to be itself, not in Manichaean opposition to him, but in that independence which is Love's gift of freedom to the one beloved. The world is endowed in its fundamental constitution with an anthropic potentiality which makes it capable of fruitful evolution.[20]

In *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (1998) Polkinghorne explicitly admits that the Free-Process Defence is a restatement of the 19th Century image of God making the world make itself.[21] He takes this further in *Exploring Reality* (2005): 'creatures are

[19] What Michael Murray calls 'nomic regularity'. Michael J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: theism and the problem of animal suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[20] John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's interaction with the world* (London: SPCK, 1989), 66. Notably, Polkinghorne also allows for a very extensive divine providential interaction with the world. Such a position always intensifies the problem of theodicy. The more God involves Godself, the more agonizing the issue of instances when God seems to do nothing. An extensive account of providence such as Polkinghorne's also complicates the assertion of freedom within natural processes. His God does not merely companion possibilities, as Page's does, but in particular instances selects possibilities that lead to the furtherance of divine purposes (not necessarily violating laws of nature to do so).

[21] John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science: the Terry Lectures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 14.

allowed "to make themselves". This seems indeed to be a great good [sic], but it also has a necessary cost. … Things will often just *happen*, as a matter of fact, rather than for an individually identifiable purpose.'[22] This last phrase might seem to suggest that Polkinghorne is adhering to freedom of creation as a non-instrumental, non-teleological good. In other words, that he regards the 'freedom' of entities – other than freely-choosing conscious creatures such as humans – as still a good in itself. But I have always read him as adhering to a more teleological view, albeit in respect of a generalized rather than an 'individually identifiable' purpose. This is confirmed by his essay of 2012 in which he writes:

> The more science helps us to understand the world, the more clearly we see its inextricable entanglement of fertility and wastefulness. I have suggested that there is a Free-Process Defence in relation to natural evil, parallel to the familiar free-will defence in relation to moral evil. Natural evil is not gratuitous, something that a Creator who was a bit more competent or a bit less callous could easily have eliminated. Created nature is a package deal, with the emergence of new forms of life and the shadow side of malformation and extinction necessarily intertwined.[23]

As we saw above, Polkinghorne is not quite right about the parallel between the Free-Will and Free-Process Defences, since his understanding of the latter is really developmental, to do with processes that lead to beneficial outcomes such as the emergence of new species, rather than the freedom of non-conscious entities being the absolute good in itself.

[22] John Polkinghorne, *Exploring Reality; the intertwining of science and religion* (London: SPCK, 2005), 143, italics in original.

[23] John Polkinghorne, "Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker" in *God and the Scientist: exploring the work of John Polkinghorne* ed. Fraser Watts and Christopher Knight (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012) 1-12, at 8-9.

It remains to consider one further articulation of the Free-Process Defence, published in 2014. Ryan McLaughlin in his *Preservation and Protest*[24] is very aware of the problem of theodicy in evolution, but wants to find a way to draw back from assigning blame to God for the processes that give rise to suffering. He does this by an extraordinary move, claiming that God 'sets the world free *prior to the formation of its laws*.'[25]

This is, in effect, a further way of articulating the proposal of Ruth Page. There were primordial possibilities, and the creation 'chose' its own laws from within them. This is tricky both in relation to the shape of current cosmology, and to evolutionary theodicy. In the face of cosmological proposals that subvert the notion of an initial singularity, and suggest that the initial emergence of this universe might have been a random event, theologians are inclined to propose the reverse of McLaughlin, namely that it is through the underlying laws and parameters of the primordial state that God ensures the fruitfulness of the universe. This would indeed be a far more familiar understanding of the theology of creation.

But McLaughlin's proposal also faces the theological difficulty that I noted in my introduction. It is the *same processes* that lead to disvalues in evolution that also give rise to all the values that we see. The laws that – for him – arose spontaneously within creation, and give rise to the disvalues we see in creation, *are the very ones* that make this creation the amazing phenomenon it is, and we have no evidence that a different set of laws would give rise to a more favourable balance between value and disvalue.

Only Way arguments

That last consideration brings me on to 'Only Way' arguments, which might also be termed 'Package Deal' arguments. We have already encountered the term 'package deal' in Polkinghorne's late essay, and it can also be found in an important article by

[24] Ryan McLaughlin, *Preservation and Protest: theological foundations for an eco-eschatological ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[25] McLaughlin, *Preservation*, 331.

Niels Gregersen, and in Denis Alexander's work.[26] The basic proposition is that the disvalues in creation *necessarily arise* alongside the values. Whether the disvalues are instrumental to the evolution of values, or a by-product,[27] the two form a package deal. This indeed tends to be the reaction of biologists when questioned about the presence of predation and parasitism in nature.

The position is given philosophical attention by Robin Attfield. He concludes on rational grounds, without reference to Scripture or the doctrines of the Church, that there might not be any 'better' created world that could be formulated for the realization of creaturely value, and that that argument in itself constitutes a theodicy, even without recourse to other components such as an appeal to eschatology.[28]

[26] Niels H. Gregersen, 'The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World.' *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 40.3 (2001): 192–207; Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution – do we have to choose?* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008).

[27] Holmes Rolston stresses the instrumentality of the evolution process – "the cougar's fang has carved the limbs of the fleet-footed deer, and vice versa", *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006 [1987]), 134. Nancey Murphy prefers to think of the suffering as a by-product – "Science and the Problem of Evil: suffering as a by-product of a finely-tuned cosmos" in *Physics and Cosmology: scientific perspectives on the problem of evil* ed. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell and William R. Stoeger SJ, Vatican City and Berkeley: Vatican Observatory and Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 131-51.

[28] Robin Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning* (Aldershot and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 109-50. This only way argument is essentially the approach defended by Michael Ruse, in *Can a Darwinian be a Christian? The Relationship between Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130-8, and Richard L. Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 152-3, 222.

Another, more explicitly theological way to put this can be found in an essay of Arthur Peacocke's. He writes:

> If the Creator intended the arrival in the cosmos of complex, reproducing structures that could think and be free – that is, self-conscious, free persons – was there not some other, less costly and painful way of bringing this about? Was that the only possible way? This is one of those unanswerable metaphysical questions in theodicy to which our only response has to be based on our understanding of the biological parameters… discerned by science to be operating in evolution. These indicate that there are inherent constraints on how even an omnipotent Creator could bring about the existence of a law-like creation that is to be a cosmos not a chaos, and thus an arena for the free action of self-conscious, reproducing complex entities and for the coming to be of the fecund variety of living organisms whose existence the Creator delights in.[29]

So although we are not in a position to be at all definite about this, it is a reasonable scientifically-informed theological guess that a natural world containing creatures evolving by natural selection is the only way – or perhaps the best type of way - in which God could have given rise to the biological values we see within our own world. Indeed the 'Only Way' argument receives support from a surprising quarter, from Richard Dawkins, arch-antagonist of theologians of evolution. Dawkins has written: 'if there is no other generalization that can be made about life all around the Universe, I am betting that it will always be recognizable as Darwinian life'. 'In short', 'if God was to create through law, then it had to be through Darwinian law. There was no other choice.'[30]

[29] Arthur Peacocke, "The Cost of New Life", in *The Work of Love: kenosis as creation* (London, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: SPCK and Eerdmans, 2001), 21-42, at 36-7.

[30] Richard Dawkins, "Universal Darwinism" in *Evolution from Molecules to Men* ed. D.S. Bendall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 403-25, at 423.

I have indicated that this is a type of argument favoured by a number of scholars coming from different approaches and traditions. I turn now to the objections that can be raised to it, and finally to what I consider to be its limitations.

The first objection might be posed by any student of the philosophy of religion. It is that the argument supposes a constraint on the omnipotent, omniscient Creator of the universe out of absolutely nothing. The objector is entitled to ask what the nature is of this constraint, and wherein it derives. To this the 'Only Way' theorist can only answer that the existence of the constraint is a plausible guess, and to advance a further guess that the constraint is a logical one. In other words, that it is a logical impossibility that a different mode of creation would have led to a world with a better balance of values to disvalues. We do not have access to this logic, but logical constraints are agreed to limit even an omnipotent God.

Two extensions to the argument are pertinent at this point. First, the inference that it must have been impossible for God simply to create directly the eschatological state that Christians believe will follow from the ultimate redemption of the cosmos. God could not simply create heaven (otherwise why did God not do so?).[31] Second, that God may have been constrained as to the creation of worlds by God's loving desire that the world be redeemable through the incarnation of the divine Logos.[32] We have no means of knowing if this further constrained the type of world that could have been created.

The second objection, eloquently raised by Neil Messer,[33] is that the Only Way argument involves God being the creator of processes to which violence is intrinsic. For Messer this cannot be what is referred to in Genesis 1:31, when God calls creation 'very good'. This is a very important point, and Only Way theorists must give an account of how their constrained creation is still 'very good'. That account could be

[31] Southgate, *Groaning*, 90.

[32] Southgate, "Does God's care".

[33] Neil Messer, "Natural Evil after Darwin" in *Theology after Darwin* ed. Michael S. Northcott and R. J. Berry (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 139–54.

based on the interpretation of that Hebrew word for good as meaning ‘fit for purpose’, rather than ‘perfect’ or yet ‘beautiful’.

Messer is convinced of the need to disentangle God’s very good intention from the world as it has actually always been. Messer is therefore drawn back to a very sophisticated type of fall-based argument involving Karl Barth’s concept of ‘nothingness’ (*Das Nichtige*). I am happy to admit that the Only Way argument constrains not only our sense of divine omnipotence but also of omnibenevolence. In my published responses to Messer, I note that both of us in our different ways find ourselves constraining the sovereignty of God. Messer’s constraint is that God cannot prevent the influence of nothingness on the created order. Also, crucially, Messer separates out on theological grounds what he concedes is scientifically inseparable – since the same processes give rise to value and disvalue.[34]

Two further objections to Only Way thinking have been published in 2015. The first is by Nathan O'Halloran, S.J.[35] O’Halloran shrinks, very understandably, from making God ‘overly complicit’ in the contingency of the world. (I sympathise wholeheartedly with this reluctance – Only Way arguments should only be taken seriously because they are the least-worst option.) O’Halloran’s own advocacy of a primordial spiritual rebellion, ‘a higher organizing principle of disorder and evil within the cosmos’, is vulnerable to the same concerns indicated in my introduction. The second, by Mats Wahlberg,[36] warrants a more careful analysis. Wahlberg’s key point is that God, presumably knowing the precise molecular composition of the biosphere at any given moment, could create that molecular system *de novo*. So the result that God is presumed to desire could be obtained without the millennia of suffering necessitated by evolution. Two points may be made in response. The first is that of course that world would still be one full of predation and parasitism and driven

[34] Southgate, “Re-reading”; “God’s Creation”.
[35] Nathan W. O'Halloran, S.J.[35] ‘Cosmic Alienation and the Origin of Evil: Rejecting the “Only Way” Option’, *Theology and Science*, 13:1 (2015): 43-63.
[36] Mats Wahlberg, “Was evolution the only possible way for God to make autonomous creatures? Examination of an argument in evolutionary theodicy”, *Int. J. Philos. Relig.* 77 (2015), 37–51.

by natural selection. So the problem of suffering in the non-human world would not be solved, merely mitigated. But the second point is more subtle. It is that living things, creaturely 'selves', are not merely a snapshot in time that could be photocopied by God. (The reader may consider whether God could reproduce an exact copy of the person she/he is at this instant of reading this section.) Creaturely selves have individual, and also ancestral history. They have inherited experience that, as Jablonka and Lamb show,[37] is far more than molecular composition. So I am not persuaded of the reality of Wahlberg's thought-experiment.[38]

One of the major thinkers in the science-theology conversation in recent years has been Robert J. Russell, and an essay of his on evolutionary theodicy is of particular importance. Russell recognizes the force of a version of the Only Way argument, but concludes that this cannot be an adequate theodicy. The burden of creaturely suffering is too great. A theodicy of evolutionary evil requires for Russell an additional eschatological component.[39] This type of argument is also persuasive for the Australian ecotheologian Denis Edwards. God's love even for the sparrow that falls likewise requires that there be a possibility of redemption for creatures.[40]

These considerations will raise for some the question – why should God have to redeem, or heal, what God has created? How does the dynamic of redemption operate without a fall-event affecting the whole of creation? This is a very important and often-misunderstood element in this type of argument. To be wholly consistent, the narrative must run like this: only a Darwinian process full of ambiguity could give rise to a world in which myriad types of creature could flourish, and in which the Logos could be incarnate and atone for the (inevitable) sins of an evolutionary world. That atonement – however understood – makes possible the eschatological phase of God's work, the 'new creation' (Isaiah 65:17; 2. Corinthians 5:17). That phase leads

[37] Jablonka and Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions*.
[38] I thank Dr Bethany Sollereder for discussions on this point.
[39] Robert J. Russell, *Cosmology: from Alpha to Omega* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 249-72.
[40] Denis Edwards, "Every Sparrow that Falls to the Ground: The Cost of Evolution and the Christ-Event" *Ecotheology* 11.1 (2006): 103–23.

ultimately to a dimension of existence in which there is no more suffering. But we are forced to conclude, if thinking this way, both that the initial ambiguous phase was a necessary preliminary, and also that the post-Cross eschatological phase is at a very early stage. The 'not yet' of Christian eschatology remains both an agony and a source of longing for the believer. Perhaps that enigmatic text, Romans 8:19-22, offers some insight into this – suggesting as it does that human redemption into authentic freedom is a necessary preliminary to final consummation.[41]

I turn finally to my own conclusion in regard to 'evil' and evolution, namely that what I have called a 'compound theodicy'[42] is the best rational guess we can make about what is ultimately mysterious. The Only Way argument (in turn one method of understanding the Free-Process Defence) is a necessary but insufficient foundation. It is an argument about systems, and suffering happens to *individual creatures*, in particular circumstances. God, the tradition leads us to believe, loves and cares for individual creatures, not merely systems. A consequentialist calculator of the least-worst system to create does not amount to a loving God. So an Only Way or Package-Deal argument is an essential starting-point, given the failure of fall-based arguments. But it needs to be combined with other elements. I agree with Russell, Edwards, and also Jay McDaniel[43] that an eschatological component is required. But I am also persuaded that a key move of Arthur Peacocke's, proposing the co-suffering of God with the suffering of all creatures, is a vital element in an evolutionary theodicy.[44] Lastly I suggest that the elements must be combined in an overall narrative scheme that is consonant with the classic Christian confessions as to creation, redemption and

[41] Southgate, *Groaning*, Chapters 6-7.

[42] Southgate, *Groaning,* 15-16.

[43] Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans, a theology of reverence for life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989).

[44] Arthur Peacocke, "Biological Evolution – A Positive Theological Appraisal" in *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* ed. by Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, SJ and Francisco J. Ayala (Vatican City and Berkeley: Vatican Observatory and Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1998), 357-76; "The Cost of New Life" - see also Southgate, *Groaning,* 50-3, 56-7.

eschatological consummation. I note that Michael J. Murray's effort to analyse these matters philosophically also leads him in the direction of a compound theodicy.[45]

This essay situates Free-Process and Only Way arguments within the range of possibilities within evolutionary theodicy. Both types of argument presuppose the failure of fall-based arguments, and the need to understand the involvement of God, confessed as profoundly benevolent, the God of Jesus Crucified and Risen, in a world full of beauty and wonder, but full too of ugliness and suffering. I have shown that the less problematic version of a Free-Process Defence coheres with an 'Only Way' approach, and that that approach survives some of its sharpest critics, but is itself inadequate unless incorporated into a compound theodicy.

[45] Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*.