

Animal Suffering in an Unfallen World:
A Theodicy of Non-Human Evolution

Submitted by Bethany Noël Sollereeder to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

The publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859 raised a host of theological issues. Chief amongst them is the question of how a good, loving, and powerful God could create through an evolutionary process that involved so much suffering, pain, and violence. The traditional Christian answers for suffering in the natural world are not plausible in an evolutionary world. We cannot blame natural evil on human sin, since earth history shows that non-human suffering long preceded humans. Nor can we say that God allows suffering because it allows opportunity for moral choice, spiritual closeness with God, and the development of virtue, as none of these apply to the non-human realm. A new approach is needed to address the question of suffering and violence amongst non-human animals.

In this dissertation, I address the question of evolutionary suffering with a multi-disciplinary approach of biblical studies, philosophical theology, and systematic theology to build a compound theodicy. After a survey of the various scholarly contributions in this area, I begin with biblical considerations of the God-world relationship. I set aside, based on exegetical examinations of Genesis 1-9, notions of “fallenness” in the natural world. I therefore argue that evolution was God’s intended process of creation, and that we should not attribute it to any kind of corruption. The rest of the dissertation engages in the development of a compound theodicy rooted in a philosophical and theological definition of love. How does a God who loves creatures respond to their suffering? I argue that God’s action in creation is characterised by kenotic restraint, the giving of freedom, co-suffering with creatures, and the work of redemption.

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Figure 1: Example of a Photo Mosaic

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”¹

Introduction

The most famous biblical creation account concludes with the divine evaluation of the goodness of the world. However, it does not take very much experience of the natural world to see that a basic formulation of nature and its processes as the “very good” creation of a good God is not unproblematic.

I have spent many nights camping in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, and on one particular night I remember waking to the sounds of struggle outside my tent. A large predator (I did not get out to investigate what kind) had caught some unlucky prey, and I remember hearing the screams of the prey’s last moments on earth. It is a harsh reality that this event was not an aberration or a tragic occurrence in the realm of nature. Rather, the suffering of that creature is the very life blood of the evolutionary process. All complex evolutionary development has come at the tremendous cost of the pain, suffering, and often untimely death of countless individuals.

An insistent question can not be silenced: how could a good and loving God have created through this evolutionary process, which necessarily involves so much pain, suffering, and untimely death? Could God, the all-powerful and omni-benevolent, really have chosen such somber and terrible tools to create?

The pitiless operations of natural selection seem to oppose the doctrine of creation by a benevolent and powerful God. Surprisingly, what has come to light ever more forcefully since Darwin’s day is that the very beauty, complexity, and functionality of the natural world that we admire are derived specifically from the harms that we flinch from. Teeth rending flesh, parasitic larvae,

¹ Genesis 1:31, NRSV.

devastating earthquakes, erupting volcanoes, and the erosion of diverse forms of life through extinction all seem to speak against the love of God. Yet, out of these very realities emerge the skills, values, and ever-renewed beauty of the natural world.² Why would a good and loving God use a process like evolution—with its necessary inclusion of pain, suffering, and death—to create our world?

The theologian is seemingly left with a difficult choice: to affirm that the creation—with all its bloodshed, untimely death, and suffering—is in fact the true intention of a good, benevolent, and omnipotent Creator and explain how this could be so; to deny one of these classical attributes of the divine; or, to deny that the world is in fact the “very good” world of God, and suppose that it has been taken off track—fallen—in one way or another. In this project, I intend to explore how a multi-disciplinary approach can provide a new approach to the first of these solutions. My approach will also include a revision of how the classical attributes of the divine are expressed in relation to the world, but will not deny the ontological existence of those characteristics. I will firmly reject the third solution, that of the fallenness of the world.

Research Aims

There are two major research aims associated with this project. The first is to guide the discussion of evolutionary theodicy along more fruitful lines of thought than have been achieved up to now, achieved at least partly by providing arguments that limit the scope of discussion. An example of where the discussion can be helpfully pruned is the work emerging out of the

² See, for example, Holmes Rolston III, “Disvalues in Nature,” *The Monist* 75:2 (April 1992): 250-278.

assumption of a fallen cosmos³—and the consequent assumption that God did not intend evolution to happen. If, on exegetical, philosophical, and scientific grounds, the idea of a non-human fall can be ruled out, then the energies currently being spent defending and developing theologies based on a fall can reorient themselves into more fruitful explorations of thought. In this sense, part of my project is about asking better questions at the starting point of theological enquiry.

Secondly, my work will attempt to develop better answers to the questions being asked in theodicy: Can non-human suffering be reconciled with belief in a good God? How is God at work in the non-human world? What does redemption mean in the non-human realm? To that end, this project will develop a compound evolutionary theodicy⁴ grounded in the nature of love. The definition of love worked out in my fourth chapter, that love is the result of the desire for the good of the beloved and the desire for union with the beloved, shows how the creation must be marked by freedom, the co-suffering of divine presence, some forms of providence, and the combination of several types of redemptive divine action, both in the here and now and in a new creation. A further explanation of each of these elements is explored in the chapter outline below.

Research Audience

The first audience for this dissertation is the community of scholars who work on the question of evolutionary theodicy, for example, Christopher

³ Examples include C. S. Lewis, Michael Lloyd, Paul Griffiths, Gregory Boyd, and others. See chapter 2 for full references.

⁴ A compound theodicy is a theodicy that does not find any one approach alone to be sufficient as a justification for evil, but which argues for several different strands of argument to be held together. For a complete explanation of what is meant by a compound theodicy, see chapter 2.

Southgate, Michael Murray, Peter van Inwagen, Wesley Wildman, Denis Edwards, Holmes Rolston III, Jay McDaniel, Gregory Boyd, Philip Clayton, Steven Knapp, Nicola Hoggard Creegan, Terence Fretheim, Nancey Murphy, Celia Deane-Drummond, Robert Russell, Ted Peters, William Hasker, and Loren Wilkinson. My work will focus almost entirely on the contemporary debate as it now exists. A few historical sources will be used, but their contributions are very limited. The cutting-edge of the debate now includes elements unavailable to historical authors, such as biological work on altruism and suffering, or models of divine action based on quantum mechanics. In addition, any comprehensive look at the historical contributions would expand this work well beyond the boundaries of a dissertation.

Secondarily, I write also for the wider audience of those who wish to bring Christian faith into conversation with the natural sciences. Van Inwagen divides theodicy into two main categories: apologetic and doctrinal.⁵ My work is not primarily apologetic. It is not meant to convince anyone that the concept of God is reasonable;⁶ rather it is an exploration in the theology of creation.⁷ Nonetheless, some readers may find this work helpful for apologetic purposes, particularly in the North American evangelical context where there often exists a polarisation between scientific theories and theological beliefs. My own

⁵ Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews in 2003* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 5.

⁶ Several of the ventures in theodicy are intended with this purpose: to convince (for example) the open-minded atheist in particular that belief in God is reasonable, or to help Christians defend their beliefs against atheist challenges. Treatments of theodicy from within this apologetic frame are advanced by Michael J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5-6; and van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 10.

⁷ Van Inwagen remarks that "Doctrinal problems are problems that are created by the fact that almost all theists subscribe to some well-worked-out and comprehensive theology that goes far beyond the assertion of the existence of an all-powerful and beneficent Creator. Attempts by theists to account for the evils of the world must take place within the constraints provided by the larger theologies they subscribe to." *The Problem of Evil*, 5-6. An example of a doctrinal approach is provided by Christopher Southgate in *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

Christian belief is shaped by the concern to integrate the insights of Scripture with the discoveries of science, the traditions of the church, and my own experiences of the world. As such, many evangelical readers may find that their concerns about the truth and centrality of Scripture in the development of theological positions are taken seriously in this work.

Research Context

Is there really a need for yet another project on theodicy? Oceans of ink have been spilled over the question of human suffering, yet there have only been three book-length treatments of theodicy in regard to evolutionary non-human suffering. The three books specifically on non-human animal suffering in evolution are Michael Murray's *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*,⁸ Christopher Southgate's *The Groaning of Creation*,⁹ and Nicola Hoggard Creegan's *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil*.¹⁰ Southgate and Hoggard Creegan's are theological works, while Murray's is analytic philosophy. Of the many existing theodicy books, most only pay passing heed to non-human suffering (if they acknowledge it at all).¹¹ John Hick, for example, in his classic *Evil and the God of Love*, spends only 5 pages exploring the question of non-human animal pain, and then finishes with the startlingly anthropocentric conclusion: "The more fruitful question for theodicy is not why animals are liable to pain as well as

⁸ Michael J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁹ Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Nicola Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Ronald E. Osborn, *Death Before the Fall: Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014) also deserves a mention, but its primary focus is on the culture of biblical literalism, not on animal suffering.

¹¹ Austin Farrer, for example, has a whole chapter devoted to "Animal Pain" in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (London: Collins, 1962) which is more than one finds in most. Yet, the chapter is a jumble of different types of argument—some of which appear self-contradicting—because the subject required more exposition than it was given.

pleasure—for this follows from their nature as living creatures—but rather why these lower forms of life should exist at all.”¹² Other theological reflections on natural evil only consider the impact of natural evil on humans.¹³

There are many current ecological works that deal with animal suffering due to anthropogenic causes, which raise different sorts of issues.¹⁴ Ecological works tend to focus on ethical considerations derived from the theology of interaction between the human and non-human world, what status and privileges or responsibilities humanity carries within creation, and how humans should conduct themselves in light of those responsibilities. Those issues raise good questions, but they are not the questions I am interested in. I am looking only at the interaction between God and the suffering of the non-human animal world apart from human influence. There are several article length treatments of the suffering of non-human animals (Clayton, Deane-Drummond, Edwards, Lloyd, McDaniel, Rolston, Tracy, Wildman¹⁵) but because they are constrained by length, they usually only explore one aspect of a possible theodicy and fail either to develop a multi-faceted theodicy that recognises the various types of issues that need to be addressed,¹⁶ or cannot deal adequately with the several intertwining theological issues.

¹² John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Collins, 1966), 350.

¹³ David Bentley Hart's *The Doors of the Sea: Where was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) is a book about natural evil, but almost entirely about how it impacts humans. The one mention of non-human animal suffering (p.79) is about how seeing it evokes compassion and service from human hearts. The same anthropocentric concern is true of Diogenes Allen's contribution "Natural Evil and the Love of God," *Religious Studies* 16:4 (December 1980): 439-456.

¹⁴ See, for example, Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM, 1994).

¹⁵ See the full references for these works in chapter 2.

¹⁶ The questions raised by the existence of parasites, for example, raise different sorts of questions from the issues raised by cancer. In the case of parasites, the parasite thrives on the sickness of the host, and uses their energy to build for some life beyond the host, either for themselves or for their offspring. In cancer, the cancerous cells may thrive while the host lives, but when the host dies, the cancer dies too, without remainder. Therefore, with cancer, neither the cancer nor the host ultimately benefit.

The works that do deal with non-human animal suffering can be divided into philosophical and theological works. The major arguments advanced in the philosophical realm are: inscrutability, neo-Cartesian, property-consequence (i.e. nomic regularity), and developmental defences (e.g. “only way”, chaos-to-order).¹⁷ In most philosophical works, different aspects of each of these are combined into a compound defence that is stronger than any one of the elements on its own.¹⁸

Philosophical arguments, however, rarely allow for the affective (or practical) side of theodicy, and thus result in what Thomas Tracy calls a “thin defense.”¹⁹ The theological “thick” defence, by contrast, attempts to weave a narrative that explains suffering and the nature of God in a comprehensive whole, acknowledging the affective elements of theodicy and holding together the rich and complex theological presuppositions of the believer.

Theological accounts vary widely, from a Barthian approach based upon the concept of *das Nichtige* (Messer), to blaming Satan (Boyd, Lloyd, Griffiths), to Orthodox concepts of shadow Sophia (Deane-Drummond). Some radically redefine God in ways that seek to avoid the problem (Wildman, Cobb, Griffin). The rest all acknowledge a traditional view of God and accept the unfallen aspect of the world, and use various strategies to account for the apparent discrepancies (Attfield, Hewlett, Farrer, McDaniel, Moltmann, Page, Peacocke, Peters, Russell, Southgate). All of these positions will be explored at greater length in chapter 2.

¹⁷ Developmental defences can be subdivided into instrumental or by-product variations. Explanations of each of these terms is found in chapter 2, p. 30.

¹⁸ See chapter 2, p. 44-46.

¹⁹ Thomas F. Tracy, “The Lawfulness of Nature and the Problem of Evil,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 152. See more in chapter 2, p. 46ff.

What is currently needed is work that holds together the insights of these arguments and expands upon the theological foundation that they have established. I will write a full-length theological treatment to respond to and build upon the current theological proposals, interact with the philosophical questions, and establish firmer theological and biblical foundations than the article-length treatments provide.

Methodology

Theodicy is a vastly complex subject. It transcends disciplinary boundaries, spans history, and has an impact on everyone. Every discipline that I will make use of in this project offers its own forms of theodicy.²⁰ In this sense, theodicy is a “universal” subject; everyone has something to say about it from every angle. In this project I hope to mirror that universality by being as universal as I can in receiving input: from philosophy, from theology, from biblical studies, and from the natural sciences. Analysis of the data will occur through a theological lens, but I will draw on the resources of biblical theology, systematic theology, and philosophical theology to move from a multi-disciplinary analysis to an interdisciplinary argument.

The reason for a multi-disciplinary approach is that any one discipline is not wide enough to give the problem its necessary scope. A theological approach that does not listen to the sciences closely will not add fruitfully to the

²⁰ This includes the natural sciences. Biology, for example, offers its own positive rationale for natural horrors. One of my favourite examples is Sir David Attenborough’s explanation of cordyceps in the series *Planet Earth*. The destructive effects of cordyceps, a parasitic fungus that targets insects, are graphically displayed. Once infected the host insect climbs to a high place and latches mechanically on to whatever stem is nearest. Then, the spore of the fungus erupts from the head and back of the insect—a real-life mycological version of Hollywood’s *Alien*. After surveying its virulent spread, which can demolish whole colonies at once, Attenborough insists “But these attacks do have a positive effect on the jungle’s diversity, since parasites like these stop any one group of animal getting the upper hand. The more numerous a species becomes, the more likely it will be attacked by its nemesis: a cordyceps fungus.” *Planet Earth*, “Jungles,” episode 8, originally aired 19 November 2006.

discussion because it will begin with unhelpful presuppositions: many attempts simply label violence or want or even overabundance as “evil”, but do not pay attention to the fact that these very realities are generative of the goods that are valued. Equally, philosophical approaches may satisfy the requirements of logic, but logic alone is not sufficient to encounter the problem of evil.

Philosophy rarely acknowledges the affective elements—the full range of emotional responses that positions evoke—that inform our thought, and therefore lacks a depth that theology brings. A philosopher is primarily concerned with the rational logic of a position, and not whether the conclusion reached is emotionally sensitive.²¹ Equally, philosophy cannot engage effectively with theological themes such as redemption or eschatology since these belong in the theological realm—but these are necessary themes to explore in any adequate venture into theodicy. Why add biblical studies to the mix as well? Partly this is because existing positions based in theology or philosophy often do not give adequate weight to biblical considerations, and partly it is because detailed exegesis allows me to critique several existing positions from a new—and far more effective—position.

In terms of the limitations of the thesis, there will be three major “boundary settings.” The first major boundary to the reach of this project is that it will not deal at all with human suffering, nor with anthropogenic non-human animal suffering. This is not a work responding to our ecological crisis, but a work which explores the theology of creation.

The second major boundary is that I will only look at the contemporary discussion of evolutionary theodicy. Directly after the publication of the *Origin of Species* in 1859 various sophisticated responses to the question of non-human

²¹ There are exceptions to this general statement, as explored in chapter 2, p. 50-57.

animal suffering, the nature of creation, and the nature of divine action were produced.²² However, subsequent discoveries in evolutionary biology and continual theological developments have changed the terms of the debate sufficiently that translating and incorporating their viewpoints into this work would be impossible within the scope of this project. In the same way, some early-mid 20th century theologians who engaged with science will not make an appearance despite their contribution to the ongoing discussions in science and religion.²³

The third major boundary is that, because this is a multi-disciplinary project, my ability to engage in depth through the lens of any one discipline will be limited. For example, I will do detailed exegesis of several aspects of Genesis 1-9 in chapter 3, but I will not be able to look with the same depth at the rest of the Hebrew Bible, and even less in the New Testament. However, I think it is still important to maintain the brief reflections that *are* possible in order to ensure that the major themes in some passages (such as Romans 8:18-22) which may challenge the theological picture being built up are addressed.

A different way to think about the endeavour of this project is to see it as a voice joining a discussion that is already underway. Other voices have brought blended approaches to the table, and I will respond to them in the same language of theological blend, developing my own particular hybrid of systematic, philosophical, and biblical theology. Applied to this project, it means that many of the arguments will proceed by a mixed approach. For example, the question “What is the nature of divine love toward non-human animals?” will

²² Asa Gray, for example, published several excellent essays in 1860 in review of *The Origin of Species* that explore these questions in depth. See Bethany Sollereder, “The Darwin-Gray Exchange,” *Theology and Science* 8:4 (2010): 417-432.

²³ Teilhard de Chardin, for example, did write a great deal on evolution and religion, but it is questionable whether he ever developed any kind of theodicy to address the issues raised by evolution. See Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 26-27.

be worked out both theologically and philosophically. The combination of these elements applied to non-human animal suffering will keep these approaches in a dynamic tension that does not belong to either discipline but uses the conclusions of both.

Chapter Outlines

The first task of this work is to set out, evaluate, and position the various current options in evolutionary theodicy. Chapter 2, “Theological and Philosophical Positions” addresses that task, and acts as the literature review. The first half of the chapter will explore the recent developments in philosophical evolutionary theodicy through the lens of Southgate and Robinson’s “Good-Harm Analyses,”²⁴ and the second half will explore the major theological solutions, which include invoking a corruption of the world due to fallenness, redefining God, and pointing to redemption as a solution.

Chapter 3, “Biblical Considerations,” will exegetically develop one of my primary arguments: that the natural world before and after the human fall is uncorrupted by any type of cosmic fallenness. In contrast to Michael Lloyd, Paul Griffiths, Gregory Boyd, William Dembski, and Neil Messer,²⁵ amongst others, I do not find evidence in the Scriptural accounts to support the idea that suffering and death in the evolutionary process is a result of the corruption of God’s “very good” world. Drawing on and building upon the work of various

²⁴ 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 Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007): 67-90.

²⁵ See chapter 2 for references and explanation of each scholar’s position.

biblical scholars,²⁶ I will show that the notion of the “cosmic fall”²⁷ is not present in the early chapters of Genesis. By tracing the themes of curse and pain through Genesis 1-9, I argue that there is no lasting, independent effect on the natural world from the curse on the ground in Genesis 3:17, but instead the curse is lifted in Genesis 8 after the account of the flood. The chapter ends with a reflection on how to interpret the difficult passage in Romans 8 in light of such a reading of Genesis. The outcome of the chapter is to set aside the notion of fallenness as the root of natural evil or disvalue and open up the discussion to approaches which accept pain, suffering, and death as part of God’s good creation.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 constitute a theological and philosophical argument about the nature of creaturely suffering that covers three different dimensions: the nature of love, special divine action, and redemption. In contrast to the theodicies which attempt to weigh the goods and harms meted out to each creature in an attempt to see if the goods outweigh the harms, I begin by asking “If God is love, what does a world created in love look like?” To do so, we must investigate what is meant by the concept of “love.” Chapter 4, “Creation, Freedom, and Love,” tackles that problem from both philosophical and theological perspectives.²⁸ The resultant definition is then worked out in the relationship of God to creation. The notion of kenosis, the self-emptying or self-limiting of God, becomes a primary quality of that relationship. The bestowal of

²⁶ The scholars in question include, amongst others, John Wenham, Claus Westermann, Gerhard von Rad, Iain Provan, David Tsumura, David Clines, Bruce Waltke, Norman Habel, Ellen van Wolde, and Carol Meyers.

²⁷ By “cosmic fall” I mean the event-based fall theory that blames the existence of violence, suffering, and natural evil in the world on human or demonic sin.

²⁸ I draw heavily from three particular sources—one philosophical and two theological: Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010); W. H. Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977); Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).

libertarian freedom is a necessary outcome of the nature of love, not only for humans but for all of creation. The world is a result of what John Polkinghorne has called “free process.”²⁹

However, the necessary freedom of the world, in light of divine love, is not a freedom that excludes special divine activity. Chapter 5, “Special Divine Action,” explores the possibilities of how God can still be active in this world inside the constraints of love. A brief survey of proposed models of how God can be active without intervening in the freedoms of the world gives way to a depiction of God’s action as characterised by the gift of being, co-presence, lure, and participation in the forms of embodiment and the shaping of meaning. Together, these approaches to divine action suggest possible ways in which God does respond to the suffering of creation, and works towards the comfort and healing of those hurt by the always-precarious freedom of creation.

Perhaps the most satisfying response to suffering and evil comes in the form of the promise of redemption. Whether it is the realisation that the suffering endured was not gratuitous, the personal experience of healing, or the final end of suffering, redemption offers hope that the Gordian knot of suffering will one day unravel. In Chapter 6, “Redemption,” I explore four models of redemption, two this-worldly and two other-worldly, that attempt to describe the hope to be held by a suffering creation. I then combine three of these models together into a compound picture of redemption. Based on the image of a photo mosaic, this picture shows how various models of redemption do not necessarily compete with one another, but can be nested together to form a richer, multi-level understanding of redemption.

²⁹ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God’s Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989, 2005), 77.

Chapter 7, “Conclusions” will re-explore the conclusions from the thesis, drawing together the arguments from the various chapters into one single argument.

Overall, this project will present a new interdisciplinary synthesis for the development of a compound evolutionary theodicy. I will hold, throughout, a particular interest in the suffering of individuals. The focus on the individual has been pointed out by Christopher Southgate as the place where the problem of theodicy becomes most acute: “The crux of the problem is not the overall system and its overall goodness but the Christian’s struggle with the challenge to the goodness of God posed by specific cases of innocent suffering.”³⁰ Not only is the problem of suffering most acutely seen in the realm of the individual, but this is also one of the least explored avenues of thought, limited almost exclusively to Southgate and Ruth Page. Preference is instead often given to the overall outcomes of evolutionary processes (Holmes Rolston III, John Polkinghorne) because they are so easily seen as glorious. The intricacy of ecosystems, the breathtaking diversity of life, the skill and power of many animals: all of these are easy to encounter as a theodicy. The slow starvation by neglect of the second-born pelican or shoebill chick, however, is much more difficult to justify. It is in the suffering of the individual that the theories of divine love are most strenuously tested. Can the same divine love which leads the creation entire towards its *telos* also be concerned with the plight of the suffering individual? Other specific contributions of this work include the close examination of biblical themes in Genesis 1-9 as applied to evolutionary theodicy and a theodicy derived from the philosophical and theological nature of

³⁰ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 48-49.

love. To do so, I will develop a combination of special divine action models and create a picture of redemption as a fractal photographic mosaic.

Chapter 2: Theological and Philosophical Positions

“I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect. A dog might as well speculate on the mind of Newton.— Let each man hope & believe what he can.—”

-Charles Darwin to Asa Gray¹

Before wading into the marshlands of theodicy, it is helpful to gain a view of the terrain to be traversed. What patches of ground might support one’s weight? How deep is the water? Can the terrain support life or has it been polluted? Are there insuperable obstacles? What sort of creatures live here? Philosophy, theology, the natural sciences, and personal experience all compete and co-exist in the saturated landscape of theodicy. Some initial groundwork will help to situate us in the debate as it exists.

This chapter and the next will work together to create a foundation for the arguments that will be developed in chapters 4-6. This chapter will introduce and review selected philosophical and theological positions in evolutionary theodicy. Chapter 3 will explore the relevant biblical material. Therefore, this chapter will not be entirely comprehensive in scope.

As there are vast oceans of literature regarding theodicy, it would be impossible to cover it all. This chapter will be limited in two ways. First, it will deal almost exclusively with the theodicy literature that covers non-human suffering, as opposed to theodicy that explores human suffering.² Second, it will be concerned with the contemporary discussion, rather than exploring all the possible historical debates. The earliest work mentioned here is C. S. Lewis’s *The Problem of Pain*, which was published in 1940. Almost every other source

¹ Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, “Letter 2814,” 22 May 1860, The Darwin Correspondence Project, available online at <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/entry-2814>, accessed 30 September 2014.

² I say “primarily” because I do at times draw upon sources that look at human suffering when it is a particularly important contribution.

considered was published within the last 30 years—publications motivated, no doubt, by the growing ecological crisis that has brought the question of non-human suffering ever more to the forefront of theological consideration.³ All three extant book-length treatments of evolutionary theodicy are recent, with Christopher Southgate and Michael Murray both publishing in 2008, and Nicola Hoggard Creegan publishing in 2013. Most of the relevant articles have all been published within the last decade. The long tradition of Christian theodicy is largely not relevant to my work because it either advances arguments that are not applicable to non-humans (such as the moral freewill defence) or because the particular sharpening of the question through evolutionary sciences (i.e. that the disvalues are necessary to the values) was simply not available. There was a sophisticated argument about animal suffering in the late Victorian period (post 1859),⁴ which would make an interesting study. However, the scientific data and theories today have changed and improved so much since Darwin's day that it would take a rather substantial piece of work to translate the concepts they were working with into the present debate. That work is simply beyond the scope of this dissertation. So, staying in the contemporary debate, we will survey the philosophical and theological landscape.

³ One earlier exception is the pioneering work of Loren Wilkinson, who wrote in 1976 on ecology and the theological implications of death. Loren Wilkinson, "A Christian Ecology of Death," 319-338.

⁴ Particularly of interest to this topic are the writings of Asa Gray, the Harvard botanist who championed Darwinism in the United States. Gray and Darwin corresponded several times—puzzling together over the question of natural evil—and the themes of design and suffering entered regularly into Gray's writings about evolution. See Bethany Sollereder, "The Darwin-Gray Exchange," *Theology and Science* 8:4 (2010): 417-432; John Hedley Brooke, "Darwin, Design, and the Unification of Nature," in *Science, Religion and the Human Experience*, ed. James D. Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165-184; Sara Joan Miles, "Charles Darwin and Asa Gray Discuss Teleology and Design," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 53:3 (2001): 196–201. Other thinkers also realised how problematic non-human animal suffering was, as evidenced in *Lux Mundi* and Clement C. J. Webb's comment that "the problem of suffering of the lower animals is the most difficult part of the problem of pain." Clement C. J. Webb, *Problems in the Relations of God and Man* (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1911), 268. Webb is referenced by Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 11.

This chapter is structured to journey from the clearer, more well-defined philosophical positions that hold fewer presuppositions through to the increasingly difficult and complex theological positions. This will allow the reader to build layer upon layer of complexity as the arguments become increasingly multi-faceted.

The philosophical section begins by exploring and rejecting the positions that simply evade the problem of reconciling a good God with the existence of evolutionary evil, such as the inscrutability response advanced by Martin Bergmann, William Alston, and Daniel Howard-Snyder.⁵ The rest of the philosophical positions, most notably those advanced by Michael Murray, but also including Peter van Inwagen, Richard Swinburne and Robin Attfield,⁶ are explored through the grid of Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson's "Good-harm Analyses."⁷ Southgate and Robinson's identification of defences as either property-consequence, developmental, or constitutive helps to reduce the complex arguments into their component parts for analysis and evaluation. At the end of the philosophical section, there is a bridging section exploring the

⁵ Martin Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Noûs* 35:2 (2001): 278-296; William Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 320-321; Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 286-310.

⁶ Michael J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews in 2003* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006); Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Robin Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

⁷ 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 Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S. J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007): 67-90.

limits of philosophy, followed by a contrast of philosophical with theological approaches.⁸

In the second half of the chapter I explore the theological positions in evolutionary theodicy. As with the philosophical section, the theological section begins by exploring some positions that evade the problem—this time by radical re-definitions of God that eliminate the divine qualities of goodness or omnipotence that are central to the question. Here I use Kenneth Surin and Eleonore Stump as foils for the usual type of analytical philosophy that is used to address theodicy.⁹ Next, I go on to investigate the theological positions that posit a fall scenario. This may be due to satanic corruption, human sin, or some more mysterious force at work in the world. Finally, the chapter will investigate more moderate redefinitions of God or God's action in the world.

The first aim of this chapter is to critique some positions sufficiently to set them aside—clearing the ground for more fruitful debate in later chapters. These will not be returned to in the project. The second aim of this chapter will be to introduce positions in order to set them up for further exploration, critique, or elaboration later in the dissertation. For those positions that will be re-explored later in the project, the footnotes will direct the reader to the relevant chapters.

Philosophical Positions

No Problem of Evil or Impossible Problem

⁸ Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010).

⁹ Championed by Wildman and Griffin. Wesley J. Wildman, "Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty, Disconcerting Truth: Ultimate Reality and Suffering in Nature," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007): 267-294; David R. Griffin, "Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981): 101-136.

The first two philosophical approaches to the problem of evil are the neo-Cartesian approach and the inscrutability response. Both end almost before they begin. The first approach, called by Michael Murray “neo-Cartesianism” due to its initial attribution to Descartes, simply states that there is no problem of animal suffering because non-human animals do not have the higher-order capacities necessary to suffer.¹⁰ Non-human animals, in this view, only appear to suffer.¹¹ Pain-related behaviours are carried out without any conscious awareness of pain or particularly of suffering. This view has some experimental verification, where pain-avoidance behaviour and even simple learning tasks were exhibited in the bodies of rats whose spinal cords had been disconnected from their brains.¹² However, the opposing evidence, which shows that all the symptoms of psychological distress which we associate with suffering are usually present, is strong and convincing.¹³ Michael Murray explores this topic at length,¹⁴ and concludes that “few will find the neo-Cartesian position to be compelling or even believable.”¹⁵ The common-sense argument against neo-Cartesianism is simply too strong, and ultimately, since the position cannot be conclusively proved or disproved, most people prefer to err on the side of

¹⁰ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 42. “Descartes and the Cartesians are reputed to have been seen torturing animals and marveling how well their behaviour mimicked the behaviour of organisms, like ourselves, who *really do* experience pain and suffering.” Italics original.

¹¹ This view has been advanced by C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940, 1996), 135-136.

¹² Michael Domjan and James W. Grau, *The Principles of Learning and Behaviour* (Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning, 2006), 179-180.

¹³ Evidence extends from very short term-effects of trauma, such as being hunted, to long-term effects similar to post-traumatic stress disorder. See: Patrick Bateson and Elizabeth L. Bradshaw, “Physiological effects of hunting red deer,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society London B* 264 (1997): 1707-1714; K. S. Gobush, B. M. Mutayoba, and S. K. Wasser, “Long-Term Impacts of Poaching on Relatedness, Stress Physiology, and Reproductive Output of Adult Female African Elephants,” *Conservation Biology* 22:6 (2008): 1590-1599. For more general discussions of animal distress see David DeGrazia and Andrew Rowan, “Pain, suffering, and anxiety in animals and humans,” *Theoretical Medicine* 12:3 (September 1991): 193-211.

¹⁴ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 41-72.

¹⁵ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 71.

greater compassion, giving the benefit of the doubt to the non-human animals. At the very least, it is argued, non-human animal pain responses are similar enough to human pain responses that it would damage one's humanity to simply ignore it.¹⁶ Were that not enough, shadows of seventeenth-century vivisectionists laughing about the pained cries of dogs as "mere creaking of the animal 'clockwork'" are enough to scare most people away from contemplating such a position.¹⁷ Furthermore, increasing evidence of non-human animals being "subjects-of-a-life"¹⁸ and of their experiences of distress should distance people yet further from any contemplation of the neo-Cartesian perspective. Non-human animals not only show signs of extreme distress with all the physiological changes we would find in humans that suffer, but also other animals can display prolonged psychological effects stemming from the experience of traumatic events.¹⁹ We can, then, safely set aside the neo-Cartesian approach.

The second approach, known as the inscrutability response, says that we simply cannot know the reasons for the existence of suffering, and our capacity to understand the complexities of the world is too small. In order to evaluate the extent of evil, or prove that one good outweighs another evil, one would have to be able to describe all the necessary conditions for both, as well as describe

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. by Vernon J. Bourke, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1975) III. 112:13.

¹⁷ Nicolaas A. Rupke, *Vivisection in Historical Perspective* (London: Francis & Taylor, 1987), 27.

¹⁸ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 243-248; Holmes Rolston III, *A New Environmental Ethics: The Next Millennium for Life on Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 64-66. For Regan, a "subject-of-a-life" is any organism capable of felt experience, which is mostly mammals. For Rolston, it also includes organisms like octopi, which have sentient experience but which may be very different from our own.

¹⁹ Scientific evidence shows not only that animals experience deep distress in circumstances such as being hunted, but also that psychological and physiological impacts can continue for more than a decade after a traumatic event. One innovative clinic for the orphans of poached African elephants has found success by treating the young elephants as having post-traumatic stress disorder. Charles Siebert, "Orphans No More," *National Geographic* (September 2011): 40-65. Accessed online 1 January 2013 at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/09/orphan-elephants/siebert-text>.

every single outcome emerging from their initial occurrences. There are simply too many variables for a person to make a plausible judgement, even in a relatively simple situation. We are, therefore, not well positioned to make arguments about whether or not evils can or cannot outweigh respective goods at a cosmic scale. Defenders of this position include Michael Bergmann, Daniel Howard-Snyder, and William Alston.²⁰ Shrouded in mystery, the problem of non-human animal suffering remains intractable, and attempts to solve it only result in wasted philosophical and theological speculations. Such speculations only keep us from the more important work of discerning and responding to evil here and now.

The inscrutability response may seem attractive since it begins where all theodicy ultimately ends: in mystery. However, the advocates of this position miss many important discussions that emerge from thinking about suffering. Theodicy is not only attempting to find an answer to suffering, it also includes reflection on the nature of God and on the nature of the world. To attempt to reflect on the nature of God or the world without including suffering would be obviously impossible, and so we must continue to wrestle with theodicy, even if only for the light it throws on other doctrines. So while a final comprehensive answer to suffering may never be found, we do not take the inscrutabilist's choice of refusing to engage the question. We turn instead to three sets of philosophical approaches that take the plunge in acknowledging and answering evil.

Analytical Philosophical Defences

²⁰ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 26; Nicola Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 65; Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil", 278-296; Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," 286-310; Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," 320-321.

Most philosophical defences attempt to show through analytical thinking that God has not built avoidable evil into the natural process of the world, thereby rescuing God from culpability for the extent and severity of animal suffering.²¹ These defences²² are built of several different types of strategies, helpfully distinguished by Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson.²³ They distinguish between three different categories of good-harm analyses (GHA), in each of which the good is supposed to outweigh the harm. The three categories are defined as:

Property-consequence GHAs: a consequence of the existence of a good, as a property of a particular being or system, is the possibility that possession of this good leads to it causing harms.

Developmental GHAs: the good is a goal which can only develop through a process which includes the possibility (or necessity) of harm. [These can be further divided into instrumental or by-product varieties of developmental GHAs]

Constitutive GHAs: The existence of a good is inherently, constitutively, inseparable from the experience of harm or suffering.²⁴

Southgate and Robinson further divide these categories by three different references: human, anthropocentric, and biotic. As only the anthropocentric and biotic references include consideration of the non-human animal world, they will be the only two explored here.

Property-Consequence GHAs

Nomic regularity is a good example of a property-consequence GHA.

The concept of nomic regularity states that the processes of change can be

²¹ Neil Messer, "Natural Evil After Darwin," *Theology After Darwin*, eds. Michael S. Northcott and R. J. Berry (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 143.

²² I will use the language of defence in this context because most of the philosophical approaches are not attempting to build a theological framework to explain God, and so the language of theodicy is inappropriate. Alternative language, such as Michael Murray's *Causa Dei*, is acknowledged but seem an unnecessary proliferation of terms.

²³ Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson, "Varieties of Theodicy," 67-90.

²⁴ Southgate and Robinson, "Varieties of Theodicy," 70.

described in law-like forms with few or no exceptions.²⁵ If I drop a large rock, its fall will always adhere to certain law-like descriptions, as will the impact it would have on a body below. Great harms develop out of the fact that the world has extremely regular patterns of change and interaction. Fires do not stop burning when fawns are caught in them, nor does water cease carrying its properties because it is built into a tsunami. The world's physical properties continue to stay stable regardless of the suffering they inflict on living beings. Because these law-like forms cause so much suffering Michael Murray argues that "theists must accept the claim that nomic regularity is either something that God values highly in creation or it is an inevitable by-product of something else valued highly."²⁶ What could constitute this highly valued something?

Two varieties of possible goods are derived from nomic regularity: first, the anthropocentric perspective, which states that the entire universe is subject to law-like forms for specifically human goods, and second, the biotic perspective, which argues that nomic regularity is good for non-human animals themselves.

For Murray, the possibility of a moral universe is one of the outcomes of nomic regularity that could form part of an anthropocentric GHA.²⁷ It is only in a universe where actions have predictable effects that a person can have a chance to make real and effective moral choices. Without knowledge of what might occur if, say, one were to throw a hard object at another person, free and effective—and crucially, moral—choice becomes meaningless.²⁸ In this case,

²⁵ Murray, whose definition I use here, is careful to say that the law-like forms can include "chance" as it exists in the quantum world, "as long as the probabilities were well-behaved." *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 135.

²⁶ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 135.

²⁷ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 136.

²⁸ For a theological development of the same point, see the arguments of Clayton and Knapp below, p. 65-66.

the suffering of non-human animals (who do not have moral capacities²⁹) due to nomic regularities are simply a tragic by-product of the necessity for moral human freedom, thus non-human animal suffering serves human ends.³⁰

Another example of an anthropocentric approach is to argue that nomic regularity serves humans by providing intellectual satisfaction through scientific investigations. The 19th century geologist George Frederick Wright, for example, wrote happily that in comparison to a trilobite's whole pleasure in its own life:

a far higher purpose is served in the adaptation of his complicated organism and of the position of his tomb in a sedimentary deposit to arrest the attention and direct the reasoning of a scientific observer. The pleasure of one lofty thought is worth more, and so more fitted to be with the Creator an object of design, than a whole herd of sensational pleasures. A page of Darwin has to a single reader more 'value in use' than all the elements had to the whole race of Trilobites in Silurian seas.³¹

The first argument, that nomic regularity is necessary for moral choice, and that it necessarily causes non-human animal suffering as a by-product, would hold great merit if it could be shown that moral choice could not exist some other way that did not involve non-human animal suffering, or if non-human animals themselves benefited from moral choice. However, in the form that van Inwagen articulates the argument (which denies non-human animals any possibility of moral choice), it is hard to accept that billions of organisms' suffering and death is outweighed by the possibility of human moral choice

²⁹ "Since non-human animals presumably do not have free will, and since some (most, in fact) of the sufferings of non-human animals occurred before there were human beings, no extension or elaboration of the free-will defense can account for all animal suffering." van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil*, 113.

³⁰ "All past and present human and animal natural evils of which we know thus contribute to the widening of human choice when we learn about them." Swinburne, *Providence*, 192.

³¹ George Frederick Wright, *Studies in Science and Religion* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1882), 204-205. This quotation is used by Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 142.

alone. Any valid solution must attribute value to the lives of the non-human animals themselves.

The second argument, that of the intellectual satisfaction of the palaeontologist, is even more outrageous to suggest, since all the satisfaction of the pursuit of physics and mathematics and present-day biology would have been available to investigate without the suffering and death of past non-human animals. Palaeontology would certainly have suffered, but not the scientific endeavour as a whole. Furthermore, the great majority of non-human animals have left no trace able to be investigated by science, and so we cannot use this argument to explain their travail. It is morally vacuous to attribute so much suffering to no greater good than a particular branch of intellectual satisfaction.

A slightly stronger point to be made here is that without nomic regularity no science at all would be possible, since science depends on the repeatable law-like functioning of the natural world. Robin Attfield points out that without natural regularities:

There would be no science and no scope for rationality, there would be no creatures of the kinds that have evolved by natural selection within the framework of the laws of nature to which we are accustomed, and if there were any life at all, it would be unrecognizably different, with no recognizable goods or ills remaining. For conscious life, indeed, some system of nature not too different from that of the actual world seems essential.³²

Two objections can be made in response to this statement. First, the applicability of rationality is almost entirely a human value, and does not ascribe worth to the non-human animals themselves. Second, that an “unrecognizably different” life would not necessarily be better or worse than the current state of affairs, so pointing out that it would simply be different does not constitute an argument. In a hypothetical “other order” without non-human animal suffering,

³² Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, 124.

there could still remain goods and ills of a different order, and so the question would have to land on whether or not those goods and ills outweigh the goods and ills currently in operation. Unfortunately, with no concrete knowledge of another world (it will always be hypothetical) and with only a very limited knowledge of this world the question remains unanswerable. It is better to argue, as I will below, that nomic regularity gives non-human animals the chance to develop skills and abilities, to stretch themselves and form themselves in ways that would be unavailable to them without nomic regularity, even if the present order does cause suffering.

A different sort of anthropocentric argument comes from Peter van Inwagen who asserts that the co-creator destiny of humanity requires a world with the properties of nomic regularity, because one could not have dominion over a world of massive irregularity.³³ A world constantly interfered with by direct divine intervention could not be handed over to human rule in the eschaton because they would not be able to intervene in the same ubiquitous and supernatural way. Although God might be able to constantly intervene to prevent harm, for example by transforming a falling tree limb into water so as not to hurt the creature below, humans would not be able to do this. The world system, built upon such interventions, would collapse into chaos upon being handed over to humans. This is not a developmental argument because van Inwagen does not imply that the regularities are necessary for humans to learn their roles as governors of creation, but only that their task would be impossible to perform without said regularities. Once again, there is little in this argument that can justify the long past of non-human animal suffering, particularly when the eschaton is usually envisioned to work under different “rules of being”

³³ van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 123.

anyways.³⁴ In the end, anthropocentric property-consequence GHAs are unsatisfactory, and therefore have little to contribute to the contemporary debate.

Property-consequence arguments with a biotic reference are also possible with a focus on nomic regularity. Murray points out “embodied creatures cannot successfully reproduce, acquire adequate nutrition, constitute a suitably interdependent ecosphere, and so on, unless the physical world in which they are embodied is appropriately nomically regular.”³⁵ Here, at least, the goods of nomic regularity benefit the individual non-human animals themselves. They are enabled to have autonomous and effective lives because the reliability of the world opens up the possibility of developmental values such as learning, adapting, and responding to the environment. Nomic regularity with a biotic reference forms part of a successful defence.

Apart from nomic regularity, a more generalised property-consequence argument with biotic reference looks to the consequences of some natural processes, such as plate tectonics. The anguished death of many non-human animals swept out to sea by a tsunami—itsself caused by plate movement—is measured against the innumerable and necessary goods that plate tectonic movement provides. An earth with moving plates means that creatures will receive harm from earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis. Yet, without the goods that plate tectonics bring there would be no possibility of life on earth.³⁶ Property-consequence arguments, particularly with a biotic reference, are helpful starting points but they do not address the imbalance of harms: why one

³⁴ See chapter 6, p. 269–286 for various models of redemptive existence.

³⁵ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 143.

³⁶ See Peter Ward and Donald Brownlee, *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life is Uncommon in the Universe* (New York: Copernicus, 2004), 191-220.

individual suffers more than another. To answer that, one needs to draw on wider theological and philosophical resources.

Developmental GHAs

Developmental GHAs argue that certain processes include the possibility (or necessity) of harm for certain goods to develop. Anthropocentric arguments in this category abound. The moral choice argument explored above can easily, and is often, argued from this perspective. That is, human moral choice can only be developed through involvement in a world like ours that involves suffering and pain. Michael Corey concludes with exactly this point in his book

Evolution and the Problem of Natural Evil:

Now we are in a position to understand why an omnipotent Deity would have opted to create the universe in a gradual, evolutionary manner, instead of instantaneously by divine fiat. He presumably did so in order to facilitate the human growth process as much as possible; but in order to do this He seems to have been compelled to implement the same evolutionary processes in the natural world that appear to be an essential part of the Human Definition.³⁷

If the scope of value is widened beyond humans to sentient beings, the GHA can take on a biotic reference. Murray does this in his Chaos-to-Order argument where he argues that the present state of synchronic order—that is, order that is displayed at a given instant by an array of different organisms,³⁸ including creatures like human beings—could only have emerged from the early chaotic state of the universe through a process “which tends to allow for an overall increase in organismic complexity over time.”³⁹ Murray explores the possibility that the evolution of complex beings necessitates the long chain of

³⁷ Michael A. Corey, *Evolution and the Problem of Natural Evil* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 113.

³⁸ Murray contrasts synchronic order with diachronic order. Diachronic order is the general orderliness of natural systems unfolding over time according to natural laws.

³⁹ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 168. See also the “Only Way” argument below, p. 39.

creatures beforehand, and the creatures' suffering finds meaning in the values of progress, narrative structure, and the necessity of divine hiddenness. He concludes that none of these instrumental goods adequately stands as a defence, but goes on to say that chaos-to-order can be viewed as an intrinsic good, and thus succeed as a defence. The intrinsic good of chaos-to-order is found in analogy to the idea that a man who can make a machine that makes watches is more worthy of praise than a man who can simply make a watch. In a similar way, God making the world with the ability to carry on creative processes of its own—to be seeded with developmental possibilities of aesthetic, moral and religious value that emerge over time—“is of greater value than creation of the finished project by divine fiat.”⁴⁰ Murray argues that this is not an ad hoc argument in light of evolution because it was attested to by Christian thinkers long before Darwin, such as Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine.⁴¹ As such, Murray considers this the most compelling defence in light of non-human animal suffering. This developmental GHA is only very subtly different from the biotic property-consequence GHA above. The difference lies mainly in a longer timeframe for the developmental GHA: it argues that a creature has the opportunity to change over its lifetime due to nomic regularity, while the property-consequence GHA argues that the creature can make a meaningful decision here and now, without the thought of how that

⁴⁰ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 184.

⁴¹ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 184-85. I find Murray's use of Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine very problematic. These church fathers were not arguing for a chaos-to-order universe as a good in its own right, as Murray is trying to do. Instead, they were attempting to harmonise the day-by-day account of creation in Genesis 1 with the (to them) self-evident truth that the only way an eternal God could interact with a world of time is instantaneously. The chaos-to-order element of their argument is simply a spandrel, an unintentional byproduct of their discussion on time. To try to argue that Augustine felt a world of unfolding development was inherently better than a world made by divine fiat is a misrepresentation of Augustine's view since he did argue for a creation by divine fiat of the seeds of possibility!

decision might shape its future self. However, the two arguments are very close, and naturally overlap with each other.

A philosophical route more focussed on the creature itself is the developmental instrumental GHA. This defence argues that many good goals are only developed by use of the harms in question. Pain is the classic example. Pain is a defensive mechanism that the body uses to protect itself. People who do not feel pain, or who do not associate pain with suffering, end up seriously damaging their bodies because they do not avoid destructive situations. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey advance this argument in their book, *The Gift of Pain*.⁴² Brand was a doctor in India working with patients with Hansen's disease (leprosy) and began to suspect that the damage patients suffered was from their lack of ability to feel pain rather than from any "flesh-eating" properties of the bacteria. Mysterious wounds were investigated, and invariably preventable causes were found.⁴³ The patients' inability to feel pain led them into countless situations where their bodies were irreparably damaged because they did not learn to avoid harm.

From this perspective, every creature that can feel pain, and can therefore respond to harmful stimuli in their environment gain far more from the harm of pain than the good of its lack. "That capacity to suffer" writes Attfield, "drives the capacity for focussed consciousness; thought cannot happen in plants, and emerges in the course of evolutionary history partly so as to secure wellbeing while at the same time averting pain."⁴⁴ The benefit of the pain is attributable directly to the creature who experiences it, so it is considered an instrumental harm. Indeed, the very *hurtfulness* of pain is what makes it so

⁴² Philip Yancey and Paul Brand, *The Gift of Pain* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

⁴³ In one case, rats were found eating flesh off of patients' hands while they slept. *The Gift of Pain*, 127.

⁴⁴ Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, 142.

valuable: everything else is put aside until the damage is responded to in some way.⁴⁵ The benefits that pain bring cannot be separated from its harm. If pain did not hurt, it would lose its protective function. Developmental instrumental GHAs, in so far as the harms benefit the individual themselves, are very strong arguments. New challenges arise regarding the goodness of God when the instrumental argument begins to extend beyond the individual. For example, those who argue that ‘the pain of the one causes the harmony of the whole,’ raise questions about why God should use tactics that are so brutal to the allegedly-loved individual.⁴⁶

One of the ways the suffering of individuals is accounted for in the larger evolutionary scheme is through a developmental GHA known as the “Only Way” argument.⁴⁷ The basic argument is that an evolutionary process, with all the harms it possesses, is the only way to create a world with the values we cherish.⁴⁸ Christopher Southgate focusses most successfully on the goods of the individual. He identifies beings capable of “selving” as the desired outcome of evolution and argues that the evolutionary process is the “only way” to produce such selves.⁴⁹ If there was another way to begin with a Genesis-like *de novo* creation where animals appeared fully developed with their various skills, competition for food and resources would soon come to govern ongoing evolution in any case, unless animal interactions were constantly prevented by divine intervention. Attfield argues “Thus, though evolution by natural selection

⁴⁵ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 117-118.

⁴⁶ Ruth Page utterly rejects instrumentalist GHAs that reach beyond the individual, but she writes from a theological perspective, and we will return to her work later.

⁴⁷ This argument is held in various forms by Alexander, Attfield, Murphy, Russell and Southgate.

⁴⁸ Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, 128-131, 139-141, 145-146.

⁴⁹ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 16, 30. The concept of “selving” is drawn from Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem “As kingfishers catch fire” and refers to the creature expressing the fullness of its form.

is not logically necessary, it is probably the only kind of non-interventionist world-system which could give us those capacities found in nature that we value.⁵⁰ The “Only Way” argument is a developmental by-product approach, where the focus of the good achieved reaches beyond the individual who actually suffers and the harms do not affect every creature.⁵¹

Another example of this type of approach is the example of the second white pelican chick.⁵² White pelicans regularly lay two eggs, with the strategy of only raising one chick. After birth, the second (and usually smaller) sibling is pushed from the nest by the older sibling and ignored by its parents until it dies of exposure or is eaten by a passing predator. However, the advantage of this evolved behaviour is that in a small percentage of cases, the first chick dies, and the parents raise the second chick instead, thus always insuring that each reproductive cycle is fruitful. To find value in the death of an insurance pelican chick for the ongoing survival of white pelicans is a developmental by-product approach. The same is true of Holmes Rolston’s observation that “adversities make life go and grow. The pressure, before extremity, for doing better is steadily a blessing in disguise. The cougar’s fang has carved the limbs of the fleet-footed deer, and vice versa.”⁵³ The suffering of millions of deer as they are painfully brought down by cougars is an unfortunate by-product of a process that is strengthening and stretching deer into beautiful forms as a species, developing specialised skills and senses. Without the bite of the cougar, these

⁵⁰ Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, 129.

⁵¹ Southgate and Robinson, “Varieties,” 88.

⁵² This is an example used by Holmes Rolston, and later appropriated by others, most notably McDaniel and Southgate. Holmes Rolston III, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey*, 2nd ed. (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), 137ff. The first edition was published in 1987.

⁵³ Rolston, *Science and Religion*, 134.

rich aspects of the deer's being would soon be lost, just as fish living in dark caves eventually lose their eyes from lack of selective pressure.

Darwin's theory of natural selection rests heavily upon a developmental argument. Famously he wrote: "Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows."⁵⁴ Ruthless competition refines life into "endless forms, most beautiful and most wonderful" yet, Darwin assures us, "when we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply."⁵⁵ According to Darwin, the goods emerge out of the harms, and the goods also heavily outweigh the harms.

However the value of Darwinian mechanics can be critiqued by asserting that there are other possibilities available; other paths that would have led to the same goods without the bloodshed and suffering. Martin Nowak presents just this sort of riposte by showing how altruistic and co-operative strategies of survival are beneficial to reproductive success.⁵⁶ Lynn Margulis goes even farther to argue that complex life, as seen in the origin of eukaryotic cells and many speciation events, could not have developed by random mutation and natural selection alone, but had to have been developed by symbiotic relationships.⁵⁷ Indeed, Margulis states "sympiogenesis, while it can clearly

⁵⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), 490.

⁵⁵ Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 490, 79.

⁵⁶ Martin A. Nowak, "Evolving Cooperation," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 299 (2012): 1-8; Martin Nowak with Roger Highfield, *Supercooperators: Altruism, Evolution, and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011).

⁵⁷ Lynn Sagan (Margulis), "On the Origin of Mitosing Cells," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 14 (1967): 225-274; Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, "The Role of Sympiogenesis in Evolution," in *Back to Darwin: A Richer Account of Evolution*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 176-184.

lead to new species, also set up the conditions for speciation itself.”⁵⁸ If it can be shown that the same or similar goods, such as physical skills and consciousness, could have evolved without the harms of predation and hurt, then the case for the developmental by-product GHA’s is considerably weakened. At the same time, it is difficult to know how this could be shown conclusively. Margulis’ approach ignores the eventual necessity of competition: even though a new symbiotic relationship may promote peace between two organisms, the two now work as a new unit within natural selection against other beings. Although two organisms might perhaps even merge to create a new species, that new species must now compete for resources and reproduction rights. Darwin himself, when confronted with the self-sacrificial nature of individual bees and ants that seemed to upset his theory, simply assumed that the hive or the nest must now be considered the “unit” of selection, as one hive competes against another.⁵⁹ So the essential problem of suffering is not eliminated by symbiotic relationships, only pushed back a step.

Developmental GHA’s begin to address the imbalance of suffering, but only when focussed on the individual. Often, developmental arguments get swept up into addressing the grand processes of evolution. They are effective, but are in danger of overlooking the central question of the individual suffering of creatures. Both property-consequence and developmental GHA’s are necessary for a theodicy, but they are not in themselves sufficient to convince of the goodness of God or the universality of God’s benevolence since there are

⁵⁸ Margulis and Sagan, “Role of Symbiogenesis,” 182.

⁵⁹ This is a point also made by Christopher Southgate in “Does God’s Care Make Any Difference? Theological Reflection on the Suffering of God’s Creatures,” in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, eds. Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Denis Edwards (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 107.

always so many remaining instances of severe suffering which are not adequately addressed by these approaches.

Constitutive GHA's

Constitutive GHA's find that the goods and harms are linked, not causally as in the developmental analyses, but constitutively. This type of defence is often used when ecosystem dynamics are taken into account, such as by Holmes Rolston and Loren Wilkinson.⁶⁰ Energy transfer up and down trophic levels through predation and decay emerges into the richness and orderliness of the natural world. The circles of life and death encompass the suffering individual, drawing the narrative of their life into a systemic whole that Holmes Rolston describes as “a passion play.”⁶¹ Wilkinson outlines the Christology in Revelation of the Lamb who was slain and writes “worthy are all lambs, all victims of the world’s carnivoroisty [*sic*], for out of their death comes life.”⁶²

In such considerations, the good is less mechanical and more aesthetic. When the outweighing goods proposed are the existence of beauty or harmony, one enters into the realm of constitutive arguments. Murray argues, for example, that “there is something grand, beautiful, and artful about a universe which contains within it everything that is necessary in order for it to yield the results God intends for it.”⁶³ In many cases, as with Murray here, the constitutive arguments quickly break down into what are actually developmental instrumental arguments: the harm is good for developing such-and-such an end. Most true constitutive positions become almost entirely theological in

⁶⁰ Rolston, *Science and Religion*, 134-137. Loren Wilkinson, “A Christian Ecology of Death,” 319-338.

⁶¹ Rolston, *Science and Religion*, 144.

⁶² Wilkinson, “A Christian Ecology of Death,” 331.

⁶³ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 146.

nature because theological positions do not need to set the weigh scales mechanically. Theology can affirm the mysterious and paradox-laden non-reductive truths that are found in constitutive arguments. Philosophical thought tends to balk at what cannot be broken down in to its component reasons and analysed, and so there are not any really good examples of a true philosophical constitutive position. In a later section of this chapter I will unpack the extant theological positions.

Compound Positions

Most defences do not rest on a single premise, nor on one type of philosophical strategy alone. Philosophers mix together the different approaches to try and build a stronger compound case. Consider Peter van Inwagen who builds a compound position.⁶⁴

He begins with the statement that nomic regularity is intrinsically good. Or, at least, he says that a world of incongruity or massive irregularity would be extremely bad—worse than a world with suffering. He bases this thesis around three main arguments of intrinsic disutility and one of extrinsic disutility. The three intrinsic arguments are as follows: first, he attempts to show that every world would (for all we know) have to contain either suffering or massive irregularities (a property-consequence GHA). Second, some good comes from the existence of higher-level sentient creatures, and these creatures could only have developed through a process that involves suffering (a developmental instrumental GHA).⁶⁵ Therefore, the whole ladder of intermediate forms is a necessary good to the full expression of God's creativity (a constitutive or

⁶⁴ van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil*.

⁶⁵ This is similar to Christopher Southgate's "only way argument" but Southgate argues that the good is not found solely in the existence of the creature themselves, but in their unique flourishing, or selving. Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 29, 63-64.

developmental by-product GHA, depending on how it is elaborated).⁶⁶ Third, massive irregularity would be a defect in the world equally morally problematic to the suffering of animals (another property-consequence GHA). Therefore, between the choice of suffering beasts or massive irregularity, the option of suffering is *possibly* the greater good. Extrinsicly, as I mentioned earlier, van Inwagen argues that the world is meant to be handed over to human rule in the eschaton and that it would be hard to see how a world of massive irregularity could be handed over if it continually depended on direct divine intervention.⁶⁷ Thus, a world of nomic regularity is good for the sake of the humans who will one day rule it (an anthropocentric property-consequence argument). Argument builds upon argument into a whole that is vastly stronger than any one argument alone.

It is now becoming commonplace to suggest that combined or compound defences are the only admissible way to deal with both the complexity of the world and the varieties of natural evil which occur.⁶⁸ Both Michael Murray and Christopher Southgate advocate compound theodicies. Murray writes:

Indeed, it seems quite implausible to think that an evil as widespread as the evil in question here, animal pain and suffering, could or would be explained only by appeal to one narrow range of goods. It seems far more likely that there would be a whole host of goods that God aims to bring about through creation, and that certain types of permitted evil are aimed at securing more than one of these goods.⁶⁹

A compound explanation makes a stronger case, and allows for a greater strength against arguments that falsify one or two of the cases made. More

⁶⁶ Here, van Inwagen echoes Aquinas' argument that the great diversity of creaturely forms is a great good in and of itself, as the creative mind of God can be best reflected in a diversity of forms. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros, 1947) I, 47, 2.

⁶⁷ van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil*, 119-123.

⁶⁸ See Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 193-199; Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 15-16.

⁶⁹ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 195.

than this, a compound defence allows one to bring a variety of goods into focus, not all of them immediately obvious. The promise of eschatological renewal, for example, stands as a great good that can complement many of the other positions, but would be hard to defend if it was the only good. Furthermore, there are a variety of harms to address: the harms caused by a tsunami are different than the harms caused by a predator. It is only natural to assume that different types of defence might apply to each. A compound theodicy or defence allows for the flexibility of addressing these various issues.⁷⁰

All the GHA approaches hinge on one major turning point: that it is possible for humans to effectively judge measures of good and evil, or to make compelling arguments about what an outweighing good or evil would look like.⁷¹ We will see in the next section, how these philosophical approaches contrast with the theological approaches, and how this central assumption has been called into question.

Philosophical and Theological Approaches Compared and Contrasted

Methodologically, philosophers seek to approach the question of theodicy with as few theological presuppositions as possible.⁷² They often begin with whether the existence of God is plausible at all. Because of the focus on logic and lack of initial assumptions, a philosophical approach often becomes what Thomas Tracy calls a “thin defense,” something that deals only with the logical incompatibility of evil with the existence of a god.⁷³ By contrast, a Christian

⁷⁰ The beginning of chapter 4 will spend a little time on the tsunami-type harms, whereas most of my project deals with the predator-type harms.

⁷¹ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 186. van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil*, 120.

⁷² Swinburne, *Providence*, 44.

⁷³ Thomas F. Tracy, “The Lawfulness of Nature and the Problem of Evil,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 152. See chapter 1, p. 14, for the introduction to Tracy’s thought.

theological approach starts explicitly with foundational assumptions and with stated sources of authority, such as the Bible and tradition. Holding to these initial beliefs and commitments allows for what Tracy calls a “thick defense.” A thick defence attempts to weave a narrative that explains how suffering is consistent with beliefs held about God.⁷⁴ While a thick defence offers a theodicy limited by certain conceptual constraints (i.e. it cannot explore any possibility, since some are ruled out by prior belief), it allows for a more in-depth engagement with evidential and existential arguments about evil, and it provides richer and more robust (not to mention more existentially satisfying) conclusions than philosophy.

A thick defence draws directly on the notion that the good which God seeks in creation is loving communion with created beings. The rewards and the risks are both higher. The “reward” of being drawn into the everlasting love of the Trinitarian life of God vastly outweighs countering evils. At the same time, the recognition of freedom must be complicated by the corruption of the will caused by sin and the shaping of selves by societal forces. The theodocist must look at the “real world” conditions of choice. A thick defence, grounded in theological reflection results in a “much more complex and qualified account of human freedom than is usually found in generic philosophical free-will defenses.”⁷⁵ The same can be said of the non-human world as well.

Another of the differences between philosophical and theological approaches has to do with audience and purpose. In Peter van Inwagen’s Gifford Lectures, he sets up his defence to try and convince a “neutral agnostic” that the theistic argument is more compelling than the atheistic argument that

⁷⁴ Tracy, “Lawfulness”, 152.

⁷⁵ Tracy, “Lawfulness,” 160.

God cannot and does not exist.⁷⁶ In a similar way, Michael Murray states that his aim is simply to engage the critics of theism on the difficult problem of animal suffering.⁷⁷ A theological approach may seek to address critiques from outside a circle of faith or to destabilise atheistic doubts, but its purpose is essentially more constructive than that—to engage in an enquiry about the nature of the God-world relationship and one’s own being in that world.⁷⁸ Theological theodicy seeks to build or reinforce a theological foundation upon which faith can build. In Anselm’s famous line, it is “faith seeking understanding.” The conclusions theology draws may not be any more epistemologically verifiable than a philosophical engagement, but its claims will be more robust.

Sources of authority also differ between the two disciplines. A Christian philosopher may refer to the Bible as authoritative in the course of his or her work, but the Bible does not stand as authoritative in and of itself, but only in so far as its teachings can be corroborated through philosophical means. Tradition, in philosophy, also stands in an ambiguous place. While epistemological traditions are certainly relied upon in philosophical enquiry, the tradition of the Church carries weight only in so far as it is pragmatic for the philosopher. In theology, the tradition of the Church stands as an important source of truth—the witness to God through the ages—that must be accounted for and reckoned with, even if one finally disagrees with it. Logic and experience do not stand alone in theological reasoning, but are joined by tradition and Scripture.

⁷⁶ van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil*, 113. “In my view, the question we should attend to is not what I think of a defense or what you think of it, not what religious believers or committed atheists think of it, but what genuinely neutral agnostics think of it.”

⁷⁷ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 8, 36-37.

⁷⁸ See chapter 1 for the intended audience of this work.

Finally, theology and philosophy are separated by different limits and responsibilities. The philosopher is bound only by the constraints of logic and is responsible only for following the argument to its conclusion. The theologian is limited by the assertions of Scripture, and is responsible for being faithful to the tradition and the needs of the Church, as well as (hopefully) staying inside the boundaries of orthodox belief.⁷⁹ Theologians should also be more sensitive to the affective and pastoral nature of their endeavour, while philosophers need only be worried about whether or not the problem of evil has been “formally satisfied.” Such an approach can lead to startlingly problematic claims. Take, for example, philosopher Richard Swinburne who claims that his book formally satisfies the need for showing that God does everything possible to bring about an overall good state of affairs in the evil of the world.⁸⁰ He goes on to illustrate his point by listing the overall goods coming from the eighteenth century African slave-trade:

But God allowing this to occur made possible innumerable opportunities for very large numbers of people to contribute or not to contribute to the development of this [slave] culture; for slavers to choose to enslave or not; for plantation-owners to choose to buy slaves or not and to treat them well or ill; for ordinary white people and politicians to campaign for its abolition or not to bother, and to campaign for the compensation for the victims or not to bother; and so on. There is also the great good for those who themselves suffered as slaves that their lives were not useless, their vulnerability to suffering made possible many free choices, and thereby so many steps towards the formation of good or bad character.⁸¹

Swinburne may “formally satisfy” the strictly logical needs of a defence through such argumentation, but he does nothing to satisfy the sense of outrage one feels in contemplating human slavery, then and now. If anything, Swinburne’s

⁷⁹ Though a theologian may, of course, seek to argue that a particular position *should* be recognised as orthodox, if it is currently not recognised as such. For a further expression of my methodology, see chapter 1, p. 15.

⁸⁰ Swinburne, *Providence*, 238.

⁸¹ Swinburne, *Providence*, 245.

confident description increases the sense of protest and outrage one feels—that the suffering, persecution, and enslavement of millions of people should be considered a great good because it allows rich, free, white people the decision to *perhaps* campaign for the slaves' freedom—it is not convincing as an outweighing good, whatever logical terms it might meet.

Compare Swinburne's approach to Christopher Southgate's summary of a theological approach:

All theodicies that engage with real situations rather than philosophical abstractions, and endeavour to give an account of the God of the Christian Scriptures, arise out of protest and end in mystery. Theodicies never 'work,' in the sense of solving the problem of suffering in the world.⁸²

A theodicy arising out of protest and ending in mystery allows the whole person, mind and heart, to engage with the problem, though theological approaches do not produce the tight, neat packages one finds in analytical philosophy.

This dissertation is decidedly theological in approach. I do not set out to create a watertight case for the plausibility of God, but rather, from a wide range of sources I seek to create a description of the God-world relationship that recognises the goodness of God and yet can sustain the burden of suffering.

There are other thinkers who also find the analytical philosophical approach unsatisfactory. The next section will explore three critical responses to "thin defence" philosophical theodicy: rejection of theodicy, "thick defence" philosophy that addresses and engages with the existential issues raised, and theological approaches. These critiques give further rationale for not pursuing this question from a strictly philosophical angle.

Rejection of Theodicy

⁸² Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 132-33.

The first critique of the analytical philosophy of theodicy is advanced by Kenneth Surin in *Theology and the Problem of Evil*.⁸³ In the introduction he shows how the ahistorical approach of post-Leibniz theodicies badly misrepresents the theological endeavours of figures such as Augustine and Irenaeus. Augustine, he argues, was concerned with the problem of evil in the human heart, and the solution was not to be found in philosophical reasoning but in conversion.⁸⁴ For Augustine, “the goal of the true *Christian* philosophy, is the attainment of blessedness, and there is no way to blessedness except that which God has revealed in Jesus Christ.”⁸⁵ In a similar way, Irenaeus’s real goal in historical context was to combat gnosticism and the perversion of the human heart, not to solve an abstract philosophical question. Here it is useful to quote Surin at length:

There is a ‘problem of evil’ for Irenaeus, but it has absolutely nothing to do with this kind of ‘soul-making’ or with anything resembling a theodicy. For as Irenaeus sees it the real problem concerning evil arises in quite another area of theological territory, one occupied by beings who, puffed up by the pretence of knowledge, fall away from the love of God, and imagine that they themselves are perfect, for this reason... they set forth an imperfect Creator... it is therefore better... that one should have no knowledge whatever of any reason why a single thing in creation has been made, but should believe in God, and continue in His love, than that, puffed up through knowledge of this kind, he should fall away from that love which is the life of man; and that he should search after no other knowledge except [the knowledge of] Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was crucified for us, than that by subtle questions and hair-splitting expressions he should fall into impiety. (*Against Heresies*, II, 26, 1)⁸⁶

The individualistic and rationalistic activity that philosophers like Swinburne, Hick, and Plantinga are involved in has nothing to do with the holiness-persuasion writings that formed the tradition of the church. Furthermore, Surin

⁸³ Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

⁸⁴ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 10-11.

⁸⁵ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 11.

⁸⁶ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 18-19.

argues, the spiritual formation which consists of the practical defeat and overcoming of evil—which was the goal of the Patristic writings—is, in essence, a trans-individualist task. Holiness is a communal quest, and a theodicy with the goal of holiness cannot survive within the narrow confines of a solitary rationalistic thinker.⁸⁷ Surin even goes so far as to say that the state of philosophical theodicy post-Leibniz “must be reckoned to constitute a grave and even insurmountable obstacle” to a theodicy of conversion and holiness.⁸⁸

Surin’s approach can be used not only to critique the ahistorical elements of philosophical thought, but also philosophy’s tendency to reduce the complexities of the world into thought-experiments that are vastly improbable.⁸⁹ Once reduced, philosophers set out criteria to be met that have nothing whatsoever to do with either the real world or even theological abstraction, and end up in grave troubles of severe anthropocentrism, a myopic view of earth history, and an entrenched utilitarian approach to creation that has no relation to the God of love.

Let us take the article “Open Theism: does God risk or hope?” by James Rissler as a case-study.⁹⁰ It is a fairly standard discussion of the questions of providence, evil, and free will explored in relation to an open theist theology. Rissler rightly begins by pointing out that the essential logic of open theism is

⁸⁷ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 20-24.

⁸⁸ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 23.

⁸⁹ If a philosopher objects that the probability of a thought experiment is irrelevant because they are meant to reveal our attitudes, I would point out the studies that show that vastly improbable thought experiments, such as the classic “Trolley Car” problem, actually do not provide us with valid results because they do not elicit the same psychological processes as real life moral events. They often evoke humour or a sense of the absurd, which changes the decision-making processes. Christopher W. Bauman, A. Peter McGraw, Daniel M. Bartels, and Caleb Warren, “Revisiting External Validity: Concerns about Trolley Problems and Other Sacrificial Dilemmas in Moral Psychology,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 8:9 (September 2014): 536-554.

⁹⁰ James D. Rissler, “Open Theism: does God risk or hope?” *Religious Studies* 42: 63-74.

based on love; that freedom in the world is not an end in itself but a means and necessary grounding point for love. So far so good. Then comes:

Let us make the simplifying assumptions that God's sole purpose in creating was that we would freely enter into loving relationships with Him, and that the proportion of free creatures who enter into loving relationships with their Creator relative to those who do not is an appropriate measure of the degree to which God's purpose is achieved. I will call this the proportionality measure. Let us also arbitrarily assume that God's purpose for creation will be achieved if a simple majority of persons freely choose to love Him.⁹¹

And with that shift, with these self-admittedly arbitrary assumptions, we are quite suddenly in a world quite alien to the God of the Scriptures, or at least, of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus spoke of God being like the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep behind to chase after the lost one, or of disciples being like the treasure-hunter who joyfully sells all he possesses for the pearl of great price; of abandoned and scandalous risk-taking. One cannot imagine the father of the prodigal son considering his purposes in fatherhood fulfilled if a simple majority of his sons chose to love him. What of the divine care for the two sparrows, sold for a penny? Or the lilies of the field that God attires more splendidly than the great kings of old? Even if Rissler chose the number 99% instead of 50%, it still pictures God in entirely the wrong frame: as a calculating God trying to figure out if the bet of creation is worthwhile. Rissler's appraisal is not faithful to the open theist conception of God, and it starts going wrong when creation is only considered worthwhile if it meets certain outcomes in light of the risk of love.

Keep listening to Rissler, and one hears further snippets of the conversation: "Even if the long-term probability of any particular action having an overall beneficial or deleterious effect on His goal is very close to 0.5, the probability of particular actions having a positive impact in the short term might

⁹¹ Rissler, "Does God risk or hope?" 64.

well be significantly higher...”⁹² or “Eventually, as the end of time approaches, God will be able to increase the odds of the final proportionality measure being favourable...”⁹³ The reader is left wondering what this discussion could possibly have to do with the God of the Bible who constantly argued, bargained with, begged, rebuked, raged at, forgave, and redeemed his people. The colour and dimensions—the very life—of the rich God-world relationship are sucked away by the constraining confines of the philosophical laboratory. The laboratory becomes a mortuary. The irony, of course, becomes even more acute when (as with Rissler) the philosophers dissect and calculate at great length to try and show the reasonableness of the scandal of a God who undertakes the always-precarious project of love! This type of philosophical enquiry misses the point entirely.

*‘Wandering in Darkness’*⁹⁴

There are, however, philosophers who do enter the mysteries, who are at home amongst the paradoxes of the complexity of life, and who do not try to fit suffering into small logical boxes. One of these is Eleonore Stump, whose magisterial work *Wandering in Darkness* explores a Thomistic theodicy through the frame of four biblical narratives. Although her work only refers to normally functioning human adults, she establishes several important perspectives that help her to bridge the usual gap between philosophical and theological positions.

First, she insists on using narratives as the basis for her philosophical reasoning. She does this for two reasons: First, narratives include

⁹² Rissler, “Does God risk or hope?” 66.

⁹³ Rissler, “Does God risk or hope?” 66.

⁹⁴ I borrow this subtitle from Eleonore Stump’s *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010).

uncomfortable complexities and nuances which force the philosopher to engage with the three-dimensional full-colour complexities of the world. Second, the narratives include knowledge and situations which cannot be reduced to the sorts of simple propositions or just-so stories that analytical philosophers prefer.

A second merit of Stump's work is that it is wholehearted. If a proposition is soundly logical, meeting all the formal requirements of philosophy, but has the added effect of making the common person cringe at the cold ruthlessness of it, she rejects it. The use of the Holocaust is a good example. Where many will bandy about arguments with reference to the Holocaust, Stump writes:

Although it is vitally important for us to remember the Holocaust and to reflect deeply on it, taking it simply as one more example or counterexample in academic disputation on the problem of evil strikes me as unspeakably awful. It is enough for me that I am a member of the species that propagated this evil. Stricken awe in the face of it seems to me to be the only response bearable.⁹⁵

The refusal to treat human suffering as simply an interesting datum set for philosophical argument is one of the valuable aspects of Stump's work, and draws her work closer to the pastoral and practical concerns of theology.

There are two aspects of Stump's work that will be important for the argument I will later develop. The first is her exploration of Aquinas' definition of love.⁹⁶ The second is Stump's view of the world's stories composing fractal patterns of nested narratives, in such a way that each individual is the centre of their own story, but is also a contributor to the stories around them.⁹⁷ Both of these will help me formulate a view of God's work of redemption, based on love and focussed on the individual, but allowing for a broader perspective as well.

⁹⁵ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 16.

⁹⁶ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 85-107. See chapter 4, p. 153.

⁹⁷ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 219-222. See chapter 6, p. 286-295.

The limitations of Stump's work are fairly obvious: it is "limited to the suffering of unwilling, innocent, mentally fully functional adult human beings."⁹⁸ There is no case made for non-human animals, and the major centre of her argument—that suffering opens unique possibilities for a person to achieve his or her highest purpose of union with God—is not directly translatable to the wider natural world. Still, her work provides valuable foundational contributions which can be extended to the natural world, as will be explored in chapter 4 and 6.⁹⁹ While Stump's philosophical approach is a great deal closer to the type of project I am working on than the earlier analytical philosophers, it is still entirely philosophical. My project will include philosophy, but also draw from biblical studies and systematic theology. However, her wholehearted and narrational approach will shape my own approach when I draw on philosophical resources.

In conclusion, philosophical approaches have a great deal to offer to a theodicy. In particular, the property-consequence and developmental GHA's help support the "only way" argument. The world needs various types of regularities for free creaturely interaction, for the development of skills, and for the possibility of creaturely serving. An evolutionary process may be the only sort of process that brings about complex life while maintaining the value of creaturely freedom.¹⁰⁰ Another advantage of some philosophical approaches—van Inwagen, for example—is that they show clearly how different types of argument could be combined into compound arguments that are stronger than their individual components. Much more, however, is needed if we are to create a thick defence; a narrative that holds God and suffering together. Now we turn

⁹⁸ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 378.

⁹⁹ Faith Glavey Pawl at the University of Saint Louis is currently working on a dissertation focussed on extending Stump's work into the non-human animal realm, with a particular focus on baboons.

¹⁰⁰ See chapter 4 for a further exploration of the "only way" argument, p. 145-148.

to explore the available theological approaches to see what resources they offer.

Theological Positions

There are various theological positions that seek to account for evolutionary suffering. Some of them would fit well in the organisational grid of good-harm analyses used for the philosophical viewpoints above, but several of them cannot be easily reduced to those categories of balancing goods and harms. I will proceed, therefore, with a different organisational approach. I will first explore the strategies that seek to dismiss the problem as either non-existent or intractable. Then I will explore the theodicies that seek to redefine God in such a way that the problem no longer exists. Third, I will outline the strategies that seek to get God “off the hook” by denying, in one fashion or another, that the world really is God’s creation. Finally, I will look at the remaining theodicies which argue for various values and constitutive elements arising from evolutionary harms and explore them through the grid of different creational standpoints.¹⁰¹

It should be remembered as I proceed that the process of defining these arguments requires an element of reduction. Many of the arguments stand alongside others, and they are not usually proposed alone, as if one argument should be expected to hold the full weight of explanation for natural evil.

Dismissal of the Problem

There are some thinkers who, when confronted with the horrors of nature, simply shrug their shoulders, and fail to see the problem. Kenneth

¹⁰¹ For another survey of the theological positions, including many of those outlined below, see Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 3-39.

Miller, for example, raises the question of natural evil only to conclude “the brutality of life is in the eye of the beholder.”¹⁰² There is no ontological problem to be solved, only a perspective to be changed. Viewed from the right perspective nature’s most horrific products—from cordyceps and ichneumonidae to necrotizing bacteria—are all beautiful creatures, splendid in adaptation and complex in developmental strategies. The wilful destruction of one creature by another is simply the way it works. Nor are non-human animals responsible or culpable for their actions. As amoral agents, to ascribe evil to their actions is, as Holmes Rolston points out, a “category mistake.”¹⁰³ Therefore, there is no problem of natural evil to be solved, only a certain distaste to be overcome.

I agree that non-human creatures are either amoral or pre-moral, and that natural processes do not reflect rational moral choice, and therefore are not “evil” in the same sense as a murder or war would be. Still, this does not in itself excuse the question of why a good and all-loving God would create a world in which harms occur, nor why God would allow suffering and death to be intrinsic to the process of development. Even if creatures are amoral, God should still be expected to act in moral ways in respect of them. The vast disjunction between the Gospel message that the “meek shall inherit the earth” and the wild’s “law of club and fang”¹⁰⁴ raises many theological questions which

¹⁰² Kenneth Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 246.

¹⁰³ Holmes Rolston III, “Naturalizing and Systematizing Evil,” in *Is Nature Ever Evil? Religion, Science and Value*, ed. Willem B. Drees (London, Routledge, 2003), 67.

¹⁰⁴ The “law of club and fang” comes from Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* where the dog Buck learns that to survive in the north means to kill or be killed. Any show of weakness on the part of another was an opportunity to be taken advantage of for one’s own benefit. A human with a club was to be feared and respected; a human without one was to be mercilessly attacked. Jack London, *Call of the Wild* (London: Macmillan, 1903).

cannot be answered by a simple redefinition of evil.¹⁰⁵ Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett write “the tendency among theistic evolutionists to collapse the theodicy problem into natural process—to see violence, suffering, and death as merely natural and hence value-neutral—represents a failure of theological nerve. It is a sellout to naturalism and a loss to theism.”¹⁰⁶

Miller and Rolston do, however, raise an important question that makes an important distinction: are natural evils really evil or are they simply disvalues? One of the major dividing lines in the current debate over non-human animal suffering is over the question whether what has been termed “natural evil” is in fact evil in the sense of being contrary to the will of God, or even the result of a force opposing God, or whether it simply represents disvalues in an ambiguous world that is—nevertheless—God’s good creation. Christopher Southgate calls this a “key fault-line in theology’s response to Darwinism.”¹⁰⁷ Southgate, along with Arthur Peacocke, Daryl Domning and Monika Hellwig take the latter view that these harms are non-moral disvalues.¹⁰⁸ The distinction between these theologians and Miller above is that they still find the suffering of innocent animals to be theologically problematic, and so can speak of the “problem of evil” without considering the violence or death inherent in the evolutionary process to be itself evil. I align myself firmly in this camp that does not see predation or natural disasters as evil or as signs of a deeper evil at work in the world. It is, it seems, the only consistent way to view the natural

¹⁰⁵ The term “natural evil” is sometimes discarded in favour of “harms” or “disvalues” because of its innate moral connotations.

¹⁰⁶ Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 158.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Southgate, “Re-Reading Genesis, John, and Job: A Christian Response to Darwinism,” *Zygon* 46:2 (June 2011), 378.

¹⁰⁸ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 28-31; Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 222; Daryl Domning and Monika Hellwig, *Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in Light of Evolution* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 76.

world. Those who see the pre-human world as corrupted in some way are often unable to coherently describe the origin of this evil, or where in the non-human world we see this evil manifested. Is predation evil? Or death? Or entropy? If these things are evil, what is left that is good? And how can we defend anything as good when they are permeated, and often caused, by the so-called-evil? Without a clear answer, some simply assert a “mystery response.”

Mystery Response

Celia Deane-Drummond, who views the world as penetrated by a mysterious evil, dismisses the problem of evil by naming natural evil as creation’s “shadow sophia” and placing the debate in the dark realms of mystery. Arising out of Bulgakov’s Orthodox tradition, the notion of sophia (wisdom) and shadow sophia (anti-wisdom) stand as the cosmic goods and evils. Deane-Drummond follows an Augustinian definition of evil as *privatio boni*, the deprivation of good, and therefore shadow sophia is present as a possibility simply because true sophia exists in a world where it can be lost or resisted.¹⁰⁹ The shadow sophia is the chaos and non-being of creation, the source of death and opposition to God. Deane-Drummond writes that one of the advantages of the shadow sophia position is that “it resists too ready an explanation as to why [shadow sophia] exists.” In other words, we are not told why it is “inevitable that shadow sophia surfaces in creation in the way that is envisaged, human wisdom is confronted by its own limitations.”¹¹⁰ Deane-Drummond denies that this is “an easy escape into the idea of evil as mystery” and she insists that “the depth of evil and suffering in the world are ultimately

¹⁰⁹ Celia Deane-Drummond, “Shadow Sophia in Christological Perspective: The Evolution of Sin and the Redemption of Nature,” *Theology and Science* 6:1 (2008), 22.

¹¹⁰ Deane-Drummond, “Shadow Sophia,” 23.

beyond human understanding.”¹¹¹ If one accepts her caveat that it is not an “easy escape” into the concept of mystery, her conclusion still lands the theologian in a place where no more can be said because reasoning has reached its limits. To some extent this is a necessary admission,¹¹² but we cannot move to her conclusion of shadow-sophia too quickly because it lacks important nuance. When it comes to some of the developmental arguments, to draw a conclusion of mystery too quickly ends up overlooking very simple and persuasive arguments to the contrary. A good example would be the arguments about the necessity of pain for a flourishing life outlined above by Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. They show that pain is a protective element which keeps creatures from harm. If, instead, we concluded with Deane-Drummond that pain is the absence of a good, or that it is simply beyond human wisdom, we would miss the constructive elements of pain. In the end, evolutionary harms as shadow sophia may be the last step a theologian must take, but there are many paths to explore before we get there. Jumping to the end immediately sets the problem too quickly into the realm of intractable mystery, and misses accounting for the complex goods emerging out of complex harms.

As opposed to these two positions of Miller and Deane-Drummond, I maintain that evolutionary suffering *is* a theological problem about the nature of the God who would set up such an apparently brutal system, and that the problem is not immediately plunged into mystery. Rather, the natural sciences themselves along with various types of theological reflection can help us gain a better understanding of many varieties of natural disvalues.

¹¹¹ Deane-Drummond, “Shadow Sophia,” 23.

¹¹² Remember Southgate’s expression above that all theodicy “arises out of protest and ends in mystery.”

Radically Redefining God

The second set of theological strategies seek to radically redefine God in such a way that the problem of evil disappears. I call these “radical” redefinitions of God because, unlike later strategies we will see, these approaches have no issue with totally divesting God of attributes that have long been considered central to the divine character and make no effort to retain the values that were held by those attributes. The three strategies are to divest God of love, of power, and finally of activity.

The first strategy is to totally divest God of love. Wesley J. Wildman forcefully advances this thesis as the logical outcome of observation of the natural world and the exhaustion of other theological or philosophical options. For Wildman, a loving God who created a world with as much suffering as we now see, and who has not yet relieved it, would be guilty of gross neglect or incompetence. Instead of levelling such an accusation Wildman would rather see God as the source of all being—the ground of all existence—but not as particularly concerned about what form that existence takes. When Dawkins describes the universe as a place of blind, pitiless indifference, Wildman agrees and simply states: “God is not in the caring business.”¹¹³ This does not pose a difficulty for God’s existence—but it does pose a challenge for God’s alignment with any particular moral path. Wildman does not descend into utter nihilism though, because he also thinks that goodness and purpose can be found if humans look for it. “The divine particularity” he writes, “is expressed in the structured possibilities and interconnections of worldly existence; wanting and

¹¹³ Wesley J. Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty, Disconcerting Truth: Ultimate Reality and Suffering in Nature,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 282.

choosing is the human role.”¹¹⁴ God meets the righteous in hope and the unrighteous in purposelessness and despair.

As interesting as ground-of-being theism is, it cannot be a help to people who wish to maintain anything of the character or nature of traditional Christian theism. Wildman’s challenge of divine neglect is an important one, but his solution is inadmissible to those who wish to hold any form of Christian faith, because God’s love for creatures is intrinsic to that faith (see for example Psalm 100:5, 119:64, 136:1-26, 145:8; Isaiah 54:10; John 3:16; Romans 5:8, 8:35-39; Ephesians 2:4-5, 1 John 4:7-8, etc.).

The second option for radical divine re-definition is process theism, which divests God of power. In process thought, God cannot direct any events, nor can God unilaterally alter the world or its inhabitants in any way. The only activity available to God is to lure the agents of events by divine love into a preferred pathway. In addition, God is understood as evolving with the world, growing in understanding of the world as well as self-understanding throughout the ages. God does not have foreknowledge of any kind,¹¹⁵ but simply observes the world and has perfect knowledge of things present and all things past.

In one sense, process theism offers an elegant solution to the problem of evil. God, having given creation freedom to be,¹¹⁶ is powerless to take it along any other track than that which it chooses. Process theists such as David Griffin will extend this freedom not only to living creatures, but even to the

¹¹⁴ Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness,” 282.

¹¹⁵ No foreknowledge, rather than foresight which God can possess. God can predict, but not foreknow with perfect certainty. This conclusion is held by both process theists and free will theists. See William Hasker, “An Adequate God,” in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, eds. John B. Cobb Jr and Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2000), 218.

¹¹⁶ Although, it should be noted, in some process schemes, creation’s freedom is eternally inherent, rather than something granted by God.

simplest elements of matter such as quarks and electrons.¹¹⁷ Creation is free to explore various possibilities of being, including many that are against the divine will and end in harm, and God is powerless to stop those harms from occurring. Griffin frankly states “My solution dissolves the problem of evil by denying the doctrine of omnipotence fundamental to it.”¹¹⁸ Kenneth Surin challenges Griffin’s solution by pointing out that if we take the process description of God seriously it fails to actually provide a theodicy at all, since it “cannot legitimately claim to have reconciled the proposition ‘There is a God who is *omnipotent*, omniscient and benevolent’ with the proposition ‘Evil exists’.”¹¹⁹ Process theism “solves” the problem by redefining God in such a way that the problem does not arise in the first place.

Still, if we are to engage a process theodicy, it bears pointing out that a God who is essentially unable to bring about events or direct history in any effective way will not be able to bring about the eschatological re-creation of the world either. There is no guarantee left that good will triumph over evil, for the divine lure towards the good has (evidently) already failed many times. Process thinkers are often, troublingly, willing to concede this. But sacrificing the substance of hope for redemption ends up with a greater problem of evil, not a lesser one, since there is no clear end to evil. Evil simply exists, parasitic upon the good around it, threatening like a black hole to wipe out purpose and meaning, and even God is powerless before it.

¹¹⁷ David R. Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 105. All “actual entities” in process thought have some kind of experience and some kind of choice. Joseph Bracken, *Christianity and Process Thought: Spirituality for a Changing World* (Philadelphia and London: Templeton Foundation, 2006), 7.

¹¹⁸ Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos,” 105.

¹¹⁹ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 91.

Furthermore, as Surin notes, the process approach does little to give comfort or courage to the person who suffers. If we accept that God co-suffers with each creature, a key process approach, it gives little hope even to those creatures who can understand what divine co-suffering might mean.¹²⁰ “To the person in urgent need of succour, it would conceivably be just as efficacious to look to unicorns and centaurs for salvation.”¹²¹ Instead, the Christian theodicit looks to the cross, to the defeat of evil, and the incoming Kingdom. “What the process theist lacks” writes Surin, “is an eschatology, a resurrection-perspective, in which the almighty God on the cross of the powerless Nazarene is affirmed in faith to have inaugurated a radically new world by this very deed on the cross.”¹²² Without an eschatology of hope, no valid theodicy can exist.

The third strategy is to divest God of activity. If God is all-powerful and all-loving, but cannot use that power in the world in any way, God ends up with tied hands when it comes to rescuing creatures from harm. Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp claim that if God were to rescue a suffering subject from unnecessary harm even once, then God would be morally obliged to do so every time. For God to submit to that moral requirement and rescue creatures every time would undermine the ‘nomic regularity’ (Murray’s phrase) that is so important to the development of life. If God turned bullets into flowers when they were fired on living targets, or if God transformed stretches of road into feather duvets when people stumbled, the world would soon turn into a place where no real learning could take place, and thus rational and autonomous

¹²⁰ Kenneth Surin writes “The merely suffering God might perhaps provide a half-consolation for the person who finds herself drinking the cup of suffering to its dregs, but this God is fundamentally unable to transform and to heal the world, or, to put it in more theological terms, to ensure that his Kingdom will become a reality.” Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 91.

¹²¹ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 91.

¹²² Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 91-92.

beings could not develop.¹²³ Clayton and Knapp articulate the “Not-even-once” principle: that even one physical intervention would undermine either God’s morality or physical regularity. Clayton and Knapp allow for God influencing thoughts, even on a subconscious level (and thus, presumably with non-human animals as well), as long as the creature is not compelled to take action in response.¹²⁴ While Clayton and Knapp hold that God might possess the traditional attribute of omnipotence, hope for the future is sacrificed since the recreation of the world would certainly require more than mental enticement. Also, it raises the question whether the Incarnation would count as a violation of the “not-even-once” principle, and what implications that might have if it is. A longer discussion of divine action and the “not-even-once” principle will take place in chapter 4.¹²⁵

In the end none of the radical re-definitions of God satisfy. Either they do not even remotely resemble the Christ-like God portrayed in the Bible, or they so deeply undermine the basic attributes of God that they sacrifice the future hope of redemption as well. God, in these definitions, may be able to evade accusation of the problem of evil, but the emaciated God left over is not the kind of God who can be trusted to “make all things well.” Let us keep looking.

Fall Scenarios, Satanic and Otherwise

A surprisingly popular contemporary option for those who wish to account for nature’s brutality comes from a long theological tradition of the fall. There

¹²³ Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47-48. See also Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, “Divine Action and the ‘Argument from Neglect’,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S. J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 179-194.

¹²⁴ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 62.

¹²⁵ See chapter 4, p. 161-163.

are two basic categories: event-based fall theories, which blame natural evil on sinful action, whether that be satanic or human, and mysterious fallenness theories, where the origin and even the content of evil is unknown or shrouded in mystery.

Of event-based fall theories, the most important is the theory that blames natural evil on the angelic fall and the consequent corruption of the world. The fall of Satan and the angels as responsible for the human fall, and evil therefore present in God's good creation before a human fall, was a notion developed by Augustine and was standard belief in western Christianity until the Reformation.¹²⁶ Since Darwin, several thinkers have picked it up as a possible solution to pre-human natural evil, including C. S. Lewis, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Michael Lloyd, Stephen Webb, and Gregory Boyd.¹²⁷

The issues with this position are manifold. First, there is no biblical evidence for a satanic fall corrupting the world. Despite Augustine's exegesis, no modern biblical scholar takes this route because a fall, particularly a satanic fall, is simply not present in the Genesis narrative.¹²⁸ Second, despite its presence in the tradition, the ancient thinkers who developed this position did not know that many of these processes and harms actually give rise to great value. Would we then be forced to honour the fallen angels for the fleet-footedness of the deer or the co-ordination and strength of the orca? Satan

¹²⁶ For Augustine's account of fallen angels, see *The City of God*, books 10 and 11, and throughout *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*.

¹²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940, 1996), 138; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 2:274; Michael Lloyd, "Are Animals Fallen?" in *Animals on the Agenda*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (London: SCM, 1998), 147-160; Gregory A. Boyd, "Evolution as Cosmic Warfare: A Biblical Perspective on Satan and 'Natural Evil'," in *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science*, ed. Thomas Oord (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 125-145; Stephen H. Webb, *The Dome of Eden: A New Solution to the Problem of Creation and Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 139-52; Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

¹²⁸ The account of the fall in Genesis will be explored at greater length in chapter 3.

would end up being the (possibly unintentional) originator of the diversity generated by cellular mutation and all the speciation events arising from predation or natural disasters.¹²⁹ Finally, this position contradicts the continual biblical refrain that God created the world good. The goodness of creation is affirmed throughout the process of creation, and at the end of the first account of creation when all the creatures are present.¹³⁰ Therefore, there is no possibility that God created the universe, and then between that event and the development of animals and humans, the cosmos was corrupted. In its totality, even in its more troublesome elements, the natural world in all its complexity brings honour and glory to God.¹³¹

A related event-based strategy to the satanic fall is that of blaming disvalues in the non-human world on the effects of human sin. Very few thinkers still adopt this move, given the chronological difficulties posed by proposing that human sin could affect processes in place millions of years before there were humans. But a version of this argument is still advanced by William Dembski.¹³² Instead of blaming Satan for the corruption of the evolutionary world, he wraps the blame back around on human sin by saying the effects of the fall were retroactively applied at the beginning of time on the created world. Just as—it is sometimes said—the saints before Jesus' time were saved through Jesus' saving work on the cross in light of God's foreknowledge of that saving work, so

¹²⁹ Cf. Southgate "Whatever processes science is able to understand as contributing to the evolution of complexity... must be presumed to be the gift of God in creation... The tectonic movement that caused the Indian Ocean tsunami is an example of those processes that have made the Earth the lovely place that it is, and should not be regarded as in any way demonic." *Groaning of Creation*, 34.

¹³⁰ Genesis 1:31.

¹³¹ See Psalm 104, Job 38-41. See also the whole of chapter 3.

¹³² William Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2009).

too the effects of sin were applied to the world in God's foreknowledge of mankind's fall.

Not only is Dembski's theory biblically inadmissible—as will be demonstrated in chapter 3—but he also utterly fails to convince the reader that God is in fact good. The God who would inflict untold suffering on billions of non-human animals over millions of years without any good emerging out of it for the creatures themselves (and only a very indirect benefit for humans¹³³) is morally repulsive. The same is true of Dembski's thoroughgoing anthropocentric focus. Southgate points out "Dembski's theodicy is marked by an anthropocentrism that is breathtaking to anyone who has followed contemporary debates in ecotheology. His only concern is with humans and human sin."¹³⁴ God allows the pointless suffering of billions of individuals just to make a point. This will not constitute an adequate theodicy.

David Clough makes a unique contribution to event-based fall theories by arguing that some particular disvalues, such as predator/prey relationships, are actually forms of sinful rebellion amongst non-human animals.¹³⁵ Clough amasses evidence that in the Hebrew Bible and in law courts almost up to the present day, non-human animals were regularly treated as responsible and therefore subject to the same consequences humans would receive for sinful action: stoning for violence toward, or sexual relations with, people (Lev 15-16), not fasting during times of repentance (Jonah 3), or death for touching Mt. Sinai during a theophany (Exodus 19).¹³⁶ Interestingly, Clough does not assume that

¹³³ Dembski argues that the benefit granted to humans is that the corruption of the world teaches them of their own need for salvation.

¹³⁴ Christopher Southgate, "Review of *The End of Christianity* by William A. Dembski," *Reviews in Science and Religion* 60 (November 2012), 43.

¹³⁵ Clough, *On Animals*, 119-127.

¹³⁶ Clough, *On Animals*, 109-112.

an understanding of God's moral requirement is necessary for sin.¹³⁷ His primary scientific case study concerns a family of cannibalistic chimpanzees. Are their actions right or wrong, sinful or morally neutral, when they slaughter and eat each other's young? Clough argues convincingly that:

We might judge the ability of chimpanzees to make considered choices about their actions to be closer to a human child than to a human adult, but we do not believe that children go from automata to responsible subjects at a particular age and so this judgment of degree is not a reason for considering chimpanzees outside the boundary of sinful action.¹³⁸

However, it is a red herring to use a case study of the most intelligent non-human animal to argue that sin might manifest itself as violence beyond the boundaries of humanity. Clough's main argument is that the existence of violence in general is a result of non-human action against the will of God. While there may indeed be proto-moral violence amongst the highest of sentient non-human animals, it would be impossible to attribute any sort of moral rebellion amongst the creatures extant when predation first occurred, estimated to be in the early Cambrian period.¹³⁹ And while there is a biblical tradition of punishing non-human animals for their actions, such as stoning an ox for goring a human, this applies only to the most intelligent orders of life. There is no such provision in the law codes for locusts, for example. Nor does Clough's argument mention the places where God seems only too happy to provide a violent creation with the sustenance it needs (Psalm 104:21-27; Job 39:30). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Clough draws primarily from sources (such as the biblical story of the Garden and medieval law cases) that had no

¹³⁷ Clough, *On Animals*, 116-117.

¹³⁸ Clough, *On Animals*, 118.

¹³⁹ Simon Conway Morris, *The Crucible of Creation: The Burgess Shale and the Rise of Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 160; Simon Conway Morris and Stefan Bengtson, "Cambrian Predators: Possible Evidence from Boreholes," *Journal of Paleontology* 68:1 (January 1994): 1-23; M.Y. Zhu, et al. "Direct evidence for predation on trilobites in the Cambrian," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 271:5 (August 2004): S277-S289.

understanding of evolution. In reference to biblical texts, Clough argues that “the most obvious reading of these texts concerning the [*sic*] God’s will for peace and harmony between creatures is that relationships of predation where the life of one creature is sustained only at the expense of the lives of others are not original or final indications of God’s creative and redemptive will.”¹⁴⁰ Biblically, Clough’s argument may seem sound, but it cannot be held together with evolution, a point Clough himself acknowledges.¹⁴¹

Clough eventually argues that the clearest evidence that creatures have turned from God and are mired in sin is that according to Colossians 1:20 Jesus came to reconcile “all things.”¹⁴² In chapter 6, I will make an attempt to build a picture of non-human creaturely reconciliation that does not involve sin, but for now, let it suffice to say that in Colossians 1:20 the “all things” referred to is defined as all things “whether on earth or in heaven.” If the line of Clough’s logic is that because all things on earth need to be reconciled to God, all things on earth are mired in sin, would he say the same about all heavenly things? Is there sin in heaven? If not, then we must assume that there is some way to be reconciled to God through Christ that does not involve sin.¹⁴³

The second category of fallenness is mysterious fallenness. These theories do not clearly state either the origin or effect of evil in the world. Nicola Hoggard Creegan, for example, does not identify natural evil with biological selfishness,¹⁴⁴ but thinks it might have something to do with the second law of

¹⁴⁰ Clough, *On Animals*, 121.

¹⁴¹ Clough, *On Animals*, 122.

¹⁴² Clough, *On Animals*, 126.

¹⁴³ See chapter 6, “The Place of the Christ Event,” p. 305.

¹⁴⁴ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 75.

thermodynamics,¹⁴⁵ and perhaps with predation.¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere, in complete contradiction, she says that evil is not necessarily to be identified with “the earthquake and the tsunami and the eating of one animal by the other and natural disasters.”¹⁴⁷ There is no clear way to distinguish the good from the evil in her work, nothing she can point to (apart from moral evil) and say “this is evil.” Instead, her work is punctuated with vague fideist statements such as “I believe there is something opposed to God”¹⁴⁸ or “I am convinced of the reality of this [evil] something and its subtle interplay with life at all levels,”¹⁴⁹ though not being able to point to any concrete evidence, while also freely mixing natural and moral categories of evil.¹⁵⁰ The result is a theological muddle in which anything aesthetically unappealing becomes “evil” and where the very basis of her argument—drawing on the parable of the wheat and tares—is actually overlooked.¹⁵¹ In her argument, the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13) is compared to the way that good and evil are mixed in the natural world. However, in the parable, it is not the *identification* of tares that is the problem (the wheat having already borne grain),¹⁵² but the impossibility of uprooting one without the other as the result of their intertwining roots.¹⁵³ Hoggard Creegan’s

¹⁴⁵ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 77.

¹⁴⁶ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 77.

¹⁴⁷ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 84.

¹⁴⁸ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 77.

¹⁴⁹ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 78.

¹⁵⁰ She opposes Neil Messer’s borrowed notion of “nothingness” accounting for the evil in the created world as not a sufficient explanation for the Holocaust or Jesus’s temptation from demons, despite the fact that Messer uses these to explain natural evil, and not all moral evil. Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 76.

¹⁵¹ The muddle in Hoggard Creegan’s categorisation is perhaps most clearly seen in her identification of the second law of thermodynamics as an element of evil. Without it, there would be no light dispersion, no heat dispersion... in short, there would be no chance for life and no history of creation at all.

¹⁵² No gardener could doubt this.

¹⁵³ See Matthew 13:24-30.

arguments, however, do not even allow for a helpful identification of good and evil. Furthermore, the origin of the tares is clearly stated as “an enemy” in the parable, a concept that Hoggard Creegan sometimes accepts and sometimes challenges.¹⁵⁴ Also, as we will see in chapter 3, there is little scriptural support for the idea that nature has been corrupted from an outside force, or that the earth ever was or is (apart from a brief period in the primordial history narratives, recounted in Genesis 3-8) corrupted by evil independently of direct human action.

Where Hoggard Creegan views evil as having real ontological substance, others such as Deane-Drummond and Neil Messer argue that the world is pervaded by a mysterious evil which is anti-being. Deane-Drummond, as seen above, argues that evil is the shadow of creation, the necessary counterpart to light. Neil Messer argues that the created world is constantly in conflict with “nothingness”—a concept borrowed from Barth. The nothingness (*das Nichtige*) “is what God rejected, and *did not will*, in creating everything that exists.”¹⁵⁵ To do this, Messer draws from two of Barth’s concepts: that of ‘nothingness’ which threatens the creation, and Barth’s view of history beginning with the fall, and therefore placing the ‘golden age’ of goodness beyond any history we can investigate. Critiques of Messer, raised by Southgate, include whether he really is as faithful to Barths ideas as he claims, and whether or not God can really be the sovereign Creator if God was unable to expunge this nothingness which is contrary to God’s will.¹⁵⁶ I am inclined to agree with Southgate’s critiques, but would also point out the difficulty of advocating that

¹⁵⁴ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 77, 133, 148-149.

¹⁵⁵ Messer, “Natural evil after Darwin,” 149.

¹⁵⁶ Southgate, “Re-Reading Genesis, John, and Job,” 379-382.

the world which God claims is “very good” in Genesis 1:31, was in fact deeply corrupted before the process of development ever began.

Issues concerning a fall of the natural world will be explored at greater length in chapter 3 since it is such a pervasive theme in theodicy literature. But there are plenty of other strategies that do not rely on either a radical redefinition of God’s activity or essence and that do not invoke a fall scenario either. Let us explore some of these other paths.

Redefining God’s Attributes and Actions

Rather than completely redefining God in the radical ways described above there are attempts to redefine divine attributes, or limit God’s actions, in more moderate and subtle ways. These strategies do not deny God’s omnipotence, omnibenevolence, or omniscience, but they do redefine these traits in ways that are more amenable to the problem of evil. A primary example of this sort of approach is exemplified by kenotic theology.

Kenotic approaches generally do not deny God’s power, knowledge, or ability to act in the world. Rather, they argue that, by merit of God’s love, or God’s interest in creaturely freedom, God voluntarily self-limits the expression of these attributes.¹⁵⁷

The idea of kenosis is drawn from the first part of the great Christ hymn in Philippians 2:5-7

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
 who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
 but emptied himself [ἐκένωσεν],

¹⁵⁷ A longer discussion of kenosis in relation to divine action will take place in chapter 4, p. 171-204.

taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.¹⁵⁸

The Christ who emptied himself in the Incarnation stands as the central revelation of divine being. If Christ emptied himself, then self-emptying must be a part of God's nature, and as such would characterise God's actions in spheres other than the Incarnation. John Polkinghorne sets out four different types of kenosis in his contribution to *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*.¹⁵⁹ The four types are kenosis of omnipotence, kenosis of simple eternity, kenosis of omniscience, and kenosis of causal status.¹⁶⁰

By the kenosis of omnipotence, God allows creation to be something truly other than God. Creation is free to be itself, and to have independence from divine determination. Therefore, states of affairs may arise in the world which are not according to the divine will, leading to the emergence of various types of evil. God is totally free and powerful in that God has no external impositions that limit the expression of power (unlike process theology), but God can and does self-limit the active expression of power in order not to overwhelm or coerce the creaturely other, and to allow it space to be itself.¹⁶¹

Kenosis of simple eternity is God's giving up of simple existence outside of time. Polkinghorne points out that "since Augustine, theologians have understood the created nature of time, so that the universe came in to being *cum tempore*, not *in tempore*."¹⁶² God chooses to know the world in the temporal terms that it is limited to: the successive slip of moments from future to present to past. Kenosis of simple eternity allows God to learn from and

¹⁵⁸ Philippians 2:5-7, NRSV.

¹⁵⁹ John Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 102-105.

¹⁶⁰ A further development of these themes is explored in chapter 4.

¹⁶¹ Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," 95-96.

¹⁶² Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," 102.

respond to the world since God experiences time in similar successive ways as we do.

If God has given up knowledge of the simple future, the definition of what is included in God's omniscience changes. Instead of having all knowledge, held from one eternal vantage point, the future is not something which is conceived as possible to be logically known. If omniscience is knowing everything that can logically be known, the future is not included. In kenotic thought, God has full knowledge of the past and present, and so has the best possible vantage point for knowing what is likely to happen in the future, without knowing exact details of what will unfold.

Finally, Polkinghorne suggests the kenosis of causal status, which he defines as the belief that "*the Creator's kenotic love includes allowing divine special providence to act as a cause among causes.*"¹⁶³ As a cause amongst causes, God is not the ground of all causes, but humbly shares power with creation and even enters into the creation as an agent, most notably in the Incarnation.¹⁶⁴ Polkinghorne suggests that God may act along side other causes by inputting energy or information, but does not expand on the discussion.¹⁶⁵

Kenotic theology offers a promising family of solutions to the problem of evil: that God could not create others in free relationship without their having independence.¹⁶⁶ Once the decision to make a free creation was chosen, the possibility of those creatures acting apart from divine purposes was also

¹⁶³ Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," 104. Italics original.

¹⁶⁴ See the discussion of God as a cause amongst causes in chapter 5.

¹⁶⁵ Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," 105.

¹⁶⁶ Kenotic theodicies have been offered, in various forms, by Jürgen Moltmann, Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Denis Edwards, Paul Fiddes, and Keith Ward amongst others. See essays in the volume edited by John Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*.

created (this, therefore, is a property-consequence GHA). The world displays harms that are not in themselves according to divine purpose, but which are the inescapable result of a world of free beings. Yet, unlike process theism or Clayton and Knapp's approach, kenotic theology does not say that God's power and expression are limited in identical ways, in all circumstances, or at all times. When the purposes for which they are now limited are fulfilled, the expression of God's power can and will be displayed differently. John Polkinghorne calls this the denial of the kenosis of novelty.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, future hope for eschatological renewal and salvation are not ultimately at risk in the way they are with the radical redefinitions of the being of God explored above.

Still, for all its strengths, kenosis does not explain why God does not intervene in cases of extreme suffering or gratuitous evil. Voluntary self-limitation could conceivably be voluntarily self-renounced for these extreme situations. Thomas Oord is particularly strong on this point, arguing: "A God who voluntarily chooses to refrain from controlling others remains culpable for failing to prevent genuine evils. A voluntarily self-limited God should at least occasionally become un-self-limited, in the name of love, to prevent the suffering and pain that victims of genuine evil experience."¹⁶⁸ Oord's solution is to propose "essential kenosis," which proposes that God's kenosis is so complete that God could not intervene to prevent suffering. In this aspect, Oord's theology is very close, if not identical, to process theism's claim that God is powerless to prevent evil.

Equally, kenotic theology has come under critique for misrepresenting the nature of divine relationship to the world. Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett

¹⁶⁷ Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," 105.

¹⁶⁸ Thomas J. Oord, "An Open Theology Doctrine of Creation and Solution to the Problem of Evil," *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science*, ed. Thomas J. Oord (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 49. See also the discussion of gratuitous evil in chapter 4.

have, in particular, have levelled the critique that a kenotic argument “presupposes a conflict between divine power and creature power; whereas the classic Christian view, we contend, emphasizes that God’s power empowers and thereby liberates God’s creatures.”¹⁶⁹ Instead of divine power limiting or diminishing creaturely power, God’s power actually creates the freedom to make creaturely power possible.¹⁷⁰ If a kenotic approach gives a loose rein to natural selection (which, in turn, privileges the ruthless and strong), Peters and Hewlett ask, “What could a doctrine of the self-limitation of God in favor of natural selection mean other than to give theological blessing to the strong to dominate, if not destroy, the weak?”¹⁷¹ Finally, while kenosis may explain the origin of suffering, it does not—by itself—offer hope to the individual who suffers. There is no redemption or recapitulation in kenotic theology itself.¹⁷² While kenotic theology will form an important part of my approach to theodicy, it does not stand alone, as I will develop a strong theology of redemption. The next section will also explore theological options that focus more closely on the individual sufferer and the possible benefits brought to them by the evolutionary process.

The Value of Suffering: Bio-Centric Approaches

If individual creatures are to suffer because of evolution, what goods do they gain themselves through the harms of evolutionary development? In one sense, each new creature born benefits from the long line of those who suffered

¹⁶⁹ Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 143.

¹⁷⁰ Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 143.

¹⁷¹ Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 143.

¹⁷² Thus Peters and Hewlett conclude “The doctrine of God’s self-limitation on behalf of evolution would leave us with a Christian faith without hope.” Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 143.

before them. Rolston points out, as we saw earlier, that the “cougar’s fang has carved the limbs of the fleet-footed deer.”¹⁷³ The pains of the evolutionary process produce glorious beauty, skill, and power on the part of the cougar and the deer. These goods are experienced by many of the creatures in their process of selving.

Yet something more than mere development is present in the evolutionary process: freedom.¹⁷⁴ If creatures are to be free, then the biological paths toward some of the desired values will be limited. Robin Attfield, using a property-consequence strategy, shows how biological values—such as organisms with quick neural capacities and fleet-footedness—could only have developed independently in predator-prey relationships.¹⁷⁵ Attfield admits that in a totally different created order these skills might have been implanted directly by divine action, thus diminishing the need for violence, yet he asserts that no other non-interventionist system would provide the skills and attributes we value.¹⁷⁶ Other theologians, such as Russell, Murphy, Southgate, Peacocke, Alexander, and Polkinghorne, have advanced similar arguments.¹⁷⁷ By claiming there is no other way in which God could have brought about these values, theologians argue that it is reasonable to assume that although every possibility of creation was available to God’s divine power—with regard to

¹⁷³ Rolston, *Science and Religion*, 134.

¹⁷⁴ A great deal more on the nature of creaturely freedom is found in chapter 4.

¹⁷⁵ Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, 129.

¹⁷⁶ Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, 129.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Robert John Russell, “Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenges to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy,” 123; Nancey Murphy, “Science and the Problem of Evil: Suffering as a By-Product of a Finely Turned Cosmos,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S. J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 135-136; Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 16; Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures, 1978* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 166; Denis Alexander, *Evolution or Creation: Do we have to choose?* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008), 279-280; John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God’s Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989, 2005), 77.

dimensions, universal constants, attributes of matter, etc.—God still had to create the universe within relatively constrained limits (including the possibility of suffering) if God desired physical life, and in particular, sentient life. Arthur Peacocke sums up this type of argument when he writes:

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 the coming to be of the fecund variety of living organisms whose existence the Creator delights in.¹⁷⁸

Robert Russell surveyed the research assessing the possibilities in determining the cosmological constants if the universe was to be fine-tuned for life, and concluded that “God had little choice.”¹⁷⁹ John Barrow has also outlined Gerald Whitrow’s investigation of the possibility of life in the universe with different time and space dimensions, and concluded that the universe had to be exactly as it is to sustain complex life. Barrow writes “the alternatives are too simple, too unstable, or too unpredictable for complex observers to evolve and persist within them. As a result we should not be surprised to find ourselves living in three spacious dimensions subject to the ravages of a single time. There is no alternative.”¹⁸⁰ If there was no alternative for physical, complex beings to a world where physical values are mixed with disvalues, and the possibility of life is mixed with the possibility of suffering, then God cannot be blamed for creating the world with the physical constants and properties that it has. Even creation *ex nihilo* is subject to logical constraints.

¹⁷⁸ Arthur Peacocke, “The Cost of a New Life,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 37.

¹⁷⁹ Russell draws particularly on the work of John Leslie, *Universes* (New York: Routledge, 1989) and Max Tegmark, “Is ‘the theory of everything’ merely the ultimate ensemble theory?” *Annals of Physics* 270 (1998): 1-51. Robert Russell, “Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenges to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy,” 126-28.

¹⁸⁰ John D. Barrow, *The Constants of Nature: The Numbers that Encode the Deepest Secrets of the Universe* (London: Random House, 2002), 223-224.

If God has indeed created a world that creates itself through evolution, then creatures really do have some autonomy in choosing their own methods of survival. This is not to say that the choices are necessarily rational, but the choices made are innovative, or self-generated.¹⁸¹ The outworking of processes brings forth varied and novel survival strategies, and God has given them the freedom to do so. John Polkinghorne has called this the “free process defence.” He explains:

In his great act of creation I believe that God allows the physical world to be itself, not in Manichaeian opposition to him, but in that independence which is Love’s gift of freedom to the one beloved. That world is endowed in its fundamental constitution with an anthropic potentiality which makes it capable of fruitful evolution. The exploration and realization of that potentiality is achieved by the universe through the continual interplay of chance and necessity within its unfolding process.¹⁸²

“Love’s gift of freedom” is given to the world with a potentiality for fruitfulness which the creation explores in an ongoing way. The gift of freedom is kenotic in so far as God surrenders the ability to determine the outcome of all things. Free process is not a freedom which denies God’s essential ability to act, as Oord or the process theists argue above, but a “letting-be” that is essential to the nature of love. Peters and Hewlett define the freedom of continuing creation as “the abiding divine activity of continuing to provide the world with an open future.”¹⁸³ Ruth Page borrows the term *Gelassenheit* (active “Letting-be”) from Heidegger to make the same point. *Gelassenheit...*

¹⁸¹ Celia Deane-Drummond might say that they reflect natural wisdom, rather than human wisdom. *Wonder and Wisdom: Conversations in Science, Spirituality and Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), 66-70. Equally, it is increasingly being shown that attributes and skills that have long been considered rational—and therefore uniquely human—such as educability, language, tool-use, number games, and self-consciousness, also exist to varying degrees in non-human animals. Clough, *On Animals*, 72-73. Cf. Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man* (New York: Routledge, 1978), 265-272.

¹⁸² Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence*, 77.

¹⁸³ Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 161.

...is a valuable way to understand God in creation, for it is more creative and supportive than mere permission, but not determining in the way that causation is normally understood. It therefore expresses freedom without loss of power on the part of the one releasing, and a consequent freedom to experiment and explore for those let be.¹⁸⁴

To let creatures explore their own potentiality of being is not weakness, or neglect, but the necessary starting point for the expression of divine love.¹⁸⁵

Equally, creatures could not be given true freedom to develop valuable attributes without also being given the freedom to develop harmful attributes.

Yet, there is a strong objection: does God's letting be in instances of horrific evil not undermine all the good of God's *Gelassenheit*? When freedom turns to violence, and self-expression victimises the innocent, is not a loving God allowing the whole show to go too far? Many have argued that this is the case.¹⁸⁶ But Page and others have responded that the letting-be of creation must also be paired closely with God's being-with creation. *Mitsein* is another Heideggerian term which Page adopts to express this "pansyntheism."¹⁸⁷ God not only lets creation be, but is also intimately present with creation in its brokenness, its suffering, and also in its healing. There is no "cost" of evolutionary development that God does not also "pay," and no creature is left to suffer alone. Whether or not this is of comfort to the non-human animals themselves is debatable,¹⁸⁸ but it does imply that God has taken full responsibility for the sufferings which God has also allowed, and it keeps us

¹⁸⁴ Ruth Page, *God and the Web of Creation* (London: SCM, 1996), 7.

¹⁸⁵ For John Haught, the "letting-be" of creation is linked with God's self-restraint or kenosis. Cf. John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 97.

¹⁸⁶ William Rowe, Richard Dawkins and Wesley Wildman are just a few who have come to this conclusion. William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16:4 (October 1979): 335-341; Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 154-155; Wesley J. Wildman, "Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty," 277-278.

¹⁸⁷ Page, *Web of Creation*, 40-43.

¹⁸⁸ Southgate makes an "anthropomorphic guess" that God's co-suffering may "at some deep level take away the aloneness of the suffering creature's experience." See Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 54ff.

from imagining God as one who sacrifices others without regard for God's own plans and purposes to be benefited. Niels Gregersen and Christopher Southgate in particular go on to stress that it is in the cross of Christ that God most clearly takes the responsibility of evolutionary suffering.¹⁸⁹ Arthur Peacocke also tentatively suggests that God's co-suffering with creatures may—in itself—have creative potential:

God, we find ourselves having to conjecture, 'suffers' the natural evils of the world along with ourselves because—we can but tentatively suggest at this stage—God purposes *inter alia* to bring about a greater good thereby, namely, the kingdom of living organic creatures, delighting their Creator, and even free-willing, loving persons who have the possibility of communion with God and with each other. Indeed, the creation may in one sense be said to exist *through* suffering: for suffering is recognized to have creative power when imbued with love.¹⁹⁰

Just as childbirth is suffering with creative purpose, the co-suffering of God may, Peacocke suggests, have some creative affect beyond the comfort of co-presence. How this might be the case, however, is not spelled out by Peacocke.

The free process defence and the co-suffering arguments are powerful together, but they leave out one important aspect: What is the final fate of animals who die?

*Redemption Approaches*¹⁹¹

Many of the solutions explored so far have focussed on the beginning: how God had to set up the universe in such a way that suffering would ensue in

¹⁸⁹ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 76. Niels Henrik Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *dialog* 40:3 (Fall 2001), 192-207. God's co-suffering in Christ is also emphasised by Arthur Peacocke, Ruth Page, Jürgen Moltmann, Robert Capon, W. H. Vanstone, John Polkinghorne and others, though not all of them advance this thought with specific reference to the non-human creation. Cf. Arthur Peacocke, *Paths from Science Towards God* (Oxford: Oneworld: 2001), 85-88; Peacocke, "Cost of a New Life," 37-42.

¹⁹⁰ Peacocke, "Cost of a New Life," 38. Italics original.

¹⁹¹ See also the further development of the theme of redemption in chapter 6.

order to bring the glories of the present. There is another realm of theological approach that begins instead with the future, with the hope that present sufferings will bring about, or be solved by, future harmonies.

Some redemption approaches are this-worldly, that is, they look to how the suffering individual finds redemption either in the midst of its own suffering, or in how its suffering will contribute to lives beyond its own, in ecological or historical senses. Ruth Page and Holmes Rolston defend these positions, which will be explored in much greater detail in chapter 6.¹⁹² Other theologians look beyond the grave to find redemption for the suffering creation. To these we now turn.

The question of whether or not non-human animals have an existence beyond death is one that has long been speculated on by theologians. Most of the early theologians, wedded as they were to certain neo-Platonic views of the world, did not think so, usually citing the lack of a rational soul in non-human beings.¹⁹³ As the rational soul was the part of humanity that had an ability to endure beyond death, non-human animals simply passed away without remainder. Others, however, were not so sure. John Wesley preached his suggestion that in the resurrection:

The whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigour, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they ever enjoyed... as a recompense for what they once suffered, while under the “bondage of corruption,” when God has “renewed the face of the earth,” and their corruptible body has put on incorruption, they shall enjoy happiness suited to their state, without alloy, without interruption, and without end.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Page, *Web of Creation*, 63; Holmes Rolston III, “Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?” *Zygon* 29:2 (June 1994): 205-229.

¹⁹³ Paul J. Griffiths, “What Remains in the Resurrection? A (Broadly) Thomist Argument for the Presence of Nonrational Animals in Heaven” (Paper presented at Blackfriars, Cambridge, 31 January 2013).

¹⁹⁴ John Wesley, “The General Deliverance (Sermon 60),” The Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-60-the-general-deliverance/> (accessed 26 February 2013).

In Wesley's mind, God's redemption would be extended to all life, which would all also be perfected. It is interesting to note that Wesley does not think that animals will be restored to what he thought was their pre-fallen state, but that their eschatological being would be "to a far higher degree" than any earthly reality. He even suggests at one place that their intelligence would increase to the present human level, just as human intelligence would reach that of the angels.

Contemporary theologians also often defend the resurrection of non-human animals.¹⁹⁵ Some do so anthropocentrically, such as Paul Griffiths, who thinks that non-human animals will only be included in the resurrection because they are necessary for human delight to be made complete.¹⁹⁶ John Polkinghorne argues that only tokens of the different types of species are needed to complete heaven, but not every living creature. Where John Wesley argued that the individuals would be raised in recompense for their suffering, Polkinghorne is only concerned with a representation of species. That representation would necessarily be either for human benefit or for God's benefit, but either way the actual case of the individual creatures who suffered is ignored. Polkinghorne makes one exception in regard to animals that have had particular significance to humans, such as pets. Polkinghorne speculates that they "could be thought to have acquired enhanced individual states through their interactions with humans"¹⁹⁷ and thus be included in the resurrection in more numbers than needed for mere representation. In short, there will be many dogs, and few dinosaurs.

¹⁹⁵ Including but not limited to the thinkers listed below as well as Keith Ward, Jürgen Moltmann, Ted Peters, Robert Russell, and Denis Edwards.

¹⁹⁶ Griffiths, "What Remains?" (31 January 2013).

¹⁹⁷ John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 123.

Other contemporary theologians are more concerned about the fate of individual non-human animals themselves, regardless of their interaction with human beings. Jay McDaniel and Christopher Southgate in particular are convinced of the resurrection of members of the non-human creation. McDaniel delineates four different types of redemption, only two of which concern us here: redemption as the contribution to a life beyond one's own, and redemption as a transformation of being.¹⁹⁸ The first type of redemption sees individuals as contributing to the life and experience of God, and thus their lives are redeemed in meaning, though with little advantage to the creature itself. John Haught proposes this sort of "objective immortality" where creatures continue to 'exist' in "a rock-solid registry that prevents the erasure of all facts."¹⁹⁹ The second redemption sees the creature—in McDaniel's example, a pelican chick—transformed into a higher state of affairs. The chick would find itself in "pelican heaven;" a place of ultimate satisfaction of its needs and desires. Yet McDaniel does not envision this resurrection to be eternal. "The hope is not necessarily that all living beings live forever as subjects in their own right; rather, it is that they live until they enjoy a fulfillment of their needs as creatures."²⁰⁰ Once the individual has found fulfilment and recompense for their suffering, they can pass out of existence without a problem. Compensation for the lack of earthly fulfilment is the central tenet of McDaniel's redemption.

Southgate advocates redemption in several more ways.²⁰¹ While he does hold that resurrection for the suffering individual who has not experienced flourishing is important as compensation, he also grounds non-human

¹⁹⁸ Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 42.

¹⁹⁹ John Haught, *Deeper than Darwin* (Cambridge: Westview, 2003), 152.

²⁰⁰ McDaniel, *God and Pelicans*, 45-46.

²⁰¹ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 82.

redemption as part of the full work of Christ. Not only do biblical passages such as Isaiah 11 and Romans 8 hint at the whole creation being present in the new life, but humans themselves are always understood in their relationship to creation. Full redemption would require the fulfilment of all those relationships. Also, it would be curious if a Cosmic Christ only actually redeemed a small part of the cosmos. Finally, Southgate argues that for a theodicy to be complete, the importance of non-human resurrection must be included to maintain the goodness of God.

Yet, despite his focus on the individual and insistence on divine care for each creature, Southgate also admits that redemption for “simple organisms” who “possess little distinctive experience or agency... may be represented in the eschaton as types rather than as individuals.”²⁰² Creatures without sentience, in his view, do not suffer, and so do not need individual compensation for suffering, though they may still be represented in the final new creation. Still, he advises that theologians ought not to be frugal in their speculations on the inhabitants of the new creation. Southgate writes that along with the elimination of the second law of thermodynamics in the new creation “must surely go the implication that there is no competition for resources, no shortage of space in heaven. We should therefore be bold in our trust of the redemptive grace of God that will populate it.”²⁰³ Southgate argues that there may not *need* to be a redemption of every creature, but as there is no extrinsic limitation to how many creatures may populate the new creation, there is therefore no reason to exclude any of them in our speculations. Later in this work, I will argue that the nature of divine love will necessitate the resurrection of every creature, even those who have little personal agency, or do not seem to vary much one from

²⁰² Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 84.

²⁰³ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 85.

another.²⁰⁴ Particularity is essential to love, and perhaps not even bacteria can be substituted one for another by the God who loves them.

We have thus explored several different possibilities for the resurrection of individual non-human animals. What about wider-scope schemes? What other forms are there for redemption?

Southgate also argues that whilst creatures will be resurrected on their own merit, redemption for them can also come through the work of humans. As humanity takes up its priestly role, it will offer up creation's praise to God and use human ingenuity to act as partners with God in bringing the creation into its own.²⁰⁵ Humanity as priests and created co-creators act in the now-present eschatological age to bring relief to creation's groaning and liberate it from its bondage to decay.²⁰⁶ This particular approach of Southgate's is interesting because it is anthropocentric, but it is so for the sake of wider life.²⁰⁷ Most anthropocentric schemes worry only about the cost and benefit to humans and the place of humans as agents in eschatological fulfilment. Southgate assumes the place of humanity is central, but that they are to live out this central role in a Christ-shaped way, as servants who give themselves up for the good of the wider creation. If Southgate is anthropocentric, he is at least redeemingly anthropocentric.

²⁰⁴ See chapter 4 on the particularity and non-substitutability of love and chapter 6 on the universality of resurrection.

²⁰⁵ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 111-112.

²⁰⁶ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 126.

²⁰⁷ Southgate makes a distinction drawn from Lukas Vischer between anthropocentrism and "anthropomonism." It is anthropomonism which sees humans as the only objects of concern in God's redemptive purposes, and every other creature as disposable or instrumental. However, Southgate and his co-authors "hold that a chastened and humble anthropocentrism, which strongly resists anthropomonism, can appropriately remain key to an ecological theology". David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2010), 124.

Theocentric approaches to redemption come from thinkers such as Moltmann, Rahner, and Edwards. For them, God will tie up all of cosmic history through the work of Christ. Humans will be part of that redemption, but will not be key to it. In Rahner's thought, redemption is tied to God's self-bestowal to the world. As God gives Godself to the world, the world then finds in itself through the indwelling presence of God the capability for self-transcendence.²⁰⁸ Thus God's work in the world in self-giving will be consummated in the self-transcendence of world history.²⁰⁹ Edwards, drawing conclusions from Rahner's theology, argues for the companionship and co-suffering of God in creation, and "sees the resurrection as a promise that creaturely suffering and death will be redeemed and healed as each creature finds its meaning and fulfillment in God's self-bestowing love."²¹⁰ Moltmann, by contrast, does not see history as moving forward into the eschatological period, but rather sees the eschaton as breaking back into the present. The culmination of creation is coming—the *adventus*—not as something that will proceed out of the past and present, but as something which exists already and will meet the present.²¹¹ Heaven is not simply a future reality, but "the beginning of heavenly bliss is already present—and is also already experienced—in the grace of Christ and in the church of Christ; and this means that heaven has already been thrown open here."²¹² The outpost of heaven created here in the church is the promise to the wider cosmos of the redemption that will come.

²⁰⁸ See Denis Edwards, "Why is God Doing This? Suffering, The Universe, and Christian Eschatology," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S. J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 255-256.

²⁰⁹ Edwards, "Why is God Doing This?" 262.

²¹⁰ Edwards, "Why is God Doing This?" 266.

²¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and The Spirit of God*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 133-135.

²¹² Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 169.

Peters and Hewlett do not hold to the in-breaking eschatology of Moltmann. By contrast they assert that the future as it is will change the meaning of the now. "It is the divine act of redemption that determines what creation will have meant, and this can be determined only eschatologically."²¹³ God's redemption actually creates the meaning of what is past, and the whole of creation cannot be understood before that moment, for its meaning is not yet determined.²¹⁴ Theodicy for individuals, then, is an issue only resolved in the eschatological age, as the meaning of suffering is forged in light of the whole work of God. Robert Russell claims with Peters and Hewlett that: "It is only when the new creation is the starting point for reflecting on evil that we can hope to give a response to its origin and meaning in this present, broken world."²¹⁵

Each of these teleological schemes does find a solution for the individual creature who suffers. Whether resurrection is seen as recompense or as fulfilment, the creature finds that all things have been made well. Yet, this places an enormous weight of meaning on the creature's being that does not directly relate to its life on earth. Celia Deane-Drummond rightly asks whether or not teleological explanations are used too quickly "to escape the conundrum of suffering and evil?"²¹⁶ If we are too quick to point to the eschaton as the residing place of all value and meaning, it makes the lives lived here vapid and hollow.

²¹³ Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 160.

²¹⁴ I will explore this concept further in chapter 5.

²¹⁵ Robert John Russell, "Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenge to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 111.

²¹⁶ Deane-Drummond, "Shadow Sophia," 24.

Ruth Page objects strenuously to future-oriented redemption models, arguing that they prioritise a distant God and a lack of concern for present suffering or present creaturely value. Her particular objection is to those who consider non-human lives as unimportant stepping-stones to the development of humans as the teleology of creation. Her pattern of thought, however, would equally object to those who place the true value of a creature in its “completion” in a final state of redemption.²¹⁷ Page writes “A distant teleology goes with belief in a distant God who will sort everything out at the end. But when God is believed to be present, then every moment becomes eschatological, an end in itself, so to speak.”²¹⁸ Instead of a distant teleology, Page advances an argument of “Teleology Now!,” where the value of creatures is found as they live and participate in relationship to God and in relationship to the world around them. As opposed to David Ray Griffin, who asks “why a God whose power is essentially unlimited would use such a long, pain-filled method, with all its *blind-alleys*, to create a world,”²¹⁹ for Page there are no blind-alleys. There are simply creatures who did not pass on their DNA to successive generations, but who were nonetheless delighted in by God and who participated in relationships around them in meaningful ways.²²⁰ Relationships are the primary purpose of creation for Page, and nothing separates a creature from its primary relationship with God. Thus, natural evils do not and cannot speak against the love of God

²¹⁷ This objection would stem from her not thinking that creatures, as a whole, are either entirely saved or entirely lost, but rather that “only those parts of lives which please God, which bear the desired fruit from the seed of possibility, are saved.” If a creature’s life had no value in this world, it would be entirely lost. Page, *Web of Creation*, 170.

²¹⁸ Page, *Web of Creation*, 63.

²¹⁹ Griffin, “Creation Out of Chaos,” 106. Italics mine

²²⁰ The varieties and the shaping of meaning will be discussed later in chapter 4, p. 261-266, and chapter 6, p. 286–295.

because even the worst disaster cannot separate a creature from its primary purpose of having participated in relationships.²²¹

Theocentric Approaches to Suffering

There are also a few additional perspectives that are essentially theocentric rather than biocentric in their treatment of evil and suffering. Two examples here will suffice. The first sees the cross as the central moment where God takes responsibility for the suffering of the world, the second places the meaning of creaturely lives (and indeed of all creation) in God and not in creation.

The cross of Christ is perhaps the most difficult and paradoxical concept in Christianity. This, perhaps, makes it also one of the most powerful concepts. At the cross, extremes meet together. The God of life dies. Perfect innocence carries sin. Good triumphs over evil by submitting to death. Love is found in the domain of hate. The greatest expression of God's power comes through the experience of entire weakness. Although precisely what happened at the cross is widely debated, Southgate and Gregersen argue that at the cross God took responsibility for all the evil in creation.²²² Gregersen in particular remarks how Jesus, who died without descendants, identifies with the losers of the evolutionary race, and thus "*co-carries the costs of creation.*"²²³ Certainly, the idea of God meeting the creation in the cross, and fully experiencing its worst aspects does much to help us see God's moral justification in allowing evil. At the same time, the mysteries of the cross will never be fully pierced by

²²¹ See also my discussion of extinction and teleology in Bethany Sollereeder, "The Purpose of Dinosaurs," *The Christian Century* 130:20 (October 2013). Available online at <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-09/purpose-dinosaurs>.

²²² Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 76; Gregersen, "Cross of Christ," 204.

²²³ Gregersen, "Cross of Christ," 203-204. Italics original. See also the discussion of biological telos in chapter 5.

theological inquiry, though we will return to it throughout this study. Instead of a focus on the suffering of the individual, the focus here is on the God willing to suffer for creation.

Moltmann's theocentric approach is quite different. Moltmann places all the value of creation in its meaning, and finds that meaning in God. He writes:

Theologically speaking, the meaning and purpose of human beings is to be found in God himself, like the meaning and purpose of all things. In this sense, every single person, and indeed every single living thing in nature, has a meaning, whether they are of utility for evolution or not. The meaning of the individual is not to be found in the collective of the species, and the meaning of the species is not to be found in the existence of the individual. The meaning of both is to be found in God... We have to overcome the old anthropocentric world picture by a new theocentric interpretation of the world of nature and human beings.²²⁴

If the meaning of a creature is not found in itself—neither in its evolutionary contribution nor its own fulfilment—but in God, then every life has meaning and value regardless of its circumstances or suffering. Utility, on any conceived level, is no longer a measure for worth.

Compound Approaches

Just as Murray was the main advocate for articulating a compound defence in the philosophical realm, so Southgate is the most clear expositor of the need for compound approaches to theodicy in the theological realm.²²⁵

While he recognises the power and necessity of each argument, he attests that no one position alone is sufficient. Rather, various positions must be drawn together in order to address the problem of natural evil. For Southgate, 1) God must be seen as originally creating a good world: a good world with constraints that provide values that can come about in no other way (the “only way” argument). 2) God must also be seen as responding to, companionship, and

²²⁴ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 197.

²²⁵ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 15-17.

suffering with each creature, taking the responsibility for suffering most especially at the cross. 3) God works redemption in, and for, and through creatures—providing for them either fullness of life here, or in a life to come. 4) Finally, humanity has a particular role in redemption as co-redeemers of the world, and so suffering cannot be divided from the work of humans.²²⁶

Together, Southgate argues, these lines of argument help us account for non-human animal suffering.

I follow Southgate and Murray in thinking that for a theodicy to be robust and satisfying it has to be a compound of various different lines of approach. Our understanding of creation needs to be complex and multi-faceted if we are to nuance the various natural disvalues we encounter. An entire population wiped out by a volcano requires a different sort of approach than a baby seal skinned alive by an orca. Holding various strands of argument together allows the flexibility to account for different values and disvalues, without simply painting all disvalues with one brush or looking for only one source of disvalue.

Conclusion

We have now explored the various resources available to the study of non-human animal theodicy. We have traversed the lay of the land. First crossed was the ground of analytical philosophy. We began with rejecting the Neo-Cartesian and inscrutability arguments because they do not engage the question of evil, but only evade it. Property-consequence GHAs (such as the necessity of nomic regularity) with anthropocentric references were rejected as inadequate, while those property-consequence GHAs with biotic reference were accepted as necessary, but not sufficient on their own. Developmental

²²⁶ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 16.

defences also were shown to be strong arguments, but not strong enough to stand in isolation. A compound defence, allowing for varieties of goods and harms, was deemed the strongest approach.

Then, the analytical philosophical positions were compared and contrasted with theological positions, and three critiques were explored. Some simply refuse to engage in theodicy. Some philosophical approaches did not retreat behind unfeeling logic, but chose to engage the affective realm and are comfortable with mystery and theological concerns. Surin's refusal of traditional philosophical theodicy in favour of practical theodicies and Stump's example of sensitive philosophical engagement with theodicy will both stand as examples of how analytical philosophy will be drawn upon in this project. Finally, some chose theological approaches instead, which allow for more sources of input, and require a certain amount of pastoral concern.

The exploration of theological approaches began with the attempts to radically re-define God in order to dissolve the theodicy problem. These solutions were rejected largely for their lack of hope. A god divested of goodness, power, or activity could not satisfy a Christian theodicy. Theodicies centred on the fall, by contrast, were critiqued as too simplistic, ignoring that much good and value emerges out of the harms that those theodicies condemn as the result of sin. Finally, the various theodicies stemming from theological considerations, whether theocentric or biocentric, were explored. The usefulness of kenotic and relational theologies was noted.

The rest of the project will concentrate on just one small piece of this vast landscape: the attempt to develop a compound theological approach which does not radically redefine God or incorporate a theology of the fall, but which will draw on the resources of relational and redemptive theologies.

I noted earlier that one of the major dividing lines in the current debate is whether the process of evolution was intended by God or whether its violence, competition, and scarcity are the result of some kind of world corruption.²²⁷ The next chapter, focussing on biblical considerations, is designed to set me firmly in the first camp. It will critique from a biblical perspective several theologians who advance the idea of a fall causing human suffering. I argue that by investigating Genesis 1-9 on exegetical grounds, it is possible to set aside the idea that the world is in any way corrupted apart from the direct sinful action of humans. This conclusion will pave the way for the development of a compound theology in chapters 4-6 which will not consider fallenness or corruption as part of the problem in an evolutionary creation.

²²⁷ This is a “fault-line” pointed out by Southgate, “Re-Reading Genesis, John, and Job,” 378.

Chapter 3: Biblical Considerations

“Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe.”
-John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Introduction

In the last chapter we explored various approaches outlining how theologians and philosophers have addressed the problem of natural evil. One of the prominent disagreements was over whether the world was made “good” in the sense of peaceable, harmonious, and suffering-free and then was corrupted by sin (human or angelic), or whether the world was made with the possibility of natural evil as a result of the creative process itself. In the latter case, the goodness of the world still exists, but “good” holds different connotations from the static perfection of the first picture. Goodness includes realities like death, pain, and predation.

While almost no theologians endorse the notion that death and violence entered the world through the human fall because of the chronological issues involved,¹ a growing contingent of theologians point to the corrupting influence of Satan or some other shadowy spiritual reality as the origin of disvalues in nature.² The aim of this chapter will be two-fold. First it aims to show that the fallenness of the natural world is not a concept that can be derived from the

¹ William Dembski being a notable exception, who argues that the effects of the human fall were applied retroactively to the creation. William Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2009). I exclude outright those young earth creationists who do not accept that evolution happened.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 138; Michael Lloyd, “Are Animals Fallen?” in *Animals on the Agenda*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (London: SCM, 1998): 147-160; Stephen H. Webb, *The Dome of Eden: An New Solution to the Problem of Creation and Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 139-180; Paul J. Griffiths, “Impossible Pluralism” *First Things* (June/July 2013): 44-48; Nicola Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering & The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10; Gregory Boyd, “Evolution as Cosmic Warfare: A Biblical Perspective on Satan and ‘Natural Evil’,” in *Creation Made Free*, ed. Thomas Oord (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009): 125-145; Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

opening chapters of Genesis (1-9), and therefore critique and set aside the models that rely upon such a reading. Discussion will include a look at Romans 8 as a key New Testament passage relating to the interpretation of Genesis. Second, this chapter will aim to establish a foundational theological principle of approach for the rest of the project: that apart from human sin and its direct effects, the world remains God's "very good" creation.

A note on terminology: the term "fall" is elusive as there are several different meanings of "fall" that can be intended. I explored in chapter 2 how there are both event-based fall theories and mysterious fallenness theories.³ "Event-based" fall theories usually refer to the "human fall" and the "satanic fall." The human fall, sometimes called the "relational fall," refers to the event that marks the entrance of sin into the world through human action.⁴ The effect of the human fall is the severing of harmonious relationship between human persons and God, between one person and other persons, and between humans and the non-human creation. However, apart from the direct result of sinful human action in the world, such as pollution or exploitation of natural resources, the human fall does not independently affect the wider cosmos but only humans and their relationships. In the same way, the satanic fall refers to the event of some of the heavenly host deciding to rebel against God, and becoming "fallen angels." The satanic fall was primordial, meaning that it

³ See chapter 2, p. 66-74.

⁴ The term "fall" here is still not the best, since it assumes an original "height" from which to fall, which inevitably pictures an Augustinian-type fall from moral perfection, rather than allowing for an Irenaean-type "fall forward" from innocence.

occurred either before time, or at least, that it was in effect from the very origin of physical creation.⁵

Closely linked to these two fall events is what is sometimes known as the “cosmic fall.”⁶ The cosmic fall refers to the effects of sin on the wider cosmos, but independent of the direct action of the sinful party, either human or angelic. It defines the concept that when either humans or angels fell, the rest of the cosmos was pulled down from an original perfection or uncorrupted state, and made subject to natural evil. Yet, these evils are usually not related to the direct action of the agents in the way that demonic possession, for example, or human environmental degradation would be.⁷ Instead, these natural evils—such as death, pain, predation, and suffering—entered the non-human creaturely experience as part of the punishment for human or angelic sin.

I think these are important to distinguish because they are often conflated, but are conceptually distinct. Most historical Christian thinkers accepted a primordial satanic fall, but did not think that a cosmic fall occurred because of it.⁸ Contemporary advocates of a satanic fall, including Boyd, Griffiths, Lloyd, and Webb, usually link it with a cosmic fall. I accept both a

⁵ Other primordial fall narratives include William Dembski’s retroactive applications of the effects of the human fall, Origen’s pre-material fall, Neil Messer’s ambiguous creation with “nothingness”, and Celia Deane-Drummond’s shadow sophia. Dembski, *The End of Christianity*; Neil Messer, “Natural Evil after Darwin,” in *Theology after Darwin*, eds. Michael S. Northcott and R. J. Berry (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 149; Celia Deane-Drummond, “Shadow Sophia in Christological Perspective: The Evolution of Sin and the Redemption of Nature,” *Theology and Science* 6:1 (2008): 13-32.

⁶ See, for example, John J. Bimson, “Reconsidering a ‘Cosmic Fall,’” *Science & Christian Belief* 18 (2006): 63-81.

⁷ The cosmic fall is never seen as caused by direct human action, as if humans could force lions to become carnivorous, but some of the satanic fall scenarios do imagine this kind of effect.

⁸ This is a view most famously enshrined in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The view that the fall of Satan had no effect on the goodness of the world was held by most Christian thinkers during the Patristic period. Bernard J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels: Soldiers of Satan’s Realm* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1952), 82.

satanic and a human fall,⁹ but I do not think a cosmic fall ever occurred; a conclusion I argue for in this chapter.

The idea of a primordial cosmic fall can be contrasted with the category of mysterious fallenness theories. As opposed to a cosmic fall, where natural evil is caused by explicit sin, these mysterious fallenness theories do not give a clear picture of the origin of evil. Instead, they simply claim that the world includes natural evil which God never intended, but have different perspectives on the origin of that evil. Messer links the origin of evil to a “nothingness” that opposed God from the beginning.¹⁰ Deane-Drummond finds the origins of natural evil in “shadow-sophia” which is constitutively linked with the creation of “sophia,” just as the possibility of darkness is constitutively linked with the creation of light.¹¹ Hoggard Creegan only allows that “there is something opposed to God, which must in some sense be God’s creation, and that this something is beyond our story; it doesn’t fit easily into any narrative that makes sense.”¹² Then she adds, “It is too mundane to speak of a prehuman ‘fall.’”¹³ Each of these mysterious fallenness theories are primordial, since they do not think that there ever was a time when the world was not fallen in this way.

Although these fallenness theories are not cosmic fall scenarios, they share one of the major weaknesses of other primordial cosmic fall theories, which is that—biblically speaking—the creation is so often affirmed as good. If it can be shown that the non-human creation is considered uncorrupted at any point in real history, these mysterious fallenness theories as well as other

⁹ Or, at least, if we accept for the sake of argument that angels and demons do exist, I would accept the plausibility of a satanic fall.

¹⁰ Messer, “Natural Evil after Darwin,” 149.

¹¹ Deane-Drummond, “Shadow Sophia,” 13-32.

¹² Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 77.

¹³ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 77.

primordial fall theories will face a serious challenge. For this reason, I will concentrate primarily on critiquing the cosmic fall theories, which are most commonly argued on biblical grounds, with the intention of drawing similar critiques against the mysterious fallenness theories.

The Cosmic Fall in Scripture

Historically, placing the blame for natural evil on a cosmic fall due to human sin was *not* the default position of the early church, despite the possible reading of such thought in Paul's writings.¹⁴ When Augustine, for example, wrote about the curse in Genesis 3, he made a distinction between the bare existence of thorns growing in a field, and thorns growing in the fields "to" humans in a way that would afflict them. He wrote:

Concerning thorns and thistles, we can give a more definite answer, because after the fall of man God said to him, speaking of the earth, Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you. But we should not jump to the conclusion that it was only then that these plants came forth from the earth. For it could be that, in view of the many advantages found in different kinds of seeds, these plants had a place on earth without afflicting man in any way. But since they were growing in the fields in which man was now laboring in punishment for his sin, it is reasonable to suppose that they became one of the means of punishing him. For they might have grown elsewhere, for the nourishment of birds and beasts, or even for the use of man.

Now this interpretation does not contradict what is said in the words, Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, if we understand that earth in producing them before the fall did not do so to afflict man but rather to provide proper nourishment for certain animals, since some animals find soft dry thistles a pleasant and nourishing food. But earth began to produce these to add to man's laborious lot only when he began to labor on the earth after his sin. I do not mean that these plants once grew in other places and only afterwards in the fields where man planted and harvested his crops. They were in the same place before and after: formerly not for man, afterwards for man.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jon Garvey, "Creation Fell in 1500: The Theological History of a Fallen Creation," unpublished, forthcoming in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 2015.

¹⁵ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1., bk. 3, ch 18., trans. J. H. Taylor (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 93-94.

Augustine thought that it was only the subsequent state of affairs of thorns growing “to” humans that was due to the curse placed on the ground in Genesis 3:15-17. Augustine even allowed for orderly predation before the human fall, since “one animal is the nourishment for another,” and he argued for orderly decomposers, thus presuming the existence of death.¹⁶ In contrast, later in the history of interpretation emerged the now more recognisable interpretation of the curse on the ground as a cosmic fall, summed up by John Calvin who wrote:

All the evils of the present life, which experience proves to be innumerable, have proceeded from the same fountain. The inclemency of the air, frost, thunders, unseasonable rains, drought, hail, and whatever is disorderly in the world, are the fruits of sin. Nor is there any other primary cause of diseases.¹⁷

The history of how the doctrine of the cosmic fall has grown and developed from the scant text in Genesis and a few New Testament references to a defining understanding of the natural world in Western thought is long and interesting,¹⁸ but the primary intention of this chapter is to investigate the Scriptural support for this notion. I hope to show that the relevant chapters in Genesis do not allow an interpretation that finds a cosmic fall linked either to a satanic or a human fall. Instead, I hope to show that there is no initial corruption in the world (ruling out the possibility of a primordial fall) and that the curse laid down in Genesis 3 is lifted after the flood narrative, and therefore any cosmic curse associated with the human fall was only temporary. The world, apart from humans, remains the “very good” creation of God.

¹⁶ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1:3:16., trans. J. H. Taylor (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 92. Augustine goes on to argue “To wish that this were otherwise would not be reasonable. For all creatures, as long as they exist, have their own measure, number, and order. Rightly considered, they are all praiseworthy, and all the changes that occur in them, even when one passes into another, are governed by a hidden plan that rules the beauty of the world and regulates each according to its kind.”

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries upon the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (1554) in *Calvin's Bible Commentaries: Genesis*, Part I, trans. by J. King (Forgotten Books, 1847, 2007), 113.

¹⁸ See N.P. Williams, *The Idea of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927).

Genesis 1: The Very Good Creation

Why did pre-human animals suffer in the evolutionary process? Those theologians who hold to a primordial fall maintain that it is because the pre-human world was already corrupted or otherwise compromised. Thus, although God never intended their suffering, they were caught up in a cosmic struggle as unfortunate casualties. Thomas Oord, Gregory Boyd, and Stephen Webb, in particular, claim that hints of the primordial fall are found in Genesis 1.¹⁹ In this first section, I want to investigate the first chapter of the Bible to see if there is room for such an interpretation.

The Hebrew Scriptures begin with the world pictured as a watery depth. “The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep [תהום], while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”²⁰ This deep, this תהום, is common to the creation myths of other ancient Near Eastern (ANE) mythologies.²¹ Instead of a creation described *ex nihilo*, the “formless and void” (תהו ובהו) nature of this watery world does not picture a lack of material existence, but rather describes a place that is uninhabitable, or unusable, like a desert wasteland.²² The absolute origins of matter are not a

¹⁹ Thomas Oord, “An Open Theology Doctrine of Creation,” in *Creation Made Free: Open Theism Engaging Science*, ed. Thomas Oord (Eugene, Or: Pickwick, 2009), 28-49; Boyd, “Evolution as Cosmic Warfare,” 125-145; Webb, *The Dome of Eden*, 144-146, 165-166;.

²⁰ Genesis 1:2, NRSV.

²¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 16.

²² The only other place the exact same phrase is used is in Jeremiah 4:23 to describe a ruined land. The words *tohu* and *bohu* are also found together in Isa 34:11 where they describe the confusion and emptiness of a land under God’s judgment. Examples of *tohu* being used to describe a wilderness include Deuteronomy 32:10 and Psalm 107:40. An extensive etymology of both words, and their use in the Hebrew Bible, can be found in David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A reappraisal of the Chaokampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 10-35.

concern of the author of Genesis.²³ Norman Habel writes: “Clearly *Ereṭs* [the earth] exists, but as yet has not assumed its final shape or function and has not yet been filled with life forms.”²⁴ The six ordering and creative days of Elohim’s work will form it into a place that is useful and habitable for all creatures. At the end of the days of creative activity, Elohim surveys all that has been made and blesses it, and recognises its goodness, calling it in 1:31 טוב מאד, “very good.”

The questions about the absolute goodness of this completed creation revolve around whether the existence of the תהום or the description of the world as תהו ובהו opens the exegetical possibility of reading in some sort of conflict, resistance, or corruption. Let us explore some of the various possibilities in turn.

Thomas Oord’s ‘Creation out of chaos’

Oord claims that a model of creation out of chaos, based on the תהום of Genesis 1, is a better answer to the problem of natural evil than either kenotic or traditional notions of *creatio ex nihilo* allow.²⁵ The first question is whether Genesis 1 is open to such an interpretation. Can we, as Oord does, hold that the initial chaos of the תהום overwhelmed God’s possibility of creating a truly good and peaceable world? Did the chaotic nature of the world refuse co-operation with divine intention in such a way that natural evil was an inevitable result?

To begin answering these questions we must set Genesis 1 in its cultural context and evaluate its form. Is the chapter an example of converted

²³ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 47.

²⁴ Norman Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of the Earth: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 1-11* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 29.

²⁵ Oord, “An Open Theology Doctrine of Creation,” in *Creation Made Free*, 28-49.

Chaoskampf literature—a struggle between the ordering God and chaos (or other possible spiritual forces)—or is it another genre of literature?

Hermann Gunkel was the first to suggest that the mention of תהום was a veiled reference to the Babylonian goddess Tiamat, and thus hints at oppositional forces in the creative work.²⁶ Yet, when comparing Genesis to other ANE mythologies, Gunkel himself notes:

The pagan myths tell of gods whose relationships in reproduction and battle give rise to the world. Gen 1, however, knows of a sole God, not begotten and not begetting, at whose feet lies the world. There is no greater contrast, then, than between the colorful, fantastic mythology of these peoples and the intellectually clear, prosaic supernaturalism of Gen 1.²⁷

Whatever once might have been the source material in Genesis 1 of ANE mythological influence, commentators generally agree that there are no remains of oppositional forces in the current form of the text.²⁸

Oord tries to garner support for his idea of creation out of chaos by attributing the idea that there is such an opposition to Jon D. Levenson. Oord writes “Levenson and other biblical authors argue that Genesis 1 suggests that even in the first moments of creation, God encounters other forces. These forces oppose, at least partially, God’s creative will.”²⁹ Yet in the book Oord is drawing from, Levenson clearly states: “First, in Genesis there is no active opposition to God’s creative labor. He works on inert matter. In fact, rather than *creatio ex nihilo*, ‘creation without opposition’ is the more accurate nutshell statement of the theology underlying our passage.”³⁰ Oord could claim that he

²⁶ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. by Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1997), 126-132.

²⁷ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 127. See also Wenham *Genesis 1-15*, 16.

²⁸ Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Omnipotence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1994), 122.

²⁹ Oord, “An Open Theology Doctrine of Creation,” 40.

³⁰ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 122. Oord, in his article, has a direct quotation from page 121.

does not think the chaos *actively*—but only passively—opposes God (nearer, perhaps to Messer’s position), but it still leaves the contradiction between some sort of opposition in creation and Levenson’s “creation without opposition” unsolved.

Instead of a struggle with evil chaos, what *is* seen in Genesis 1 is simply the existence of the chaos: of unordered water that has no boundaries. God’s creative work brings some order and limitations to this watery chaos so that the world can become habitable and useful. However, as Levenson points out, even though God is not opposed in any way by the chaos, “God has not annihilated the primordial chaos. He has only limited it. The same holds for the other uncreated reality, darkness. Light, which is God’s first creation, does not banish darkness.”³¹ Instead, light and darkness alternate, as each is useful for different things. So too, the land and the seas alternate, and neither holds dominance over the other. The chaos, therefore, is not something that God *could not* subdue, but rather something that God *did not* subdue.³² The Genesis account does not leave room for Oord’s idea that this chaos has in any way inhibited God’s creative endeavour. Instead it claims that even the waters and the darkness form a necessary part of creation. We are left with the interesting exegetical reflection that the (literally) dark and dangerous elements of creation were left precisely because they were good and useful; fit to the purposes of God’s very good creation.³³

Satanic Opposition?

³¹ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 123.

³² This claim about the divine ability is reinforced by the hope that God can and will entirely do away with dark and chaotic elements in the new creation. See Revelation 21:1-4.

³³ That throughout the Hebrew Bible God regularly claims responsibility for these darker aspects of creation will be explored in the next section.

What, then, of another possibility—the possibility that the problem was not a chaotic force that hindered God, but a malicious one that corrupted God’s world? As noted in chapter 2, various theologians have come to the conclusion that the world was corrupted with the fall of the angels. C.S. Lewis wrote:

It seems to me... a reasonable supposition, that some mighty created power had already been at work for ill on the material universe, or the solar system, or, at least, the planet Earth, before ever man came on the scene...If there is such a power, as I myself believe, it may well have corrupted the animal creation before man appeared.³⁴

Gregory Boyd is more specific when he writes:

God wasn’t the only agent involved in the evolutionary process: Satan and other malevolent cosmic powers have also been involved. I will contend that the process of evolution may be seen as a sort of warfare between the life-affirming creativity of an all-good God, on the one hand, and the on-going corrupting influence of malevolent cosmic forces, on the other.³⁵

Paul Griffiths agrees, but extends the corruption beyond the process of evolution to the very fabric of creation: “Among these [created] creatures are angels; (almost) simultaneously with creation (*in actu*), some among these rebel against their creator and introduce thereby deep damage into the otherwise harmoniously beautiful space-time fabric of the cosmos. All creatures, material and immaterial, living and nonliving, are damaged by this fall.”³⁶

While an angelic rebellion causing the cosmic fall solves the chronological problem of pre-human animal suffering, it raises two other serious questions: First, why is God’s creation (including humans and all living creatures) called “very good” and continually attributed to God’s work later in

³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 138.

³⁵ Gregory Boyd, “Evolution as Cosmic Warfare: A Biblical Perspective on Satan and “Natural” Evil,” in *Creation Made Free*, 127.

³⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, “Impossible Pluralism” *First Things* (June/July 2013), 48. When I challenged him on the biblical difficulties of his view, he responded: “I do think that Scripture tells the story of an angelic fall. I recommend a close reading of books eleven and twelve of Augustine’s *City of God*, together with the scriptural texts he engages. It’s an invigorating exercise.” “Good from Evils,” *First Things* (October 2013): 13-14.

Scripture, if in fact it has been deeply corrupted all along? Second, how does one account for the lack of Scriptural evidence for such a view? Where is this story of nature's satanic corruption recounted in clear terms?

That the earth is considered God's good work, and continues to operate under God's sovereign dominion, is a common theme in the Bible:

"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."³⁷

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers."³⁸

"O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures."³⁹

"In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed."⁴⁰

The whole of the divine dialogues in Job are an eloquent attribution of all the most problematic parts of creation to God's handiwork, from carnivorous birds and giant sea monsters to hail and whirlwinds.⁴¹ If we set aside readings of Genesis 3 weighted by later tradition (or set aside the chapter itself for a moment), we would never arrive at the idea that the natural world was deeply corrupted by God's curse from the texts in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, if there *had* been a profound corruption of the earth, if these aggressive elements of creation *were* against the divine will, why is it not mentioned? Gregory Boyd would protest that it is mentioned, that the struggle between God and

³⁷ Genesis 1:31a, NRSV.

³⁸ Psalm 24:1-2, NRSV.

³⁹ Psalm 104:24, NRSV.

⁴⁰ Psalm 95:5-6, NRSV.

⁴¹ Job 38-41.

oppositional forces is reflected in the Old Testament passages where God rebukes the hostile waters of the תהום or fights sea monsters, such as Psalm 29:3-4; 18:15; 74:10-13; 89:9-10; 104:3-9; 106:9; Proverbs 8:27-29; Job 9:13; 38:6-11; Habakkuk 3:8-15.⁴² Boyd acknowledges that this opposition is not present in Genesis 1,⁴³ but crops up throughout the Hebrew Bible. He goes on to elaborate that:

The point of these passages is clearly to stress that Yahweh (and no other god) reigns supreme over the “proud” chaotic waters that threaten the foundation of the earth. Indeed, unlike Baal, Tiamat, Enki or any other Near Eastern hero who is said to have controlled the chaos, Yahweh’s sovereignty is such that he can master these destructive forces by his mighty voice alone.⁴⁴

But if God is utterly sovereign over these chaotic forces, then, what is the problem? Boyd argues “A very real battle took place when God created the world, and is still taking place as Yahweh (not Baal or Marduk) preserves the world from chaos.” However there is no biblical justification for the second clause of Boyd’s claim. All the passages that Boyd references celebrate God’s past and ultimate defeat of these chaotic elements. There is no mention of their ongoing harassment of creation. Quite the opposite, the past defeat of these mythological enemies is invoked as the reason that God should be able to save people from their current human enemies,⁴⁵ as is seen in Psalm 74:10-14:

How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name forever?

⁴² Boyd, “Evolution as Cosmic Warfare,” 134-35.

⁴³ Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 84-85.

⁴⁴ Boyd, *God at War*, 86.

⁴⁵ That the *Chaoskampf* motif has more to do with the present appeal of Israelites to work in history than God’s work in creation is argued by Dennis McCarthy and Andrew Angel over against John Day. Dennis McCarthy, “‘Creation’ Motifs in Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29: 393-406; Andrew R. Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaoskampf Tradition in the Period 515 BCE to 200 CE* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 9; John Day, *God’s conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3-4.

Why do you hold back your hand;
 why do you keep your hand in your bosom?

Yet God my King is from of old,
 working salvation in the earth.
 You divided the sea by your might;
 you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.
 You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
 you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

The God able to crush Leviathan should surely not hold back against those who now scoff at God's name. Boyd suggests that the "foe" referred to in this Psalm is the ongoing presence of these chaotic spiritual forces in creation,⁴⁶ but the actions of the foe (which include roaring within the holy place, setting up emblems, hacking the wooden trellis at the upper entrance with axes, and smashing the carved works with hatchets and hammers before setting the sanctuary on fire) rule out the possibility that it is spiritual forces that are here being considered: it is plainly referring to human soldiers.⁴⁷ The sea, the dragons in the waters, and the Leviathan appear only as *already defeated* enemies. They are not only defeated, but they fail to put up any kind of resistance to God's attack. Rebecca Watson notes "it appears that although Leviathan and Rahab are sometimes portrayed as recipients of Yahweh's antagonism, the lack of resistance (or even acknowledged provocation or hostility) precludes speaking of a 'combat' proper."⁴⁸ There is no indication that there is any sort of an ongoing struggle with them. Similarly, Boyd's claim that "these hymns express the authors' perception that the cosmos is besieged at a

⁴⁶ Boyd, *God at War*, 87. "This passage, which is possibly echoing another Canaanite hymn, seems to identify *yām* with "the dragons of the sea," and the monster is clearly a mocking enemy of Yahweh....In short, even though God is in an ultimate sense sovereign, for the psalmist his battles with evil are not on this account in any sense a sham. In contrast to Augustine, the psalmist sees that evil and thus warfare are absolutely real for God just as they are for his creation."

⁴⁷ See Psalm 74:4-7.

⁴⁸ Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 376.

structural level with forces of evil that God himself must battle”⁴⁹ is simply not borne out by the biblical content. Everywhere the total victory of God over chaotic forces and creatures is announced, proclaimed, and celebrated. Where the chaotic forces or sea creatures do appear as currently existing, they are universally seen as one of God’s good created creatures or well within the boundaries of God’s current control.⁵⁰ In Genesis 1:21, the great sea creatures, התנינם, are simply considered creatures that Elohim created along with the rest. In Psalm 104:26 the Leviathan *that God formed* (the text emphatically reminds us) frolics in the sea. In Job 41:1-11 the Leviathan is pictured as God’s servant, whom God can lead on a leash and play with like a pet bird.⁵¹ The character of Satan is also noticeably absent in the creation stories. God, and God alone, is the Creator.⁵²

Finally, Boyd (like Oord) points to the existence of the תהום in Genesis as having “ominous overtones” or “indicating a lingering element of the

⁴⁹ Boyd, *God at War*, 89.

⁵⁰ E.g. Job 41:25; Genesis 1:21; Psalm 104:26, 146:6.

⁵¹ There is only one passage, Isaiah 27:1, that could contradict the idea that the monsters of creation were utterly defeated: “On that day the Lord with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.” Here alone in the Hebrew Bible is there a sense that a brooding chaos monster might have been allowed a continued existence, and one that merits “punishment”. The passage, however, forms part of the “Isaiah Apocalypse”, is highly figurative and describes the eschatological event of Leviathan’s defeat alongside the prediction that “Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit.” (Isa 27:6) As an idealised future order, it pictures redemption in a similar way to how Revelation 21:1 pictures the new heaven and the new earth without a sea. The author of Revelation does not picture no sea because it was against the ability of God to subdue or eliminate the sea, but because the time for the disorder caused by the sea is finished and a new order is to take place. Indeed, strong thematic links between Isaiah 24-27 and the book of Revelation have been pointed out. See Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 143-144.

⁵² The one exception to the absence of Satan in these narratives might be Genesis 3 and the snake in the garden. However, identification of the snake in Genesis 3 with Satan has long been rejected by biblical scholars. “The serpent which now enters the narrative is marked as one of God’s created animals (ch.2.19). In the narrator’s mind, therefore, it is not the symbol of a ‘demonic’ power and certainly not of Satan.” von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 87.

Chaoskampf creation stories.”⁵³ Increasingly, however, exegetes are moving away from even the initial identification of the תהום with elements of chaos.⁵⁴ Whereas older exegetes regularly identified the תהום with chaos,⁵⁵ Ellen van Wolde and Norman Habel both conclude that chaos is not the primary aspect of the pre-created waters⁵⁶ and David Tsumura’s intensive exploration concludes “The Hebrew term *těhôm* is simply a reflection of the common Semitic term **tihām*- “ocean,” and there is no relation between the Genesis account and the so-called *Chaoskampf* mythology.”⁵⁷ More colloquially, William Brown writes “But not to worry: the “deep” (*těhôm*) and the “waters” (*mayim*) lack the combative chaos that raged in *Enūma elish*, the Ba’al Epic, and for that matter Psalm 74:12-17... Rather, the curtain of creation rises to reveal a benign primordial soup.”⁵⁸ While the Genesis account may have been written in response to Canaanite, Ugaritic, and Mesopotamian stories that contained such divine forces of watery chaos, an element of chaotic opposition in Genesis 1 is

⁵³ Boyd, “Evolution as Cosmic Warfare,” 141. Reflecting on the history of interpretation, Rebecca Watson concludes “The term ‘chaos’ is unclear, inconsistently applied—and from the first, it was contested whether it accurately described the situation in Genesis 1.” *Chaos Uncreated*, 18.

⁵⁴ David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

⁵⁵ See von Rad, *Genesis*, 49; John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 4; Susan Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 18.

⁵⁶ Habel, *The Birth, The Curse and the Greening of the Earth*, 29. Ellen van Wolde, “Facing the Earth: Primaeval History in a New Perspective,” in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*, ed. Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 25. Van Wolde writes “This is the primaeval situation: no ‘nothing’, nor a chaos that needs sorting out, but a situation of ‘before’ or ‘not-yet’ in view of what is coming.”

⁵⁷ Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 56-57. The refusal to see chaos in the creation narratives is not simply a recent phenomenon though: it was characteristic of the Patristics (Clement and Hippolytus), and many post-enlightenment writers as well (Herder). See Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Themes of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 14-15. Watson also adds that “the association of the supposed ‘*Chaoskampf*’ theme with creation seems not to be original or central in the Hebrew Bible.” *Chaos Uncreated*, 379.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Seven Pillars of Creation*, 36. Watson’s voice can also be helpfully added: “The notion of combat with or the suppression of the sea is nowhere clearly expressed in the Old Testament and indeed there could be no place for such a notion within the monotheistic framework of which is it ultimately an expression.” *Chaos Uncreated*, 398.

noticeable only by its absence.⁵⁹ Formless matter is present, but not oppositional chaotic forces.⁶⁰ Elsewhere, we are told “The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;”⁶¹ even the mighty flood waters are not a threat, but a foundation for enthronement.

The Dome of Eden

Stephen Webb proposes that between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 stands a large narrative gap, and that the effect of the Satanic fall is indirectly attested to by the “chaotic” state of the world in 1:2.⁶² Not only does all the evidence about the non-chaotic nature of the primordial seas, explored above, contradict Webb’s thesis, but even he admits that the Gap Theory “is not widely accepted even among evangelical and fundamentalist theologians.”⁶³ None of the other theologians who defend a satanic corruption of the world, even those such as Boyd who are convinced that the Scriptures do tell of Satan’s fall, reference this passage as a plausible source.⁶⁴ Michael Lloyd, who defends a cosmic fall caused by the satanic fall, made a careful study of the origins of the angelic fall, but never mentions Genesis 1:1-2.⁶⁵ Webb’s use of this highly implausible argument to root his theory already puts his account into question.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Seven Pillars of Creation*, 31-32, 36.

⁶⁰ In place of the chaos myth, Habel suggests a birth metaphor: the earth is surrounded by waters just as an infant in the womb is surrounded by fluid. Habel defends that primal birth images also emerge elsewhere in Scripture: the earth as mother is found in Psalm 139:13-15 and Job 1:21, and the birth of the sea is pictured in Job 38:8, and of the mountains in Psalm 90:2. Habel, *The Birth, The Curse and the Greening of the Earth*, 31. I do not agree that this is primarily what is going on (one would expect birth-type language to appear in Genesis 1, with words such as ליל, if that were the case), but it is a helpful way to re-imagine this text without the chaos motifs.

⁶¹ Psalm 29:10, NRSV.

⁶² Webb, *Dome of Eden*, 143-145.

⁶³ Webb, *Dome of Eden*, 143.

⁶⁴ Boyd, as we saw above, admits that no divine battle motifs are found in Genesis 1, p. 109.

⁶⁵ Michael Lloyd, “The Cosmic Fall and the Free Will Defence.” (D.Phil Dissertation, Worcester College, University of Oxford, 1996), chapter 5.

Far more important to Webb's theory, however, is the idea that the "firmament" or "dome" (ע'ק'ר) created on the second day (Genesis 1:6-8) was a protective dome surrounding the Garden of Eden, excluding Satan's otherwise ubiquitous corrupting effect on creation. Inside the dome, according to Webb, was a world of peace and plenty, while outside it evolution took place, leaving all the physical evidence of strife we see today. Webb therefore claims that his position accounts for the violence and suffering evidenced by the fossil record, while still maintaining a historical Eden where harmony and cooperation prevailed. Webb's exegesis is profoundly questionable when it comes to the construction of the firmament. It is perhaps best to quote him at length:

The dome is an arching vault that covers the Earth, or at least one part of the Earth. I say one part of the Earth because it is not clear what cosmology the writer of Genesis is using... On the one hand, if the sky or heaven is an immense vault that rests upon the Earth, then the Earth must be flat; otherwise, the dome could not encompass all of the Earth. The land left out of the dome would then have no sky. On the other hand, if the dome was not the sky but some kind of symbol of God's protective providence and if the Earth was not considered flat, then the Dome would cover only part of the Earth, and the earth that was left out of the Dome would indeed be waste and void. Even if the Genesis writer thought the Earth was flat, he still could have conceived of the Dome as covering only part of the Earth, with parts of the Earth left out at the fringes of the Dome.⁶⁶

First, Webb does not address the ancient Near Eastern texts which regularly attest to a firmament covering the whole earth and separating it from the heavens, a concept Wenham calls "a familiar theme in ancient cosmologies."⁶⁷ It is more plausible to assume that the author of Genesis 1 is adopting the common cosmological construction of the time (i.e. that the dome

⁶⁶ Webb, *Dome of Eden*, 166-167.

⁶⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 20. Actually, where Webb does mention ancient depictions of the world, it is to say that the depiction of the earth as flat with a hard dome above it is "widespread in the ancient world." Webb, *Dome of Eden*, 214.

covers the whole earth) than to assume that he is radically innovating on it while giving so little indication that he is doing so.⁶⁸

Second, there is absolutely no indication in the Genesis text that the dome only covered part of the earth, or that there were lands excluded from it. Not only is there not the slightest hint of lands existing outside the dome, but the internal coherence of the text would be hugely compromised if that were the case. In Genesis 1:16-17 Elohim sets the heavenly lights—the sun, the moon, and the stars—“in the firmament,” ברקיע, to give light to the earth. If the dome only covered part of the earth, so too would the light of the sun, moon, and stars. Since this is clearly not the case, Webb’s thesis that the dome only covers part of the earth is highly implausible.

Third, Webb’s case assumes that the dome which made Eden a paradise is inaccessible in present times.⁶⁹ Yet David praises God for the existence of the firmament in Psalm 19:1, and recounts how day by day it “pours forth speech.” If God had removed it after the fall, how can David refer to it as still existent in his day?

Finally, the dome theory leaves serious theological questions. If God could so easily exclude Satan’s corrupting influence from a part of the earth, why would God not choose to do the same for all the rest of the earth? Why allow creatures to suffer needlessly when it was so obviously preventable?

⁶⁸ For more on the firmament and ancient cosmology, see Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 120-131.

⁶⁹ Webb, *Dome of Eden*, 225. Confusingly, at one point, Webb seems to imply that the dome *is* still in existence around the whole earth: “Scientists have long puzzled about the increasing rate of the universe’s outward expansion, and physicists have posited a dark energy to account for it. The latest thinking, however, is that the earth might be located in a kind of space-time bubble that is particularly void of matter. This domically shaped bubble would explain why things look further away than they actually are, because light is distorted in a void. The bubble of low density matter surrounding the Earth would thus make speculations about dark matter unnecessary.” Webb, *Dome of Eden*, 215. If the dome were still in existence around the world, one would expect the Edenic conditions underneath that Webb attributes to its presence in Genesis.

Webb's theory simply does not hold up on either biblical or philosophical grounds.

From the considerations explored in regard to Oord, Boyd, and Webb, we can conclude that the identification of natural evil as the result of malicious corruption, including satanic or chaotic ANE entities, which opposed God's creative activity simply cannot be maintained on exegetical grounds.⁷⁰

Other Fallenness Scenarios

We should remember at this juncture the various other positions which advocate for a mysterious fallen cosmos without specifying more carefully what is meant, or where the evil in the cosmos originates. The mysterious fallenness scenarios include Nicola Hoggard Creegan's "wheat and tares" analogy, Celia Deane-Drummond's "shadow sophia," and Neil Messer's Barthian "nothingness." Their approaches differ in important ways. Hoggard Creegan's approach, for example, is closer to the Satanic opposition theory since it admits some sort of opposition against God's works in creation.⁷¹ Deane-Drummond's approach is far more constitutive in nature: the goodness of creation necessarily creates shadows of evil, not as opposition, but as *privatio boni*.⁷² Messer's approach is closer to Oord's position, as it holds that an active principle of chaos, or "nothingness" has threatened God's creation since before recorded history.⁷³ Violence and want are evidence of this non-being.

⁷⁰ Indeed, when highly destructive events happen in the Hebrew Bible, whether whirlwinds, earthquakes, fire, or lightning storms, they are usually associated directly with God's presence: Exodus 19:18; Psalm 77:18; Isaiah 29:6; Habakkuk 3.

⁷¹ Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, 77-78.

⁷² Deane-Drummond, "Shadow Sophia in Christological Perspective," 13-32.

⁷³ Messer, "Natural Evil after Darwin," 139-154.

Yet, none of these positions can account for God calling the creation “very good” once it rests in completion at the end of Genesis 1. Nor can they account for the biblical tradition where God claims the violent aspects of creation as particular points of pride—particularly in the book of Job. We must adopt a different paradigm, leaving aside the notion of fallenness. To further support this move, I will explore the most important biblical texts that were developed into the Fall story, and argue that a fallen cosmos is not a required interpretation of the Scriptural witness.

Genesis 3-9: The Curse

If we have ruled out the possibility that the primordial creation was somehow corrupted by either chaotic or non-human agents, there still remains the traditional story of the human fall instigating a cosmic fall that has left creation cursed and ontologically crippled with violence. I will show in this next section that the story in Genesis does not envision an ongoing immutable corruption of the earth due to human sin, such that it could be construed as a cosmic fall.

First, let us investigate the curse language in Genesis 3:14-19, which is the source story for the cosmic fall myth:

The Lord God said to the serpent,
 ‘Because you have done this,
 cursed are you among all animals
 and among all wild creatures;
 upon your belly you shall go,
 and dust you shall eat
 all the days of your life.
 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and hers;
 he will strike your head,
 and you will strike his heel.’
 To the woman he said,
 ‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
 in pain you shall bring forth children,

yet your desire shall be for your husband,
 and he shall rule over you.’
 And to the man he said,
 ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
 and have eaten of the tree
 about which I commanded you,
 “You shall not eat of it”,
 cursed is the ground because of you;
 in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.
 By the sweat of your face
 you shall eat bread
 until you return to the ground,
 for out of it you were taken;
 you are dust,
 and to dust you shall return.⁷⁴

*Genesis 3:16: The Birth Pain Myth*⁷⁵

Before considering the main argument of the nature of the curse on the ground, let us investigate the seemingly tangential question of pain in childbirth which will act as a small scale argument for the main argument I wish to convey, namely, that a long tradition of one particular reading of these texts has influenced theology beyond the proper emphasis of the text.

The curse of increased pain for women in childbirth is a helpful way to look at one of the problems of the classic cosmic fall argument. In short, throughout the history of interpretation, the curse language was understood to reflect some sort of physiological change in women that caused childbirth to be especially painful.⁷⁶ Developmental anatomists, however, tell us that the pain in childbearing results from the large size of the human brain, and therefore of the

⁷⁴ Genesis 3:14-19, NRSV.

⁷⁵ I am grateful to Iain Provan for first pointing out the linguistic discrepancies that led to this work. His own developed work, published after this chapter was written, can be found in “Pain in Childbirth? Further Thoughts on ‘An Attractive Fragment’ (1 Chronicles 4:9-10),” in *Let Us Go Up To Zion: Essays In Honour of H.G.M. Williamson on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 153, eds. Iain Provan and Mark Boda (Leiden, Brill, 2012): 285-296.

⁷⁶ This is maintained even in contemporary commentaries: Habel, *The Birth, The Curse and the Greening of the Earth*, 61, 131.

human head, conflicting with hips that are ever-narrowing due to an upright walking position. Birth pains are not a result of the punishment of sin, but of conflicting anatomical endeavours. There seems, therefore, to be a conflict between the biblical and scientific aetiologies of suffering in childbirth. I will show, however, that this reading of the text is not the best available, and that in this particular instance, that there is no conflict because the biblical account does not actually make claims about physical pain in childbearing in the first place.⁷⁷

The first thing to acknowledge is that modern English translations stand almost entirely against the interpretation I will try to make. Here is a brief scope of the English translations of Genesis 3:16a:

NRSV: “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children”

TNIV: “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children.”

NASB: “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children;”

CEV: “You will suffer terribly when you give birth.”

ESV: “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.”

Early translations, either because they are more comfortable with the woodenness of the Hebrew text, or because they feel less need to interpret for their readers, translate the Hebrew more literally:

⁷⁷ That is not to say that there are not other places where there is real conflict between the biblical text and a contemporary scientific world-view. Examples such as the existence of a firmament or the special creation of separate kinds of species pose serious conflicts for those who want to hold a very literal reading of the text.

KJV: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.

Wycliffe: I shall multiply thy wretchednesses and thy conceivings; in sorrow thou shalt bear thy children.

The Hebrew phrase in question is:

הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך בעצב תלדי בנים

The first obvious difference between the early and the new translations is that the phrase *עצבונך והרנך*, *‘iṣḇônēk w^ehārōnēk*, is treated as a hendiadys in the modern translations and left as a conjunctive phrase in the older versions. As Hebrew meter allows for both enhancing parallelism, which would suggest the use of a hendiadys here, and contrasting parallelism, which would favour a contrasting conjunctive phrase, there would be little reason to choose one reading over another, all other things being equal. However, the use of the word *עצבון*, *‘āṣabôn*, in the first part of the line and its root, *עצב*, *‘āṣab* in the second is significant because, as Wenham points out “Neither the word used here for “pain,” *עצב*, nor the earlier one, *עצבון*, is the usual one for the pangs of childbirth.”⁷⁸ Hebrew has several different ways of expressing specifically the pains of childbirth,⁷⁹ so why does the author use this particular word for pain here? Nowhere else is this word or its derivatives used in the context of birth pains.⁸⁰ Indeed, the word *עצבון* is exceedingly rare, occurring only three times—twice here in the curse formulation of Genesis 3 and once in Genesis 5

⁷⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 81.

⁷⁹ Such as *קשה ילד* or *חול*.

⁸⁰ The one possible exception is in 1 Chronicles 4:9 where the mother of Jabez names him “sorrow” because she bore him “with sorrow” (KJV) or “in pain” (NRSV): *בעצב*. However, considering this to be specifically his birth pains is problematic, since in the next verse Jabez prays to be delivered from evil so that he would be “kept from hurt and harm” using the same root word for pain: *לבילתי עצבי*. It would be a strange man indeed who would be motivated to pray for deliverance from birth pains! Even in this passage, the implication is toward a generalised circumstance of pain into which the woman gave birth.

at the beginning of the flood narrative. We shall come to a full discussion of the implications of this in the next section. עֲצַב, which is far more common, usually refers to mental or emotional distress.⁸¹ It can mean hard labour in a physical sense, but it never means physical pain. Indeed, the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* makes a special case about the use of this word in Genesis 3:16.

The traditional translations render both terms [עֲצַב and עֲצַבוֹן] with words for physical pain. Since 'šb II refers more to mental than to physical pain, however, this traditional interpretation must be called into question... In the nuanced biblical lexical field of pregnancy and birth (→הרה *hārâ*), that latter does not refer to the actual process of childbirth... The second clause of v. 16 deals with the theme of “having children”; it does not necessarily refer to the process of childbirth itself, for → לֵד' *yālaḏ* can mean simply “have” or “produce” children and is used of both men and women. Having many children was a desirable and fundamental aspect of the labor-intensive agricultural society, albeit not without difficulties: parenting had its own special “pain.” Thus the meaning of 'ešeb in this text is ambiguous: it can mean “labor” and “work” and intensify that statement of the preceding clause; it can refer to the psychological stress of family life; or it can mean both. But it does not mean physical pain.⁸²

These considerations move one away from interpreting the phrase עֲצַבוֹן וְהַרְגָּה as a hendiadys meaning “birth pains” and towards separating the two words into being represented individually, as in “your pains and your conceptions I shall greatly increase.”

What difference does this make? The punishment laid on the woman is not an increase in physical labour pains as the modern translations imply, but rather a warning that the general circumstances surrounding the birth of a child will become extremely painful. Where childbirth ought to be a joyful occasion—bringing new life into a world of relational peace and harmony—now children are introduced into a world of pain and uncertainty. Yet, despite human sin, the

⁸¹ C. Meyers, “asab,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 11: 279.

⁸² Meyers, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 280.

promise of increased conceptions also gives hope of God's continued work with humans.⁸³ Life will continue, and people will still multiply and fill the earth. Thus, even in this larger textual passage of curse formula (though no curse is laid directly on the man or the woman, only on the snake and the ground), the promise and blessing of God is found to continue.

In summary, we see how a close reading of the text reveals that there is no conflict between the modern scientific understandings of birth pangs and the aetiological account of child birth and pain in the Scriptures. This is not because, as some might have it, the Hebrew authors had an understanding of the natural necessity of labour pains, but simply because the text does not actually claim what the popular imagination has, because of modern translations, assumed it does.⁸⁴ Genesis 3 makes no claims at all about the origins of physical labour pains, but only of the sorrow-filled world into which children are born.

In a similar way, I will argue, the opening chapters of the Bible make no negative claim about the ongoing nature of the created world. There is no cosmic fall in the Hebrew Scriptures. I will argue that the curse laid in chapter 3 is lifted in the Noahic flood episode, leaving the ground released from its curse.

עצב *Use of*

Part of constructing the argument that Genesis 3 and Genesis 5-8 form one story about the laying down and the lifting of the same curse involves finding lexical links that draw the narratives together. I want to return for a

⁸³ Alternatively, and more darkly, it may mean that more conceptions will be needed because of increased child mortality rates.

⁸⁴ There are, of course, other etiological claims made by the Hebrew author that would conflict with science, such as the monogenesis of humanity and the lack of evolutionary development of life forms.

moment to the repetition of those strange words in Genesis 3:16, עֲצַב and עֲצֹבוֹן. Why does the author use these two rare words in this passage? עֲצֹבוֹן is used only three times in the entire Hebrew Bible. Twice it is used in the Genesis 3 curse formula, once of the man and once of the woman, creating a parallel between their punishments. The final time it appears is in Genesis 5:29, in the Noahic episode that we shall soon consider. Is there any other reason for the author to use this particular word for pain when other, perhaps more clear words, were available?

I want to suggest that the author's use of עֲצַב, *'āṣab*, in this context is due to a play on words being created with the phonetically similar word עָזַב, *'āzab*. Meaning "to forsake" or "to leave," עָזַב has already shown up in the garden episode in 2:24 in which a man "*will leave* his father and mother in order to cleave to his wife." Used once in a positive sense of normal human relations, a play on the words showing up in the context of the disruption of human relations, particularly between the husband and the wife, seems apt.

Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the two terms show up together, most notably in Isaiah 54:6a:

For the Lord has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit

כי־כֹּאֲשֶׁה עֲזוּבָה וְעֲצוּבַת רוּחַ קִרְאָךְ יְהוָה

The description is of a woman who is both abandoned (עָזַב) and in pain (עֲצַב) of spirit. The prophet uses both these words together in the context of speaking of the marriage bond between Yahweh and Israel, and it seems to indicate that in the covenant context these words could have a close lexical link.⁸⁵ In 2 Samuel 5:21 and 2 Chronicles 24:18, these same Hebrew roots

⁸⁵ Helpfully, for my case, the link between the marriage covenant between Israel and Yahweh and the covenant between Yahweh and Noah is made evident by the following lines in 54:9 "This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you."

show up together again, although here a slightly different word with the same root עזב, *'āṣāḇ* is used, which means “idol.”⁸⁶ The use of these two related words together, particularly as we find them once again in the context of covenantal themes, reinforces the possibility that the writer of Genesis used עזב in order to evoke its similarity to עזב, and having used עזב, would then in turn use the rare but related word עצבון. Word play of this sort is not unfamiliar to the author of the garden narrative. Indeed, wordplays run throughout this passage, the most obvious of which are the play between אדם, *'ādām*, and אדמה, *'ādāmah*, in 2:7 and 3:17 and the play between ערום, *'ārôm*, and ערום, *'ārum*, in 2:25 and 3:1. While a link between עצב and עזב is by no means certain, it may help us understand why the very rare word עצבון is used twice of the human pair in the context of their self-alienation from God and from each other, particularly in light of their marital and covenantal bonds.

Genesis 3, Noah, and ארר

As mentioned earlier, the word עצבון only shows up in three places: twice in the curse formula of Genesis 3, and once just before the Noahic narrative in Genesis 5:29. Immediately the reader ought to be alerted to possible links between the two narratives. Comparing Genesis 3:17 and 5:29 gives a clear picture of the similarities:

Gen 3:17 “And to the man he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it”, cursed [ארר] is the ground [האדמה] because of you; in toil [עצבון] you shall eat of it all the days of your life.’”

⁸⁶ On occasion, though, it is ambiguous which root is meant. Wellhausen, in Psalm 16:4 argues that *'aṣṣāḇōt* should be connected with *'ōṣeḇ* instead of with *'aṣṣeḇeṭ*. Graupner, TDOT, Vol. XI, 281.

ולאדם אמר כי שמעת לקול אשתך ותאכל מן־הגֶּץ אשר צויתֶיךָ לאמר לא תאכל ממנו ארורה הארדה בעבורך בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חייך

Genesis 5:29 “He named him Noah [נח], saying, ‘Out of the ground [האדמה] that the Lord has cursed [אררה] this one shall bring us relief [נחם] from our work and the toil [עצבון] of our hands”

ויקרא את־שמו נח לאמר זה ינחמנו ממעשנו ומעצבון ידינו מן־האדמה אשר אררה יהוה

The related themes between these two passages are clear: the ground, the curse, and the toil. Nowhere else do these three terms come together. In between these two narratives, in 4:1-16, is the account of Cain, who is cursed [ארר] from the ground on account of his brother’s blood, and so the theme of the curse weaves like a thread through the early Genesis narratives, linking the stories together.

When the reader arrives in Genesis 5:29, the curse has been laid down and the prophetic statement that Noah will relieve people of the toil of the curse has been received. In 5:29 there is a play on words between Noah’s name, נח, *nōah*, and the relief נחם, *naḥam*, that he is to bring. Then follows the flood narrative in which the world is uncreated and the chaos of the seas rules over the earth. But as the flood subsides (קלל), the earth re-emerges and God reaffirms his covenant with all living creatures in chapter 9 and assures Noah that a similar destruction will never overtake the earth. Just before the new covenant is established, Noah builds an altar and offers a sacrifice:

Genesis 8:21, NRSV

And when the LORD smelt the pleasing odour, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

וירח יהוה את־ריח הניחח ויאמר יהוה אל־לבו לא־אסוף לקלל עוד את־האדמה בעבור האדם כי יצר לב האדם רע מנערין ולא־אסוף עוד להכות את־כל־חי כאשר עשיתי

I mentioned earlier the play on words between Noah and the relief he was to bring. A similar play on words occurs here between Noah, the relief of chapter 5, and God's response of finding the offering soothing. Noah, נֹחַ, is to bring relief, נֹחַם, and offers a sacrifice which God finds "soothing", נִיחַח. These sacrifices are restful, נֹחַ, to God. As Gordon Wenham writes:

Here however, it is also a deliberate pun on Noah's name. We might even paraphrase it, 'The LORD smelt the Noahic sacrifice.' Lamech called his son 'Noah' because he hoped he would bring him rest from the labor of his hands (5:29): here God implies that Noah's sacrifice has soothed him.⁸⁷

God, being soothed by the sacrifice, relieves the people of their curse through the ground.⁸⁸ Lamech's hope for his son is fulfilled and the curse on the ground is resolved. "Now," writes Norman Habel, "with the revoking of this curse, nature will no longer suffer divine curses because of human sinfulness.... The natural order is declared safe from divine acts of judgment provoked by human deeds."⁸⁹ So far, the removal of the curse seems like a fairly easy argument to sustain: the curse narrative is a typical Hebraic *inclusio* encompassing creation and re-creation.

A Problem

There is however a problem. Let us look again at the lexical links that draw the passages together. The use of the word אָרַר for "curse" in both 3:17 and 5:29 is of particular interest as a link, since אָרַר is only otherwise used of Cain and of Canaan in the primordial Israelite myths that comprise the first eleven chapters of Genesis.⁹⁰ In Cain's case, there exists a strong lexical

⁸⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 189.

⁸⁸ Ellen van Wolde, *Stories of the Beginning: Genesis 1-11 and Other Creation Stories*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1996), 127.

⁸⁹ Habel, *The Birth, The Curse and the Greening of the Earth*, 105.

⁹⁰ Genesis 4:11 & 9:25.

current in favour of linking the curse in chapter 4 with the curse in chapter 3 and 5 since both ארר and the ground, אדמה, show up together: “And now you are cursed [ארר] from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.”⁹¹ The cursed ground extends its curse up to Cain.

When Canaan is cursed in 9:25 after the flood, he is cursed independently of the ground, on account of his own (or rather, his father’s) evil action. This is the first time the word ארר is used independently of the ground, אדמה. Indeed, after 5:29 and the Noahic flood, the ארר curse is never again used in conjunction with the ground, אדמה,⁹² indicating perhaps, that in the new world order established after the flood people are cursed only by their own actions (most obviously laid out in Deuteronomy 27:15-26) and no longer on account of, or through, the ground as Adam and Cain had been—the same curse that Lamech recognised he toiled under. Again, this reinforces the case that the ארר on the ground was lifted. Yet a wrench enters the argument when we look at 8:21 more closely. When the LORD proclaims that he will never again curse the ground, the same word, ארר, is not used of the curse, but rather the much milder curse word קלל.

If there is a case to be made for the lifting of the Genesis 3 curse on the ground in Genesis 8:21, we must ask why the author did not again use ארר but changes to the milder curse word קלל? Gordon Wenham argues that the author changed words because we should not understand the original curse

⁹¹ Genesis 4:11, NRSV.

⁹² The closest to the ground being cursed after this is in Deuteronomy 28:16-18 when the people are assured that if they fail to keep the law they will be cursed in the field, and the fruit of the ground.

on the ground to be lifted, but rather that God only promises not to add to it.⁹³

“The flood was a punishment over and above that decreed in 3:17... it is simply the threat of another flood that is lifted.”⁹⁴

Wenham, however, does not seem to take into account that the flood is never referred to as a curse. What other curse could the author be referring to in 8:21 if not the curse that has been wending its way through the last five chapters? Scharbert asks “But what is the meaning of *lʿqalēll* in Gen. 8:21, since there is no mention of any actual curse in the whole deluge narrative? Here too we can probably follow the early versions (*katarásasthai*, *maledicere*) in translating the verse: ‘I will never again curse the earth.’”⁹⁵ Scharbert argues that even with no other mention of a curse in the deluge narrative, we can take it to be referring to the stronger notion of curse already familiar to the reader.

While I agree with Scharbert that no curse is mentioned in the deluge narrative itself, there is as we have seen the mention of ארר in 5:29 in reference to Noah, before the formal beginning of the deluge narrative in 6:9. The play of words on Noah’s name, the relief of the sacrifice, combined with the emphasis on the ground and the curse seems a significant enough link to hold the two passages together. We are to see the promise of God fulfilled as the lifting of the curse; it is the looked-for rest from the עֲצָבוֹן, the toil and pain, resulting from the curse on the ground. The relief is made tangible, when, after the flood Noah

⁹³ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 190. David Clines also thinks this is the case, but argues that it is because of the parallelism with God promising not to destroy all living things again. David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 77.

⁹⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 190.

⁹⁵ J. Scharbert, “qll,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 40.

plants a vineyard that is so abundantly fruitful that he becomes magnificently drunk.⁹⁶

Why does the author not use ארר in 8:29? Perhaps it is because קלל has already appeared twice in the 8th chapter, referring to the abating of the water, and the author wishes to include a pun about the abating sea and the end of the curse. In the end, it is not certain why the author moves over to this other, as yet unused word. Still, it is significant that the word ארר occurs four times in quick succession in these chapters all in close proximity to the word אדמה and then the two never occur together again in the remaining 59 occurrences of the word ארר in the Hebrew Bible. It seems strongly to suggest that the curse on the אדמה is no longer in effect in the Hebraic mind.

Conclusion to Genesis 1-9

We have seen now how there is good reason to see the curse laid on the ground in 3:17 as having been lifted in the new order of creation after the flood. Norman Habel concludes “The removal of the curse means that nature is fully alive once again, fully green and vibrant. Now there is no fallen creation, no dark side to nature because of human sin. Nature is free of the curse, liberated to become lush, green and plentiful.”⁹⁷

Drawing out the lexical connections between 3:17, 5:29 and 8:21 we have seen how there runs a simple narrative thread: curse, prophecy of the relief of the curse, and then the lifting of the curse. The difficulties in this story, particularly the use of קלל rather than ארר in 8:29, do not pose insurmountable objections to this interpretation. Rather, the ending of the curse lends

⁹⁶ W. M. Clark also links this fruitfulness to the lifting of the curse. “The Flood and the Structure of the Pre-patriarchal History,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83:2 (1971), 208.

⁹⁷ Habel, *The Birth, The Curse and the Greening of the Earth*, 111.

coherence to the story: chaos has receded, the curse is lifted, and a new covenant is made with all living creatures as the creation gets off to a fresh start. Where, in the cursed earth, thistles and thorns were brought forth to man, now they have resumed their proper order, only to be renewed in disorder if people actively disobey the law, as the Israelites are warned in Deuteronomy 27 & 28. The particular type of toil referred to as a result of the curse, the עֲצָבוֹן, is never again brought up in the Hebrew Bible.

As in the example of childbirth pain above, we have a tradition of reading into the curse narrative cosmic effects that are not evident from the text. Weeds and thistles were not necessarily *introduced* to the world because of the curse, only given a new relationship to humanity through humanity's misdeeds.⁹⁸ Predation and natural disasters, traditionally also assigned to the cosmic effect of the human fall, are not even mentioned. Instead, what we see is that the ground is cursed in relation to humanity in Genesis 3, and the curse is lifted in Genesis 8. The cosmic fall as a result of the human fall, which is also the traditional narrative explaining the existence of natural evil, simply does not exist in the opening chapters of Genesis. We cannot look here for an explanation of the abundant suffering of the non-human world.

Romans 8

In addition to the text of Genesis, however, there is often an appeal to Paul's writing in Romans 8:18-23 as the reason a Christian worldview must hold an anthropogenic cosmic fall.⁹⁹ The passage in question reads:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation

⁹⁸ See Augustine's point on p. 101 above.

⁹⁹ E.g. Boyd, "Evolution as Cosmic Warfare," 139.

was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.¹⁰⁰

Most interpreters hear in Paul's veiled references to "the subjection of nature to futility" and its "bondage to decay" an allusion to the Adamic narrative of sin in Genesis 3 and the subsequent curse on the ground.¹⁰¹ The difficulty of the passage is contained, according to James Dunn, in the fact that "Paul was attempting to convey too briefly a quite complicated point: that God subjected all things to Adam, and that included subjecting creation to fallen Adam, to share in his fallenness."¹⁰² If these commentators are right, and Paul is alluding to the curse narrative in Genesis, then (apart from the type of exegesis shown earlier in this chapter) those who wish to take the Bible seriously would be hard

¹⁰⁰ Romans 8:18-23, NRSV.

¹⁰¹ This is the usual interpretation in the standard commentaries: Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 234-35; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* Vol. 1, *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 413; James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38a (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 469-471; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible Series 33 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 505-507; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 436; Douglas J. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 515; Brendan Byrne, "An Ecological Reading of Rom. 8.19-22: Possibilities and Hesitations," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, eds. David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 83-93, 90-91; Cheryl Hunt, David G. Horrell, and Christopher Southgate, "An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23 and a Modest Proposal for its Narrative Interpretation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 59:2 (October, 2008), 569. Hunt et. al. do emphasise that a broader background than just Genesis 3 is likely in view; Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2004), 223. Andrew Linzey, "Good News for the World?," *Third Way* 26:6 (2000), 24; Harry A. Hahne, "The Birth Pangs of Creation, The Eschatological Transformation of the Natural World in Romans 8:19-22," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov. 1999; available at <http://www.balboa-software.com/hahne/BirthPangs.pdf>, accessed 18 Sept 2013; Harry A. Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8:19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 1, 187-88. For a history of interpretation, see Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2010), 65-70.

¹⁰² Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 471. Hahne shares this view: not that creation fell because of rebellion, but "Creation is not in the state in which it was originally created. Yet it is not correct to speak of a fallen creation, as if the subhuman creation disobeyed God... Rather, nature is a victim to human sin." *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 192.

pressed to deny the strength of the human fall causing a cosmic fall—or at least that Paul thought it was so.¹⁰³

However, there is another perspective on this passage which avoids this problem. Laurie Braaten suggests instead, and Richard Bauckham agrees, that Paul is alluding to the Hebrew Bible's motif of the earth going into mourning found in the prophets, rather than to Genesis 3.¹⁰⁴ Hosea 2:3-14; 4:3; Jeremiah 4:23-28; 12:1-11; 23:9-12; and Amos 1:2 all use the motif of the mourning earth to describe the disfunction of the earth as a direct result of human sinfulness and often of subsequent divine punishment. Their argument begins by dividing up the terms *συστενάξει καὶ συνωδῖνε* in verse 22 and refusing to see the phrase as a hendiadys (“groaning in labour”) but rather as two separate terms “groaning” and “travailing.” Separated in this way, the terms do not seem to point together to a one-time event in the past, such as the Genesis 3 curse, but rather point to two different spheres of meaning. The groaning refers to—based on Paul's use in 2 Corinthians 5:2 and the regular use in the LXX¹⁰⁵—mourning and lament.¹⁰⁶ The travailing is associated with Hebrew Bible images of divine judgement.¹⁰⁷ There are nine passages in the Hebrew prophets where the earth is said to mourn in response to human sin or divine judgment on sin.¹⁰⁸ In

¹⁰³ Some scholars are willing to say both that Paul thought the cosmic fall was incited by a historical Adam, and that Paul was mistaken in this respect. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation*, 324.

¹⁰⁴ Laurie J. Braaten, “All Creation Groans: Romans 8:22 in Light of the Biblical Sources,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 28 (2006): 131-159; Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 2010), 92-101.

¹⁰⁵ See Braaten, “All Creation Groans,” 138-141.

¹⁰⁶ Braaten, “All Creation Groans,” 152-154.

¹⁰⁷ Jeremiah 4:31, Isaiah 21:2-3. See also Conrad Gempf, “The Imagery of Birth Pangs in the New Testament,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45:1 (1994), 122-125.

¹⁰⁸ Amos 1:2; Hosea 4:1-3; Jeremiah 4:23-28, 12:1-4, 12:7-13, 23:9-12; Isaiah 24:1-20, 33:7-9; Joel 1:5-20. See Katherine M. Hayes, “*The Earth Mourns*”: *Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic*, *Academia Biblica* 8 (Leidin: Koninklijke Brill, 2002).

Hosea 4:1-3, for example, the earth languishes because of the sin of the people:

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;
 for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
 There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
 and no knowledge of God in the land.
 Swearing, lying, and murder,
 and stealing and adultery break out;
 bloodshed follows bloodshed.
 Therefore the land mourns,
 and all who live in it languish;
 together with the wild animals
 and the birds of the air,
 even the fish of the sea are perishing.¹⁰⁹

In Jeremiah the suffering caused by the demise of the earth stands as one of the outcomes of divine judgment:

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
 and to the heavens, and they had no light.
 I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
 and all the hills moved to and fro.
 I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
 and all the birds of the air had fled.
 I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
 and all its cities were laid in ruins
 before the Lord, before his fierce anger.¹¹⁰

In other prophetic passages the absence of fruit on the vines (Isaiah 24:7) or the departure of birds (Jeremiah 4:25) are the outcomes of human abuse *and* the sentence of punishment. In each of these instances the earth mourns and “what the Earth mourns is the withering and destruction of inhabitants, flora and fauna, and so Paul’s phrase ‘bondage to decay’ or ‘bondage to a process of destruction’ (v 21) is an appropriate description of the state to which God has assigned creation because of human sin.”¹¹¹ Yet these are localised responses to localised human sins, not a cosmic fall scenario where all of nature is

¹⁰⁹ Hosea 4:1-3, NRSV.

¹¹⁰ Jeremiah 4:23-26, NRSV.

¹¹¹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 97.

inherently bound to decay because of a one-time curse. Instead, because all the earth is filled with people, and “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), so too Paul can say the “whole creation” is subject to the effects of sin.

Perhaps the link between Romans 8 and the Hebrew Bible prophets is most clearly seen in Isaiah 24-27. Although this passage is primarily one of lament and judgement, it contains prophecies of hope for the deliverance of both humanity and the wider creation. The most important aspects are the lexical links. In Isaiah 24:1, we are told that in response to sin the earth will be “utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled,”¹¹² or more literally, “destroyed with decay (φθαρῆσεται φθορᾶ)—the same term used by Paul in Rom 8:21 to characterize the decay to which creation has been subjected.”¹¹³ Note that the term φθορᾶ, or decay, is absent from the LXX of Genesis 3 yet here it is used of the future judgment that will occur in response to sin. The decay is associated, too, with a curse on the earth (Isaiah 24:6 “Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt”), but it is obviously distinct from the curse pronounced in Genesis 3 since it has just come into effect. So too, waiting in hope is not mentioned in Genesis 3, but waiting on the future deliverance of the LORD is made explicit in Isaiah 25:9:

It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Isaiah 24:3, NRSV.

¹¹³ Braaten, “All Creation Groans,” 145. Note that φθορᾶ in this context does not mean the instantiation of all decay that has ever happened, as might be imagined in a cosmic fall scenario. It means undue decay, or lack of fruitfulness from expected sources, such as the languishing vine (v.7) causing a lack of wine (v. 7 & 9), or the earth ending up “polluted under its inhabitants” (v.5).

¹¹⁴ Isaiah 25:9, NRSV. Waiting on the LORD’s deliverance is also mentioned in Isaiah 26:8.

Other thematic and lexical links draw the two passages together. Jonathan Moo in particular has found strong parallels between Isaiah 24-27 and Romans 8.¹¹⁵

He notices that the common themes include:

the suffering of the earth due to the Lord's punishment of human sin, the personification of creation's response to judgment, the promise that God's glory will be revealed, the present waiting of the righteous in expectant hope, the use of birth-pang imagery, the defeat of death, and the possibility of life beyond death.¹¹⁶

However Moo, unlike Braaten and Bauckham, does not deny that Paul was referencing Genesis 3. In fact, he considers it "nearly certain" that Paul has been influenced by the Genesis narrative, but finds that "though Paul indeed links the subjection of creation back to Adam, he interprets this narrative in such a way that the effects of the subjection of creation continue to be worked out in the context of a dynamic and ongoing relationship between God, Adamic humanity, and the rest of creation."¹¹⁷ I agree that the Adam event is central to Paul's thought in Romans as a whole, and it is probable that some echo of it is in view here. Yet, the uniqueness of the language of the groaning creation and travail (Paul does not use this language in the rest of Romans) may indicate that he is drawing from a different source, the prophetic literature, instead of the Adamic myth.¹¹⁸ Moo's final conclusion, with which I agree, is that "if Rom 8.19-22 is to be read in light of Paul's possible use of Isaiah 24-27, the *effects*

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Moo, "Romans 8:19-22 and Isaiah's Cosmic Covenant," *New Testament Studies* 54:1 (2008): 74-89.

¹¹⁶ Moo, "Romans 8:19-22," 84.

¹¹⁷ Moo, "Romans 8:19-22," 84.

¹¹⁸ Elsewhere, Paul uses the word for "travail", ὠδίνω, only in Galatians 4:19 and 4:27. The second of these is a quotation from Isaiah 54:1, reinforcing the link with prophetic material in his use of this verb. The Greek verb for "groaning", στενάζω, is derived from the root verb στενάζω which is used elsewhere by Paul only in 2 Corinthians 5:2&4, where the context is the believer's groaning in longing for the redemption of the body "so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." Nowhere else is the creation described as mourning or in travail in the Pauline material.

of creation's subjection may not have entailed for Paul a once-for-all ontological change in the created order, or a 'fall of nature' in the traditional sense."¹¹⁹

There is also a very positive outcome to the idea that Paul is drawing from the prophets: the prophets focus also on salvation for those who mourn and the eventual release for the mourning earth. The mourning of the land in Isaiah 33:7-9 and the mourning women in Isaiah 32:11-13 are promised the peaceful reign of God in Isaiah 32:15-20, including the animals who live in peaceable relationship with humans:

Until a spirit from on high is poured out on us,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.
Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.
My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.
The forest will disappear completely,
and the city will be utterly laid low.
Happy will you be who sow beside every stream,
who let the ox and the donkey range freely.¹²⁰

The devastated and withering fields will be fruitful, the ox and donkey will range freely.¹²¹ Similarly in Joel, the destruction of the earth sends the land and animals into mourning:

The fields are devastated,
the ground mourns;
for the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,

¹¹⁹ Moo, "Romans 8:19-22," 89. Italics original. Emil Brunner is more emphatic: "The Bible knows nothing of a 'fallen world'... We have no right to turn the divine promise that things will one day be different from what they are now, in to the conclusion that 'once they were not.'" *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics: Vol. II*, trans by. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 128.

¹²⁰ Isaiah 32:15-20, NRSV.

¹²¹ Verse 19's description of the forest disappearing, or being laid low by hail, has been problematic for interpreters. Kaiser suggests the verse "consists entirely of allusions" and "that the forest destroyed by the hail is in fact the enemy army, which has overwhelmed the city of God (cf. 10.33f., 18: 30.30)" Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary*, trans. by R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1974), 335-36.

the oil fails.¹²²

How the animals groan!

The herds of cattle wander about
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep are dazed...

Even the wild animals cry to you
because the watercourses are dried up,
and fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness.¹²³

Yet, as the inhabitants join in the mourning and repent (1:11-15) fruitfulness is restored to the people, to the land and to the animals:

In response to his people the Lord said:

I am sending you
grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a mockery among the nations.

Do not fear, O soil;
be glad and rejoice,
for the Lord has done great things!
Do not fear, you animals of the field,
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;
the tree bears its fruit,
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.¹²⁴

The curses brought upon the earth by humans' sin are not irreversible or immutable, but subject to repentance and restoration: hints of the restoration that Paul refers to as the creation being made subject "in hope."¹²⁵

There is a correlation between the redemption of humanity and the release of creation from sin's damaging effects. Until that day of full redemption, the creation is made subject (by God) to ματαιότης, to a frustrated state, where the world displays the "ineffectiveness of that which fails to attain

¹²² Joel 1:10, NRSV.

¹²³ Joel 1:18, 20.

¹²⁴ Joel 1:19, 21-22, NRSV.

¹²⁵ For further work on the theme of Paul's hope, see Horrell et. al., *Greening Paul*, 175-176.

its goal.”¹²⁶ The frustration of the created order echoes the book of Ecclesiastes, with its continual refrain that all is הבל, *hebel*, subject to frustration and fleeting good.¹²⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield likens this frustration to the members of a concerto group being frustrated by the soloist failing to play his or her part.¹²⁸ It is an analogy that may be worth some further exploration.

If the whole creation can be likened to a symphony of praise, we can begin to parse out the meaning of creation’s ματαιότης, its futility and frustration. Imagine a symphony orchestra arranged to play one of Mozart’s concertos. The horns and woodwinds and large stringed instruments all begin in unison and in harmony, and the sound builds into a beautiful melodic theme. But, suddenly, the violins—brashly ignoring the conductor and the music—interrupt on untuned instruments with whatever comes into their fancy. One starts with a loud rendition of “Happy Birthday,” another with “God save the Queen,” and a third simply emits a series of cacophonous squeaks. The performance is utterly ruined because a key set of players have refused their part and gone their own way.

If we were to imagine the same scene with the theology of the traditional cosmic fall, the violins’ rebellion would cause all the other instruments to go out of tune, so that they could no longer play in harmony with each other, or produce in-tune music themselves. In my suggested alternative scenario, the rest of the instruments all continue to follow the music, and through gritted teeth continue the performance until its conclusion. In this case, all the instruments

¹²⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, “Some Observations on Romans 8:19-21,” in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament essays on atonement and eschatology presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th birthday*, ed. Robert Banks (Exeter: Paternoster, 1974), 227.

¹²⁷ Chris Wright, “Theology and Ethics in the Old Testament,” *Transformation* 16:3 (1999), 82; Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 413. Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 190.

¹²⁸ Cranfield, “Some Observations on Romans 8:19-21,” 227.

apart from the violin have performed their duties and have fulfilled what they could fulfill of their potential: their music was well-played and their ability to emit good sound to the audience was not compromised. However, the performance was still ruined by the errant violin section, and the gathered purpose of the orchestra (to perform Mozart's concerto) is brought to meaningless futility by the interruption. The purpose of each individual player is therefore two-fold: to perform their own part well, and for their own efforts to be gathered with all the others into a pleasing performance for the audience. If either one of these objectives is lost, the other is lost as well. A good personal effort is made almost meaningless if the overall performance is ruined by another. Equally, if the personal performance is poor (as in the case of the violins) it will result in the overall performance being ruined. Simply by being part of one orchestra, the fate of the two is tied together.

In a similar way, the individual purpose of each non-human animal to glorify God in its participation in life is not necessarily compromised by human sin because of some ontological shift in the nature of its being. That is, non-human animals have not "gone out of tune" due to a cosmic fall. However, the effects of sin are still such that the corporate purpose of the non-human creation is frustrated, both through the languishing of the creation due to the direct action of humans, but also through the playing out of divine judgment, as seen in the prophetic material.

Paul's statement in Romans 8, then, does not necessarily require that the exegete adhere to a cosmic fall scenario. Once again, this has implications for those theologians who want to hold the ontological corruption of creation by human sin. If creation's work is futile, it is not necessarily so because of an immutable condition tied to the initial sin of Adam, but it may be because of the

ongoing sin of humanity which causes discord and dissonance in the work of creation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to show that there is not sufficient biblical merit for the often proposed notions of the fallen or corrupted creation. We started by looking at the initial state of creation in Genesis 1. Was the earth, as Oord's proposal suggests, created out of a chaos that resisted divine shaping? Oord, it seems, did not sufficiently acknowledge the utter sovereignty and power of God displayed in that chapter: God seems thoroughly in control of the limits and boundaries of the chaos, and is satisfied with the "very good" finished work. Second, we investigated the proposal that some malicious force may have intentionally ruined the creation, as argued by Boyd, Griffiths, Lewis, Pannenberg, and Lloyd. Once again we found the proposal to be lacking in Scriptural support. The creation is ubiquitously attributed to God's work, and even the violent and dangerous elements are claimed by God. Third, we investigated Webb's proposal that the firmament was a dome to protect Eden from the effects of a satanically corrupted cosmic fall. However, we rejected this due to its adherence to the questionable Gap Theory of Genesis 1:1-2 and the dubitable exegesis surrounding the firmament.

Approaches which claim that a primordial cosmic fall occurred, whether by satanic origin or mysteriously, all have to meet the challenge that the world is pronounced "very good" and that it is continuously attributed to God's work.

After setting aside primordial fallenness theories, we looked exegetically at the language of the curse in Genesis 3-8 to see if the garden narrative could account for the presence of natural evil. However, we discovered that the

lexical similarities and narrative structure of Genesis 1-8 pointed toward the curse being lifted after the flood and the world being given a new beginning. The new beginning meant that although future human sin could still damage the creation, as it is portrayed as doing in the prophetic books, the non-human world was not bogged down by an ontological shift due to a curse from the entrance of human sin in Genesis 3. Finally, we looked at Romans 8 and the groaning of creation. I argued, in line with exegetes Braaten, Bauckham, and Moo, that this enigmatic passage could be understood as drawing primarily from the prophetic literature where the earth is seen to mourn in response to localised human sin. This interpretation removes the necessity of accepting a cosmic fall scenario, either due to the human fall or some primordial fall.

Neil Messer has written: “the biblical witness, in short, requires us to say of the world we inhabit both that it is created and that it is fallen; both that it is the work of God, pronounced ‘very good’, and that it is badly astray from what God means it to be.”¹²⁹ While this might be true of the human element of creation, there is no necessary reason why a person who desires to take the biblical witness seriously has to hold to a version of the cosmic fall scenario for the non-human creation, or think that evolution as God’s method of creation is in any way corrupted. We will therefore set aside the fallenness tradition and its variations for the rest of the dissertation. Instead, the way is now clear to see God’s “very good” creation in its full evolutionary form, and ask the inevitable question “why?” The next three chapters will begin to unfold why a good God, without opposition, may have chosen to create through the long, arduous, dangerous, and often painful process of evolution.

¹²⁹ Messer, “Natural Evil after Darwin,” 149.

Chapter 4: Creation, Freedom, and Love

“The external restraint which love practices is often a mark of its freedom from internal limit.”

-W. H. Vanstone¹

Introduction

The end of the third chapter marks a change in the direction of this work. So far we have largely been exploring “the lay of the land,” discovering what roads have been built in philosophical and theological approaches, and have begun to mark some of these roads as dead ends. Our original question was “How can a good and loving God have created through a process like evolution, which necessarily involves so much pain, suffering and untimely death?” Implied in the question are assumptions about the attributes of God, particularly omnipotence and omni-benevolence. The unlimited power of God combined with the universal goodness of God seems at odds with the existence of natural evil. After a preliminary survey of approaches in chapter 2, we set aside the notion that the evolutionary process is a result of fallenness in chapter 3. The cosmos is not fallen or corrupted, but remains the good creation of God. Now we embark on the more constructive part of the project: building a compound theodicy.

With Christopher Southgate and Michael Murray, I propose that only a compound theodicy which draws on several different approaches at once, will be up to the task of addressing non-human animal suffering.² There are six different and essential components to my proposed approach. They are:

- 1) God was limited by the logical constraints imposed by creating a physical world. There was no way to create a physical world and advanced sentient

¹ W. H. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 44.

² See the sections on compound theodicies and defences in chapter 2, p. 44-46.

- beings inhabiting that creation without the possibility of suffering. This is the “only way” argument, sometimes also called the “package deal” argument.³
- 2) While there is no opposing force acting against God’s purposes in creation, the nature of God’s love involves kenotic self-limitation and granting the possibility of creaturely autonomy, resulting in a creation that does not always reflect God’s own loving character. The paths of evolutionary development were open to creaturely innovation which, as in the case of parasitism, may capitalise on disvalues.
 - 3) The work of God does not leave suffering unaccompanied or unredeemed, but continues to make gratuitous suffering not gratuitous after all.⁴
 - 4) The nature of God’s love means there are only limited ways in which the unlimited divine power can be exercised, which prevents God’s unilateral annihilation of evil and disvalue.
 - 5) The meaning, and therefore the value, of a life is only determined eschatologically. What value we ascribe to a life is an intrinsic part of the venture of theodicy, since great suffering *with* great value is usually considered reasonable for God to allow. Therefore, God works to redeem every life in such a way that its life is considered worthwhile even in light of the suffering the creature has undergone.
 - 6) Redemption for creatures, in the ongoing outworking of history and in new life after death, is a key component of what makes suffering comprehensible.
- Various models of redemption can be held together in the image of

³ C.f. Niels Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World,” *dialog* 40:3 (Fall 2001), 197-199.

⁴ Two different conclusions that might be drawn from this particular point are that either there is no suffering so horrendous that God cannot redeem it, or if such an evil were about to occur, God would actively prevent it. It is more difficult to find examples of the second example, but one example might be the possibility of a universe without life. See the discussion on gratuitous evil below, p. 199-203.

redemption as a fractal mosaic, composed of nested layers of redemptive meaning.⁵

My compound approach to theodicy speaks more about the nature of God and God's love than it does about the traditional endeavour of theodicy: weighing the goods and harms experienced by a particular creature. Theodicy is always (at least tacitly) a two-part process. It first asks, "How is God good or loving?" and then, second, applies that definition of God's goodness or love to the suffering world. The next three chapters are, in essence, a treatise on the nature of God. How does God love? How does God act? How does God redeem? The suffering creatures will appear, and applications will be made, but much of the work is spent setting a firm grounding in the nature of God. The next three chapters cover the following themes:

This fourth chapter explores the nature of divine love. What is love? Does God's love differ from ours? What implications does love have for God's activity in, and relationship with, creation? It is the aim of this chapter to argue that God's love involves several implications, including: divine temporal experience of the world, creaturely freedom, kenotic relationship, and a limitation of God's ability to impose God's will on the world.

In chapter five, I will carry forward the basic conclusions of chapter four into an argument concerning divine action. In light of God's love, how is God at work in the world? Here I will focus more on the second part of theodicy: applying the outcomes of God's loving nature directly to God's activity amongst the suffering creatures.

The sixth chapter will explore the nature of the final work of God in redemption. It will argue that redemption is radically individual as well as

⁵ See chapter 6.

communal, and that it combines the personal and universal narratives of history into a coherent and redemptive whole in such a way that no suffering is gratuitous.⁶ The focus is a blend of the first and second parts of theodicy: the question ‘How does God’s love shape God’s redemption?’ is then applied to the suffering individual.

Logical Constraints and Package Deals

The first element of the proposed theodicy—that God had limited options in the original configuration of a physical creation—will not be explored at length in this work because it has been explored extensively in other writings.⁷ Essentially the argument can be summed up as: many things in a physical world are a “package deal.”

If you want rock to have the physical property of hardness so that it can form stable planets, it will also maintain that hardness when the rock falls and crushes a softer creature below it. If animals are to evolve by a process of random genetic variation, then the process which produces beneficial variations will also be able to produce harmful variations, such as cancers. If animals are to be mobile (and therefore exposed to constantly changing environments) and need to regulate some sort of internal homeostasis, they need a warning to tell them when outside elements are doing harm to them and upsetting their ability to maintain homeostasis. Pain is that essential warning system: it informs in

⁶ By “gratuitous” I mean the standard definition of “instances of evil which neither serve as means for bringing about a greater good, nor for preventing a greater evil.” William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Goodness of God* (London: Routledge, 2004), 42. Parsed more carefully, it means that harms are not *instrumental* in the GHA scheme explored in chapter 2 (p. 30) though they may still be part of a property-consequence GHA.

⁷ For more on this topic, see C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 16-27; Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do we have to choose?* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008), 279-281; Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World,” 197-199; Bethany Sollereider, “Evolutionary Theodicy: Towards an Evangelical Perspective” (MCS Thesis, Regent College, 2007), 19-39; See also Southgate’s critique of why the package deal is not enough to solve the problem in Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 12-13, 42-48.

urgent terms that damage is being done to an individual, and generally increases in proportional painfulness in relation to the damage being done. Where an individual does not feel pain, as in rare cases of congenital pain insensitivity or Hansen's disease (leprosy), the individual does not flourish, but perishes quickly from the lack of warning of harmful elements in their environment.⁸

It is the very "badness" of pain that makes it a great biological good. The same "package deal" could be made for countless other elements of the natural world, from earthquakes and competition, to death itself.⁹ The primary outcome of the package deal argument is to limit the scope of the problem from all suffering down to the most theologically problematic suffering. There are various elements of disvalue in the world that do not constitute a theological problem because they are actually the foundation upon which the possibility of life is built in the first place.¹⁰ Without them, there would be no life, and therefore no suffering to discuss. There simply is no alternative, this is the "only way," in the development of life and in its ongoing existence. What is suffering that goes beyond the "package deal" and becomes theologically problematic? It is the suffering that does not aid a creature, but instead severely or completely limits flourishing. In extreme cases, the value of the life as a whole is called into question.

⁸ See Philip Yancey and Paul Brand, *The Gift of Pain* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

⁹ See works noted above in note 7, p. 145.

¹⁰ See also the discussions of nomic regularity and physical constraints in chapter 2, sub-headings "Property-Consequence GHA'S" and "The Value of Suffering: Bio-Centric Approaches," p. 30-36, 78-83.

David Clough makes the critique that “only way” or “package deal” arguments set aside *creatio ex nihilo*.¹¹ Clough writes: “This is a God who is either unable to create in any other way—and is therefore not omnipotent—or chooses to create through suffering and predation when creating without these evils was a possibility—and is therefore not good.”¹² Clough misses the point that even an omnipotent *creatio ex nihilo* is subject to the laws of logic as applied in a physical universe. Such a denial has nothing to do with God’s power. Once God chooses to make a physical world with particular values, some physical realities will make it impossible, even for God, to avoid certain outcomes.

When discussing the limits of creation, we are never arguing simply about whether God *could* have created a world without suffering, which certainly would have been easy enough—it need only be fauna-less.¹³ Instead, we are always discussing whether God could have created a world without suffering, given that God desired X. X could represent any number of attributes, such as creaturely independence, moral freedom, sentience, physical regularity, loving relationships, or any combination thereof. The argument of package deals (which encapsulates all the arguments about nomic regularity explored in chapter 2) is simply the most scientific example of God ‘creating in light of the desired thing, X.’ It is not clear that God could have created, *ex nihilo*, a physical world with anything like the physical qualities it has now, and have that world develop sentient and autonomous creatures, *and* avoid suffering. These

¹¹ David Clough, *On Animals*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012.), 126-27. Clough’s argument is responding in particular to Christopher Southgate’s version of the “only way” argument, which focusses on evolution as the only way to give rise to the values of beauty, diversity, and sentience.

¹² Clough, *On Animals*, 124.

¹³ Before the development of central nervous systems, our world was painless. When algae were the primary life forms on earth, there was abundant life and abundant peace and no suffering at all.

necessary disvalues are physical limits, of course, and no one can show whether or not they are logical limits. A world based on completely different physics, for example might be able to avoid the disvalues. However, as Southgate claims, these limits make “common sense to a scientist. It is hard to imagine a universe not governed by the Second Law of Thermodynamics... [or] an evolutionary process in which natural selection is not a significant factor.”¹⁴

In addition, neither Clough, nor any other objector to the package deal argument, has ever been able to propose a consistent world system that would allow for the values of the package to be retained without the disvalues. Neither side can prove whether this question is possible or impossible. The best we can do is argue that—given that God desired X—it seems impossible that God could have created a world without the suffering and disvalues we see.

The major argument of the rest of this chapter follows a similar “package deal” argument, except that instead of arguing about the physically constrained nature of the world, the focus is on the limits inherent in the nature of God’s love. After the first point of theodicy above, all the others—apart from the fifth (that meaning is derived eschatologically)—are derived from the nature of divine love. To establish a foundation for them, we must first investigate the nature of love.

The Philosophical Nature of Love

In the eleventh book of his *Confessions*, Augustine complains about time:

What is time? Who can explain this easily and briefly? Who can comprehend this even in thought so as to articulate the answer in words? Yet what do we speak of, in our familiar everyday conversation, more than of time? We surely know what we mean when we speak of it. We also know what is meant when we hear someone else talking about it.

¹⁴ Christopher Southgate, “Cosmic Evolution and Evil,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Forthcoming).

What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know.¹⁵

A similar complaint arises when one thinks about the nature of love. Despite thousands of years of songs, poems, books, and experiences of love, there is still little agreement as to what constitutes its nature. Jules Toner remarks “It is a strange and striking fact that even those who write best about love devote very little space to considering what love is.”¹⁶

In traditional philosophical thinking, two divergent camps emerge in regard to the nature of love. Here, I follow Eleonore Stump’s excellent survey in *Wandering in Darkness*, and expand upon the basic outlines of her exploration.¹⁷ The first camp conceives of love as a response to characteristics in the beloved.¹⁸ This is what Niko Kolodny calls “the quality theory” of love.¹⁹ As Gabriele Taylor writes: “if x loves y then he does so in virtue of certain determinate qualities which he believes y to have.”²⁰ David Velleman nuances this by saying that it is not only the qualities themselves, but attention to the valuation of the qualities of the beloved that evoke love: “I am inclined to say that love is likewise the awareness of a value inhering in its object; and I am also inclined to describe love as an arresting awareness of that value.”²¹ For Velleman it is the rational nature of the beloved that is to be loved, not any

¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Bk.11, ch.17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 230.

¹⁶ Jules J. Toner, *The Experience of Love* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1968), 8.

¹⁷ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 85-107.

¹⁸ This argument reaches as far back as Plato, who understood love as a response to beauty.

¹⁹ Niko Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” *The Philosophical Review* 112:2 (Apr, 2003): 135-189, 135.

²⁰ Gabriele Taylor, “Love,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 76 (1975-76): 147-164, 153.

²¹ J. David Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Ethics* 109:2 (Jan 1999): 338-378, 360.

particular qualities that nature might bring forth. It is the choosing capacity itself which is to be loved, not the choices that are made.

However, two objections emerge which seem to overturn this responsive definition: the first objection is that those values might change in the beloved,²² and the second is that there is no reason why love should not be transferred immediately to some new object upon recognition of equal or superior values.²³ Yet, intuition would tell us that (while sometimes this may happen) love which changes objects when a person of superior value walks by, or love which ceases to love the beloved after an accident or illness changes the valued characteristics, is not real love but somehow defective. By this definition of love alone, we would certainly not want to be the recipients of love.

In response, the second philosophical camp defines love as an act of the will by the lover, what Eleonore Stump calls the “volitional account” of love.²⁴ Harry Frankfurt defines love this way, pointing out that his love for his children is precisely what causes them to have value, not vice versa.²⁵ In the classic work by Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, he identifies agape (the *Christian love par excellence*) as this sort of value-creating, spontaneous love that arises entirely out of the character of the lover.²⁶ “We look in vain,” he writes, “for an explanation of God’s love in the character of the man who is the object of His love. God’s love is ‘groundless’... the only ground for it is in God Himself.”²⁷

²² A person might very well lose their attributes, or even their power of choice, due to an accident, dementia, or other misfortune. This objection only applies if we see love as a current response to attributes. If we continue to love someone for attributes they *used* to have, it falls under the historical category of love that is developed below.

²³ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 86.

²⁴ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 87.

²⁵ Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 39.

²⁶ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. by Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 75-77.

²⁷ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 75.

While this solves the problem of the beloved facing competition from someone with superior virtues, it creates its own problems. Stump points out that if the beloved asks the reasonable question “why do you love me?” the volitional lover must answer “Oh, there is no reason, at least no reason having anything to do with *you*.”²⁸ The love of volition can give no reason for its existence in respect to the beloved. In which case, any choice or particularity of love—say, to love one’s husband more than the stranger on the street—is completely arbitrary.²⁹

In light of the unsatisfactory nature of both these definitions, there have been several attempts to find other ways to conceptualise love. Thomas Oord has proposed the definition “to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.”³⁰ The aspect of sympathetic response in this definition overcomes the problem of the volitional account being unable to explain itself. If asked “why do you love me?” the answer would be “because I see your need for well-being, and I choose to respond.” Oord’s definition removes part of the arbitrariness of the volitional account of love—we can now account for why it is *this* beloved and not another, because the particular attributes or needs of this person call forth our sympathetic response—but locating love in an act still holds many problems. It does not, for example, solve the problem of substitutability. If the lover sees another object worthy of sympathetic response, there is no reason not to move to a new beloved. If we try to use the volitional part of his definition to say that

²⁸ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 87. Italics original. David Bentley Hart critiques the monopoly of agape love in his own way when he writes of beauty evoking desire. “Here Christian thought learns something, perhaps, of how the trinitarian love of God—and the love God requires of creatures—is eros and agape at once: a desire for the other that delights in the distance of otherness.” David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 20.

²⁹ Nygren follows this logic to its end by saying that any real love has to be universal in order to avoid the charge of arbitrariness, and therefore any love that chooses a specific object is not real love. See the discussion of Nygren’s cat below, p. 155.

³⁰ Thomas J. Oord, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), 15.

the faithfulness rests only in the lover's choice, then it is the faithfulness rather than the love that is now without explanation.

To solve the problem of faithfulness, philosophers have added the notion that a historical component is necessary to love.³¹ Kolodny argues simply that "one's reason for loving a person is one's relationship to her: the ongoing history that one shares with her."³² We love because we have historical experience which draws out attachment to the particular individual. An identical twin or even a superior person cannot be loved in the place of the beloved because there is no shared history to make that love authentic. Love is not situated only in the attributes of the beloved (which may change) nor solely in the character or intentions of the lover (which ends up ignoring the beloved), but in the relationship between them. Here is an explanation for the faithfulness of love in response to changed attributes and an explanation for why a substitute of the beloved is not good enough.

However, the historical position is open to critique: as Stump points out, it denies the reality of unrequited love.³³ There is no place for Dante's famous love for Beatrice, for example, a love that Dante held for decades (and even after her death), despite only meeting her on two occasions. There was no shared history, and no hope for a future shared history—no relationship (by Kolodny's standards, at any rate) to justify Dante's love. For Kolodny, this simply is not love. As Stump points out:

³¹ Niko Kolodny, Christopher Grau, and Robert Kraut all add a historical dimension to their definition of love. Cf. Kolodny, "Love as Valuing,"; Christopher Grau, "Love and History," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48:3 (Sep 2010): 246-71; Robert Kraut, "Love De Re," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 10 (1986): 413-30.

³² Kolodny, "Love as Valuing," 135-36.

³³ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 88-90. Kolodny presents shared history as an essential, and not simply an important, component of love. If it was only an important component, Stump's objection would not stand, since one could simply say that Dante's love lacked a component that would make it ideal, rather than non-existent.

On Kolodny's account, we have to say not that there is something defective or deplorable about Dante's love for Beatrice, but just that he did not love her. Dante did not suppose that he had a relationship (in Kolodny's sense of 'relationship') with Beatrice, and so he also did not believe that there was such a relationship between him and Beatrice that rendered his love of her appropriate.³⁴

The implications of this conclusion if extended to divine love would be disastrous: it would mean that God could not love those who did not return God's love.³⁵ The unrequited nature of much of God's love for humanity would meet Kolodny's criticism that God should (in these cases) "get over it, and move on."³⁶ Again, Kolodny's conclusion would be that in the light of a profound inequality of positions or without the prospect of reciprocated concern, concern is likely inappropriate and love is simply absent.³⁷ This is obviously an inappropriate conclusion when it comes to divine love, so whatever our definition of love, it must include the possibility of one-sided, unrequited love that is still love.

In *Wandering in Darkness*, Eleonore Stump presents a Thomistic definition of love that seems to meet all the required conditions.³⁸ According to Stump's interpretation, Aquinas defines love as the product of two interconnected desires: the desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire for union with the beloved.³⁹ These two desires, when they are truly desires of love and not some other desire disguised as love, will always converge. This

³⁴ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 89.

³⁵ In the case of Dante, if one agreed with Kolodny, one could at least appeal to the option that Dante's love was a fantasy completely invented in his own mind. Dante was not so much perverse, as simply misled. Such a defence could not be used of God, because God really is in relationship with every creature at every moment.

³⁶ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing," 171.

³⁷ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing," 170-71.

³⁸ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 90-107. The same content is also found in her 2006 article "Love by all Accounts," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80:2 (Nov. 2006): 25-43.

³⁹ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 90.

means that the desire for union with the beloved will always contribute to the good of the beloved, and the desire for the good of the beloved will always contribute (ultimately)⁴⁰ to union with the beloved.

Now, desire for the good of the beloved can be a general, universal desire—one can desire the good of many, and desiring good for others does not require any particular attribute or trait in the beloved. Desire for the good of the beloved would explain why love does not falter when encountered with change, or is faithful when others with similar or superior values emerge. However, from this desire only, we would end up with the same problem as the volitional lovers: when asked “why do you love me?” the answer is “it has nothing at all to do with you,” which is unsatisfactory. Furthermore, there is no particular reason to love any person uniquely, since one can equally desire the good of many. However, the desire for union with the beloved introduces a specificity and particularity to love that is responsive to the beloved.⁴¹ If I desire union with John or Valerie, they cannot be replaced by Peter or Karen, because I desire union with *this* person and not with another, based on their characteristics, our shared history, and our relationship: it is a response to the beloved. The specificity solves the problem that so antagonised Nygren: it seemed to him that to love one beloved in a particular and special way was to mistreat every other individual of that type. Nygren’s logic leads one to say, for

⁴⁰ It needs to be said, however, that sometimes the truest act of love for the good of the beloved, temporarily, is to hold back from the union that is desired because to pursue that union would be to overwhelm the beloved. (See the discussion of self-willed loneliness below, p. 168) However, this would always be done in hope that the beloved (in having their freedom) will develop and grow to the point where the expressions of love would be received and returned. Even the withdrawal of acts of love out of interest for the good of the beloved can be in pursuit of an ultimate union with him or her.

⁴¹ It should be noted here that the first desire of good for the beloved will regulate both the type and the action of union: as mentioned in the note above, it may be that there are cases where the best option for the beloved is not to have significant union with the lover. The self-restraint of love will be explored at greater length below.

example, that for him to feed his cat would be to do an injustice to every other hungry cat that he was not feeding. Stump, in contrast, writes:

On Aquinas's account of love, a person can have an impartial love of all human beings. But Aquinas also supposes that some loves are and ought to be greater than others. A person ought to love all human beings, but not equally. She should love some people more than others in virtue of having certain relationships with them, which ought to make her love for them greater than her love for humanity in general.⁴²

The same could be said of other non-human objects of love, such as pets.

Since the desire for union must also converge with the good of the beloved, the union desired must be of an appropriate type.⁴³ For Stump, desire for union is closely tied to what she calls the "offices of love."⁴⁴ The office of love is, quite simply, the type of relationship one holds with another. This might be mother, friend, lover, teacher, patient, or something else. What is important to note for my purpose here is that offices are partly dependent on the characteristics of the beloved. We can, for example, take an office like "mother" which seems general and universal enough, but realise that no one is only "mother." Everyone who is a mother is a "mother to so-and-so." The limits and boundaries of the office change depending on who the beloved is. A woman may be mother to both Julia and Steve, but if her relationship to both was exactly the same, something would be wrong. Circumstances, needs, and inherent abilities all shape how the love of the mother for the child will be expressed, and how far—as well as what type of—union will be achieved. Stump uses the example of a man who composes music trying to share his joy with a very beloved but tone-deaf sister. Her capacity to share in his music, and

⁴² Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 97.

⁴³ It should be noted that "union," in this context, is not a euphemism for sexual relations. It means to share oneself, be accepted by the other, and to accept what the other shares of themselves in return. That sharing could involve conversation, skills, gifts, or any other type of sharing one's self with another.

⁴⁴ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 98. She uses the term in a similar way to Kraut's definition in "Love *De Re*," 425-426.

thus her ability to be united with him in that aspect of their love is dependent upon her innate qualities and abilities (or lack thereof).⁴⁵ Each relationship is unique, and each relationship must be weighted on all the considerations of office, inherent qualities of the lover and the beloved, and the circumstances in which love is to be expressed.

Love, then, as the desire for the good and for union with the beloved holds together the qualities of the beloved, the relationship of the lover to the beloved, and the volition of the lover into a unified whole. It also allows for unrequited love. Since the desires are centred in the lover, it simply says that in the case of unrequited love the desires will not be fulfilled, accounting for love's painfulness. With this definition we move forward into our discussion of God's particular love.

The Nature of God's Love

One Love or Two Loves?

Before we engage the question of God's love for the non-human world, one more task remains: it is important to decide whether there is only one kind of love, or whether there are two, namely, divine and human.⁴⁶ For some, divine love is of a completely different essence than human love and so we should not talk about the two with the same language. Nygren, for example,

⁴⁵ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 99.

⁴⁶ A great deal of theologians mention God's love but make no exploration of what it means or what might constitute it. An example of this is Thomas G. Weinandy, who talks about God's "all-loving" nature, and says that this is expressed through the Cross, but never defines what is meant by love. "God and Human Suffering: His Act of Creation and His Acts in History," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, eds. James F. Keating and Thomas J. White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 99-116. In a similar way, in Kathryn Tanner's book *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny and Empowerment?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1988) divine love is mentioned only six times, and each time it is used as a simple attribute of God, without any explanation of its nature. It seems to me a serious problem to insist that God is timeless and immutable in love while not presenting a definition of love that makes those claims coherent.

divides up love into *eros* and *agape*.⁴⁷ Human love is almost always *eros*.

Nygren believes that humans *can* participate in a form of *agape*, though even that human *agape* is better described as “faith” since it is a response to God’s love and not something existent entirely on its own. True *agape* for Nygren is self-existent and independent of any motivation or response, and therefore can only exist entirely in God.⁴⁸ The definition of love we have been exploring above, involving desire as it does, would be equally suspect since it implies a lack in God.

Does desire imply a lack in God? Can God desire? Keith Ward, in *Religion and Creation*, argues that desire is necessary to any notion of God’s creativity. As opposed to seeing desire as a lack in God, Ward sees it as “the good of creative activity itself, in which the creator realises new and imaginative forms of beauty and intellectual complexity.”⁴⁹ In order to engage in creative activity, something like desire, and something like a temporal movement toward the realisation of goals is necessary.⁵⁰ There is no reason why the desire of God for creation should diminish the being of God. Proposing any sort of desire within the divine nature, however, does lead to an adjustment of the classical attributes of God, as will be discussed below in much greater detail.

For now, I argue that there is only one love: expressed across a spectrum of ability and with varying degrees of success. Proposing only one real type of love, rather than dividing it as Nygren does into a human type and a divine type, also means that I am making an assumption that our being is

⁴⁷ A significant critique of Nygren’s division is found in Thomas Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (Atlanta, GA: Chalice Press, 2010), 39-51.

⁴⁸ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 99, 140, 218.

⁴⁹ Keith Ward, *Religion and Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 185.

⁵⁰ For an excellent argument on the temporal nature of God see Ryan Mullins, “In Search of a Timeless God” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 2013). God’s temporal experience will be explored below.

significantly like God's. Univocity of being, a concept worked out significantly by Duns Scotus, means that when we speak of the similarities between our own nature and God's nature, we can do so by more than mere analogy.⁵¹ While I cannot make a full argument about the necessity of the univocal rather than analogical nature of God's being here, it is a proposition that I assume. I assume univocity because it allows us to say something substantially true about who God is—even analogical language presupposes some degree of similarity of nature or else the analogy could not be made at all (or all analogies would be equally relevant).⁵² In relation to love, univocity is required to make sense of the biblical commands to love. Jesus says “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”⁵³ There would be little coherence to this commandment if the love we were meant to bear to one another was in fact something utterly and ontologically different from what Jesus brought to us.

One might observe that human love does not often look like divine love. Divine love is necessarily perfectly formed and perfectly expressed: it is unalloyed by either selfishness or hatred, nor hampered by unforgiven hurt. In humans, although the essence of love is the same, it cannot be expressed the same way. Love is simply unable to be expressed in its full, unlimited nature through finite beings. The master chess player and the novice are playing the same game by the same rules, but the expression of a chess game will be vastly different. The finiteness of expression in humans does not make the love

⁵¹ There is a long history of philosophers and theologians who accept the univocity of God's nature. See Colin Gunton's exploration of univocity in *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM, 2002), 69-75; Philip Tonner, “Duns Scotus' Concept of the Univocity of Being: Another Look,” *Pli* 18 (2007): 129-146. There are also plenty of theologians, particularly those who are part of the Radical Orthodoxy movement, who utterly reject univocity of being. See Hans Boersma, “Accommodation to What? Univocity of Being, Pure Nature and the Anthropology of St. Irenaeus,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8:3 (July 2006): 266-293.

⁵² Tonner, “Duns Scotus' Concept of the Univocity of Being: Another Look,” 130.

⁵³ John 15:12, NRSV.

in question any less true or rigorous, it simply means that love as expressed by humans will not carry the unlimited nature of the phenomenology of divine love.

Now we can finally ask how our definition of love as the desire for the good of the beloved and desire for union with the beloved affects the discussion of suffering in the natural world.

“For God so loved the worms”

First of all, Aquinas’s definition deals with some common objections to evolutionary theodicy. The first of these is that God cannot or does not love the non-human world. For some, the non-human world is not a proper object of divine love. Without the complex brain structures that humans have, worms (for example) are not capable of sentient brain states, and therefore are unable to love God back. From a relational view of love, this would be a fatal objection. For Kolodny and his fellow theorists, the possibility of love for worms is already ruled out. However, for the Aquinas/Stump thesis of love, God’s desire for the good of each and every worm *is* plausible, as is God’s desire for union with each worm—as long as we include the caveat that the union must be appropriate to the office of love. In the case of worms, the office of love that exists between God and a worm is that of Creator and “wormly creature” respectively. The form that relationship of love takes will also be appropriate to the inherent abilities and limitations of the worm: the love will be “wormish” in nature. And since it is “wormish,” the love shared between God and the worms need not be perceivable or understandable to any other species.

The Aquinas/Stump definition of love helps solve another objection: that God has to treat all creatures completely equally in every respect. The nature of love *does* require that God desire union with each beloved and desire the

good of each beloved. However, since each beloved has unique characteristics, experiences, and potentials that determine the shape of the good and the type of union available to God, there can be variation in *how* God loves each creature. God can love the adult chimpanzee with a different sort of love than God loves the worm, because the adult chimpanzee is sentient, has memory, and experiences suffering. The adult chimpanzee also has the capacity for altruism and aggression. The worm, as far as we know, has none of these things. The good for the chimpanzee and the worm will therefore be different. Although both will ultimately (as with all created things) find their good in union with God, the chimpanzee will have far more specified needs to fulfil than the worm. In fact, as we set out a theodicy with regard to the worm, there is no particular reason that even being trod underfoot should be inimical to the good of the worm, if we consider the following:

- the worm does not have the sentient capacity to experience suffering
- the worm has the ability to participate fully in the divine gift of life
- the simple stretching out of the worm's life for longer does not necessarily equate to value for the worm because of its lack of sentience
- the worm shares in the hope of redemption with all of creation and therefore the "self" of the worm is not lost in death
- the manner of the worm's death and the subsequent outcomes of the worm's death (its feeding a passing bird, for example) may all be reflected back to the glory of the worm⁵⁴

In so far as the worm exists in relationship with God and the world, the worm is pursuing its greatest good⁵⁵ with as much intention and capacity as it is

⁵⁴ I expand upon this argument a great deal in chapter 6.

⁵⁵ The goods I have proposed here are necessarily speculative. What the true good of the worm (alluded to here as "union with God") is not something one could know without being a worm or being God, as we have no access to the inner content of the divine-worm relationship.

able.⁵⁶ The death of the worm is a simple result of those relationships having consequential integrity. For the chimpanzee the matter of life and death becomes more complicated, because there is more ability to choose and more ability to suffer. For that highly intelligent primate, *Homo sapiens*, in whom mutual loving relationship with God finds its greatest potential, things become the most complex. Nonetheless, there is no reason that God cannot love the worms, even though they do not (in our current understanding) have the capacity to love back. In so far as the existence of worms adds to the fullness of creation, God loves worms out of God's own volitional desire and in response to a worm's ability to be a worm.

An objection related to the conclusion that God loves every creature is that if God loves and knows every sentient creature, then God cannot act in a way to relieve the suffering of one sentient creature without being morally obligated to respond in a similar way to every other sentient creature. To do so would seem to make God morally arbitrary—a point raised by Wesley J. Wildman.⁵⁷ In response, Philip Clayton and Stephen Knapp have proposed what they call the “not-even-once” principle: “A benevolent God could not intervene *even once* without incurring the responsibility to intervene in every case where doing so would prevent an instance of innocent suffering.”⁵⁸

However, the Thomistic definition of love gives us another option because it

⁵⁶ Readers may immediately jump to the ethical question of “then is there any way that I can harm the worm by treading it underfoot?” In the case of the worm, I would say “probably not” but in the case of more sentient animals, the answer would be “probably/certainly.” In the case of the trod-upon worm, the greatest damage would likely be to the soul of the person, if the person—by cruelty or malice—intentionally set out to destroy another living creature. But there is no room to pursue the ethical treatment of animals here. See Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 92-115.

⁵⁷ Wesley J. Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty, Disconcerting Truth: Ultimate Reality and Suffering In Nature” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds Nancey Murphy, Robert J Russell & William R Stoeger (Vatican City/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007): 267-294.

⁵⁸ Philip Clayton & Steven Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49. Italics original.

does not propose that God's relationship to each creature is equal. Quite the opposite. Every creature has a unique relationship to God based on the givenness of its species, abilities, personality, environment, and history. And God's concern is radically individual: how to promote *this* creature's greatest good. Therefore, God would not be automatically morally obligated to intervene in every other situation of suffering, but only to act in each individual's life in a way that is consistent with its own greatest good. Since every situation is different, each choice of divine action will be uniquely considered under the surrounding circumstances and in light of the particular suffering subject. An example will help illustrate this point.

Aron Ralston made headlines in 2003 when, after a large boulder crushed and pinned his right arm, he self-amputated the limb and walked to help. He spent 127 hours alone with his life in the balance. How does he reflect on this horrific accident? "It was the most beautiful moment of my life... that was the moment I stepped out of my grave and into my life. I don't regret losing my arm."⁵⁹ For Ralston, the experience of extreme suffering acted as a catalyst for growth and joy. For many others, a similar situation would simply have destroyed them, body and spirit. We could understand, then, that in this situation God *might* be justified in allowing the rock to fall on Ralston's arm while not allowing it to fall on another person's arm for whom the experience could have no redemption. I want to emphasise that this example cannot be applied to all cases of suffering, since many instances of suffering are in fact life-destroying. However, it can be raised usefully as a caution in invoking

⁵⁹ Interview by Vincent Graff, "Trapped again for 127 hours: After cutting off his own arm in a climbing accident Aron Ralston is ready for another wild adventure," accessed 11 November 2013, available from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2043213/After-cutting-arm-climbing-accident-Aron-Ralston-ready-wild-adventure.html#ixzz2kLCq5xXb>.

something like a “not-even-once” type argument because it paints all circumstances of suffering with the same brush.

With humans, we can talk to a person afterward and understand what impact an event of suffering had on their inner experience. With non-human animals, we have no access to this sort of communication, nor would we even necessarily recognise what might be considered beneficial or harmful in their own inner experience. I cannot, therefore give any specific illustrations to show how this might be true in a non-human animal without the accusation of overly anthropomorphising the circumstances. However, to God, who would know the inner experience of each creature, a justification could be made that one creature might be able to bear suffering differently to and better than another creature. Equally, on a macro-scale, the increased complexity, power, and skill of diverse species in response to eons of adverse conditions gives more than a hint that there certainly have been responses to suffering that have brought about a glorification rather than a diminution of the selfhood of creatures. In turn, the possibility of glorification through suffering as likely for some and impossible for others allows for the justification of different treatment of creatures depending on various factors. The observation that God can treat individuals differently in response to their unique needs does not get us much closer to answering the question “why does God allow the innocent to suffer?” in particular circumstances,⁶⁰ but it does avoid Wildman’s charge that a God who would intervene in some cases and not in others is totally inconsistent without dropping all possibility of physical interaction with the world as Clayton and Knapp do.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Some attempt will be made in chapter 5 to explore divine responses to particular circumstances where God does allow suffering.

⁶¹ Please refer to chapter 2, subsection “Radically Redefining God” for the explanation of Wildman, Clayton, and Knapp’s views, p. 62-63, 66.

It might be asked, “How far into creation can God’s love extend?” If God can love worms, what about a smallpox virus, a tree, or a mountain? There are no clear-cut, satisfying answers to this question, because it is impossible at some levels to discern what the “entity” is that is to be loved. A tree may be a distinct unit, but how is the mountain to be divided from the plate below? Should slime mould be considered one organism or an aggregate of organisms? For a process theist, every unit conceivable, down to the components of an atom, are unique entities and therefore recipients of the love of God. However, I think that something has to have life in order to “have” a good.⁶² Anything that can adapt—that is, exhibit behaviour and respond to external stimuli in a way that benefits itself—can have both a definable good (e.g. “reach more sunlight” or “exchange DNA with a fellow bacteria”) and some means of pursuing that good (e.g. “grow taller” or “move over there”).⁶³ While the existence of a mountain might *be* good, it has no good of its own to pursue, and no ability to adjust or adapt to a good. Therefore, while we might have a desire to see or possess something inanimate, and our desire might imitate the desires of love, those things are not proper objects of love. God can love the smallpox virus, but not the mountain.⁶⁴

In this section we have explored some of the most common objections to the idea that God could love the non-human animal world. The Aquinas/Stump definition of love was useful in demonstrating that God could love the part of

⁶² Cf. Holmes Rolston, “Naturalizing and Systematizing Evil,” in *Is Nature Ever Evil? Religion, Science and Value* ed. Willem B. Drees (New York: Routledge, 2003), 67-86, 70-71, 76-80.

⁶³ Of course, there are times when life itself is fairly ambiguous. A virus outside of a host does not act like a living organism. Some might consider inanimate objects to have a “good” as well, for example, the “good” of a river to reach the sea. But we can only be speaking metaphorically if we speak of the river’s “good” in this way. The water in the river is not harmed by being dammed up or otherwise prevented from achieving this “good.” However, living creatures are harmed, even destroyed, if they are prevented from achieving their various goods.

⁶⁴ On this definition, a human cannot love the mountain either. While we might use the language of love in regard to inanimate objects, we can only mean it analogously.

creation that could not love God back. We also saw that God's love for all of creation does not mean that God is forced to treat every creature in exactly the same way. Quite the opposite, the uniqueness of each relationship and its circumstances means that there is almost endless flexibility in Creator-creature relationships. In practice, there might be little difference in how God treats a worm, a beetle, and a spider. The lack of difference does not arise out of moral limitations on God, or out of lack of love entirely, but because none of these creatures have needs that require particularly different treatment.

The Theology of Love

So far we have explored primarily philosophical definitions of love. Now we will investigate the nature of God's love from theological perspectives, and merge them with the outcomes of the philosophical study.

W. H. Vanstone has been an influential theological voice reflecting on the nature of love. His now-classic *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* offered a highly-regarded treatment of God, love, and the risk of creation. His thought deeply impacted later theologians, and the 2001 edited volume *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*,⁶⁵ which explores the engagement of love and creation, was dedicated to Vanstone, with each chapter beginning with a quotation from *Love's Endeavour*.⁶⁶

Vanstone does not, like Stump, positively define love's nature in his work. Instead, he defines the *boundaries* of love through three phenomenological

⁶⁵ *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

⁶⁶ The volume contains essays from many of the foremost scholars in science and religion, including Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Sarah Coakley, Holmes Rolston III, Keith Ward, Paul Fiddes, and Jürgen Moltmann.

markers. He proposes three marks that show the *inauthenticity* of love. They are the marks of limitation, control, and detachment.⁶⁷ If these are present, love is not. I will use these three marks to organise my thoughts in the coming section.

Another influential voice reflecting on the nature of love is Denis Edwards. In *How God Acts*, this Roman Catholic theologian explores an understanding of divine love based on God's actions in the Christ event. By looking at Jesus' life, Edwards comes to the conclusion that the love of God will lead God to wait upon the creation, be vulnerable to it, and participate with it.⁶⁸ He develops a theological view of love that is deeply consonant with Vanstone's vision, but defined positively instead of negatively. In the next few pages, I will weave the approaches of Edwards, Stump, and Vanstone together into a theological picture of divine love in creation.

The Mark of Limitation

If love is limited, according to Vanstone, it is not love in its truest form. Love, in its ideal form, must be unconditional and endless. It cannot depend upon a certain response or a certain set of characteristics (though it can, as we have seen, respond to certain characteristics). In Stump's definition, the limitlessness of love is derived from the unlimited desire for the good of the beloved. If the lover loves the beloved, then the lover necessarily desires the good of the beloved, and there is no point at which that desire ceases. For Edwards, the limitlessness of love is demonstrated by God's startling patience: God does not force or coerce creation, but waits through the billions-year-long

⁶⁷ Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense*, 42-50.

⁶⁸ Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 24.

process of star and element formation and then through the long ages of evolutionary development for life to mature into sentience.⁶⁹ In light of such patience for cosmological processes, the patience extended to individual creatures is impossible to exhaust.

Furthermore, if God loves the creation, then regardless of the outcomes or cost, God must commit to the project of creation without hesitation and without calculation. Limitlessness means that God will never turn away from the desires of love for creation. No amount of disvalue, pain, or even of rebellion will turn God away from desiring the creation's good and seeking union with the creation. Because God's desire will not be turned away, the patient action of God (even if only in actively waiting) will never end until the full resources of God are expressed. God's love is limitless: "it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."⁷⁰ Hope for creation is not grounded in God's ability to unilaterally decide the whole of history, but in the unlimited faithfulness and creativity of divine love.⁷¹ Too often, hope has instead been placed in the ability of God to overpower and control any and all resistance to God's kingdom. But control, as we will see, is anathema to love.

The Mark of Control

Vanstone's second mark of inauthentic love is the mark of control. Vanstone writes "When one who professes to love is wholly in control of the object of his love, then the falsity of love is exposed."⁷² We cannot both love and control because love necessarily involves respect for the will and being of

⁶⁹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 51.

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:7, NRSV.

⁷¹ Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour*, 63.

⁷² Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour*, 45.

the other.⁷³ Stump discusses the question of control in relation to a tendency in the beloved toward “self-willed loneliness.”⁷⁴ Self-willed loneliness is the internal isolation of an individual—the refusal to accept or return love. This chosen loneliness by the receiver of love is driven by shame, and cannot be overcome until internal fragmentation within the person is drawn back together and the person allows another near them. Even God cannot force someone out of their self-willed loneliness, for to do so would be to do violence to the very self that needs integration. To intrude without invitation would be to drive that already fragmented self further apart.

I don’t think the non-human world necessarily shares in the shame and self-willed loneliness that undergirds Stump’s argument.⁷⁵ However, the principle is the same even without self-willed loneliness: for God to control the creation entirely would be to determine and therefore destroy its capacity to develop self-being in so far as it possesses that capacity. Since creation’s “selving” is good and God desires the good of creation, then if God loves the creation, God will not control and thereby short circuit that process of development.⁷⁶ For Edwards, God’s respect for creaturely autonomy is most

⁷³ Some might think that parental love is a counter example: that parents who let their children do anything are bad parents, not loving parents. However, there is a confusion here between coercive control and loving parenting which involves setting boundaries (whether physical or otherwise) and giving guidance. I argue, in chapter 5, that God’s action does involve setting boundaries and constraints and giving guidance. What God cannot do, if love is genuine, is prevent all harm by *wholly* controlling the choices of individuals. Neither can good parents decide every outcome of their children’s choices.

⁷⁴ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 129-150.

⁷⁵ Although, similar patterns of self-induced isolation, fear, and fragmentation of personality can be seen in abused cats, dogs, and horses. Reintegration of those selves in rescue situations are also observed. How far this reflects the internal journey that Stump sketches in humans is beyond the scope of my work.

⁷⁶ If, as I have argued earlier, stepping on a worm is not necessarily inimical to the good of the worm, how can God’s control be inimical to its good? This seems inconsistent until you consider that by stepping on the worm, I as a human am only able to affect its external freedom, but not its internal freedom of being. If God were to intervene it would be, we assume, by changing the internal impulses of the worm toward something else, and God would therefore be controlling its internal powers of choice. How far down the ladder of sentience does any meaningful choice extend? This is a question I cannot answer completely, but the important thing to be able to say for my argument is that it extends beyond the human world at all.

fully expressed in the event of the cross, where God chooses to suffer the rejection of God's own creation, and therein reveal the full extent of divine love.⁷⁷ Instead of overwhelming or coercing, God accepts the limited understanding and love of people. Through the cross the divine nature is revealed. "This nature," writes Edwards, "is revealed in the Christ-event as radical self-giving love. This is a divine and transcendent love, a love that has an unimaginable capacity to respect the autonomy and independence of creatures, to work with them patiently, and to bring all things to their fulfillment."⁷⁸

The Mark of Detachment

The final mark of inauthentic love according to Vanstone is that of detachment. A lover who is untouched by the trials of the beloved does not actually love. In Stump's appropriation of Thomist theology, God's detachment is denied by the desire for certain outcomes for the beloved. If God has desires for creation which creation itself has the power to resist (such as the desire for unity, which can be rebuffed by the self-willed loneliness of creatures), then God cannot be unaffected by creation. For classical theists, the conclusion of vulnerability has been troublesome since it challenges the notion of God's *aseity* and God's immutability, that is, God's ability to be totally self-existent, self-reliant, and unchanging. If God responds to the world, then the world has the power to affect God, beyond God's own choice. God's vulnerability seems problematic: after all, it appears as if there is nothing to prevent God from being overwhelmed by suffering just as people often are. One philosopher wrote, "Love takes us hostage to fortune; it binds us to the weal and woe of the

⁷⁷ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 31.

⁷⁸ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 51.

beloved in ways we could not have anticipated and cannot reject.”⁷⁹ But surely God cannot be taken hostage to fortune! Moltmann tries to avoid the challenge to God’s aseity by arguing that even God’s suffering in response to the world is God’s own action on God’s self, and is therefore controllable. However, as Paul Fiddes points out, in Moltmann’s system, “God seems less the supreme victim than the supreme self-executioner.”⁸⁰ Fiddes, along with Edwards and Walter Kasper,⁸¹ finds a middle way between refusing God the ability to suffer and refusing the uncontrollable nature of suffering by suggesting instead that God “chooses that suffering should *befall* him, rather than making himself suffer.”⁸² God chooses to be vulnerable, and chooses to be open to the suffering that love brings. Fiddes’s conclusion coheres well with Vanstone’s observation that, “Where love is authentic, the lover gives to the object of his love a certain power over himself — a power which would not otherwise be there.”⁸³ Of itself, the creation has no power to affect God: in this sense God is immutable and impassible. As an object of love, however, the creation gains that power because God gives God’s self to it. Yet, since the ability to suffer is freely chosen by God, God is not ruled or overwhelmed by it. Suffering remains both

⁷⁹ Jeanette Kennett, “True and Proper Selves: Velleman on Love,” *Ethics* 118:2 (Jan 2008), 217.

⁸⁰ Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 137.

⁸¹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 31-32; Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ: New Edition* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 194-195. Kasper writes “God’s self-emptying, his weakness and his suffering are not the expression of a lack, as they are in finite beings; nor are they expression of a fated necessity. If God suffers, then he suffers in a divine manner, that is, his suffering is an expression of his freedom; suffering does not befall God, therefore, rather he freely allows it to touch him. He does not suffer, as creatures do, from a lack of being; he suffers out of love and by reason of his love, which is the overflow of his being. To predicate becoming, suffering and movement of God does not, therefore, mean that he is turned into a developing God who reaches the fullness of his being only through becoming; such a passage from potency to act is excluded in God. To predicate becoming, suffering and movement of God is to understand God as the fullness of being, as pure actuality, as overflow of life and love. Because God is the omnipotence of love, he can as it were indulge in the weakness of love; he can enter into suffering and death without perishing therein. Only thus can he redeem our death through his own death.”

⁸² Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God*, 108. Italics original.

⁸³ Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour*, 51.

uncaused by God and voluntary.

Also, because love is a desire *for* something in the state of the beloved, love is either fulfilled or not fulfilled in its desires by the beloved him or her or itself. There is, therefore, no way that the lover can be untouched by the choices of the beloved; no way for God to stand apart from the suffering of the world. Here, we find the co-suffering argument advanced by theologians such as Ruth Page and Christopher Southgate: no creature suffers alone because God suffers with it, and God takes on the full consequences of the risk of creation.⁸⁴ There is no pain that God does not share.

The three theological marks of love's inauthenticity are limitation, control, and detachment. The exploration of these marks led to a description of God's love as unlimited, patient, committed, respecting the freedom of the other, vulnerable, and co-suffering.

The Kenosis of the God Who Loves

If we accept that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and work from the philosophical definition and theological description of love just developed, there are certain outcomes for God's relationship with creation. A God who loves the world according to the definition above will not be able to relate to the world in the way the classical tradition has described the Creator-creation relationship—characterised by the expression of omnipotence, omniscience, eternity, and immutability.⁸⁵ While God might possess these traits within Godself, God cannot relate to the world with these attributes and maintain the desires of love

⁸⁴ Page, *The Web of Creation*, 53-54; Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 50-54.

⁸⁵ Some of these attributes are only incompatible with love if they are expressed. Omnipotence, God's ability to do anything that is logically possible, is compatible with love as long as God *does not* do everything. Immutability however, is simply impossible, because there is no difference between its existence and its expression.

according to the definition above. Love requires the vulnerability, precariousness, and freedom of the other. Even the classical tradition has acknowledged the mutual exclusiveness of some of the classical attributes of God and the love of God as expressed in the Incarnation. Classical theology solves this problem through the distinction between the economic Trinity (how God appears as God relates to the world) and the immanent Trinity (how God is within God's own being). God acts in the economic Trinity in ways impossible to the immanent Trinity, allowing for the acts of love to be genuine—at least, at some level.⁸⁶

Unsatisfied with a God where the effects of love do not reach to the core of the divine being, relational theologians have instead offered the model of divine kenosis as the organising principle of the God-world relationship.⁸⁷ As mentioned in chapter 2, John Polkinghorne proposes four types of kenosis in relation to creation that are necessitated by love.⁸⁸ They will serve as an organising matrix for the rest of this chapter. Polkinghorne suggests that in creation God voluntarily gives up the traits of omnipotence, simple eternity, omniscience, and causal status.⁸⁹

Kenosis of Omnipotence

⁸⁶ Traditionally, there is a great deal of theological strain around the concept of the immutability of God in light of the Incarnation. Bulgakov, for example, held that Christ's divine nature was not impassible in Jesus, but that the immanent Trinity was untouched by the kenosis of the Incarnation. How the Incarnation should have failed to touch the inner being of God is beyond me. See Gilles Emery, "The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the 'Suffering of God'," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, trans. by Thomas J. White, eds. James F. Keating and Thomas J. White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 46-47.

⁸⁷ Relational theologians is a broad grouping, which includes both process theists and open theists. See particularly the essays in *The Work of Love*, ed. John Polkinghorne.

⁸⁸ Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," 102-105.

⁸⁹ An introduction to Polkinghorne's meaning of each of these types of kenosis is found in chapter 2, p. 75-77.

This section will investigate how God's kenosis of omnipotence allows for an indeterministic world, which—I will argue—is the only foundation for a world created in love. To do so requires an investigation of the various philosophical positions on freedom, and how each impacts the relationship of God to the world. Some of these positions, as we will see, deny the possibility of a world created with the love that we have described as vulnerable and freedom-granting.

Kenosis as the emptying of divine attributes, and particularly of omnipotence and omnipresence, has been most notably developed by Jürgen Moltmann. Linking his position with the Jewish kabbalistic doctrine of *zimsum*, Moltmann argues that for creation to be truly an "other," it requires room—a sort of ontological vacuum or *nihil* that is not God—in which creation can expand and have its own existence.⁹⁰ Thus God, before creation, contracted into God's self in order to make room for creation. That room was necessary for creatures to be able to have causal effectiveness in the world.

Moltmann's understanding of space and creation have been strongly critiqued, most notably by Colin Gunton, for his mechanical view of space (as if God existed in space and could be withdrawn from any part of it) and for the lack of biblical support for the notion of sacrificial self-limitation in the act of creation. Gunton writes "there is no suggestion in the Bible that the act of creation is anything but a joyful giving of reality to the other."⁹¹ Christopher Southgate joins Gunton in critiquing what he calls a "questionable spatial metaphor for the God-world relation"⁹² and also raises an objection against

⁹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 86-89.

⁹¹ Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 141.

⁹² Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 58.

Moltmann's "commitment to incompatibilism."⁹³ Sarah Coakley, in her critique of various kenotic theologians, raises the same point about incompatibilism.⁹⁴ Coakley argues that various compatibilist options are also available, and she offers a model of divine empowerment of creation, rather than seeing divine action as a zero-sum game that limits creaturely action.⁹⁵ Southgate and Coakley raise an important objection, and one well worth investigating at length. There are two major types of compatibilism: those that think determinism is true and those that think it is false. Coakley, as we will see, defends the truth of determinism, while Southgate does not explain which position he takes. We will therefore concentrate on Coakley's objection, since it is clear she accepts determinism.⁹⁶

I agree with Gunton's and Southgate's objections to Moltmann's spatial metaphor. I do not, however, think that Coakley's objections to his incompatibilist position is valid. Instead, I think that a commitment to incompatibilism is usually necessary. I agree with Moltmann, Barbour, Peacocke, and Polkinghorne⁹⁷ that indeterminism, which is usually associated with an incompatibilist position, is a necessary step to true creaturely freedom.⁹⁸

⁹³ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 58.

⁹⁴ Sarah Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," in *The Work of Love*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 202-206.

⁹⁵ Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett also offer a model which allows for openness but without kenosis. They claim that God's gift of an open future is not to be seen "as a divine self-limitation; but rather as an expression of divine power in creation." Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 160.

⁹⁶ These terms are all more closely examined on p. 178-180.

⁹⁷ See each of these writer's essays in *The Work of Love*, ed. John Polkinghorne.

⁹⁸ Nor are these thinkers, who contributed to *The Work of Love*, alone in thinking that indeterminism is necessary. They are joined by Philip Clayton and Robert Russell in rejecting determinism. Clayton writes "Indeterminacy seems to be a necessary condition for free will." Philip Clayton, "Tracing the Lines: Constraint and Freedom in the Movement from Quantum Physics to Theology," in *Quantum Mechanics: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert Russell, Philip Clayton, Kirk Wegter-McNelly, and John Polkinghorne (Vatican City/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2001), 221.

I set out here into much-contested territory. The reason I do so is two-fold. First, there is a significant theological gain for parsing out God's relationship to creation. Second, I aim to broaden the terms of the philosophical debate into a form that is useful for discussing the non-human creation.

The theological gain has to do with assumptions about the relationship of God to creation. A common assumption about God creating through evolution is voiced by Stephen Webb when he writes:

If God designed evolution, then he must endorse it. If it is his tool, then it must fit his hands—if it is his creature, then it must do his bidding—and thus it must say something about what he is.⁹⁹

Behind Webb's statement is an assumption about a type of determinism. God's design and endorsement of evolution, in Webb's mind, means that evolution "must do his [God's] bidding." Yet that is only true in a world where the creatures who evolve have no significant freedom in their physical or behavioural choices. In a deterministic world, and by "deterministic" I use Wildman's definition that determinism means "given that the world is a particular way at one moment, its unfolding thereafter is fixed and inflexible,"¹⁰⁰ the whole of history is determined by the initial conditions of the universe. Like the movement of a good clock, each event in the world is a direct outcome of the state of the world preceding it. If that is the case, Webb's argument that the "tool" of evolution must do God's bidding would be correct. Any other conclusion would mean that God's craftsmanship was terribly flawed.

However, I think Webb's analogy is entirely the wrong sort to illustrate the God-world relationship. Instead, we must think of an organic analogy. (An organic analogy is more appropriate since, as I have argued, the relationship

⁹⁹ Stephen H. Webb, *The Dome of Eden: A New Solution to the Problem of Creation and Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 104.

¹⁰⁰ Wesley J. Wildman, "The Divine Action Project, 1998-2003," *Theology and Science* 2:1 (2004), 39.

between God and creation is one of love, and only living things can be proper objects of love.¹⁰¹) Imagine, for a moment, an organic entity in Webb's argument, and it becomes clear how non-intuitive his argument and its outcomes really are. Let us substitute God and evolution for parent and child:¹⁰²

In other words, if a mother [voluntarily] gives birth to a son, then the mother must endorse him. If he is her tool, then he must fit her hands—if he is her creature, then he must do her bidding—and thus he must say something about what she is.

We can clearly see both the truth and the falsity of Webb's statement. If a mother chooses to bring a child into the world, then she does indeed endorse that child. But that does not mean that the son is her tool, or that he necessarily does her bidding. It is true that the son will tell us something about the mother (at the very least, genetically), but he will not tell us many things and may indeed embody traits quite opposite from his mother, since he is his own creature. It is the same with God and the evolutionary process. I argue that God chose a creative process with self-generative capabilities, which means that it will both reflect and not reflect who God is in its outcomes.

I am not saying that God cannot hold any purposes in relation to evolution. A mother may well have some purposes in mind, such as having a relationship with her child. Other outcomes will be strongly influenced or even determined by the mother, such as what language the son will initially speak. But having a strong guiding influence, or even determining certain broad parameters within which freedom is at play is a vastly different thing from the sort of control implied in one "doing the bidding" of another. Similarly, the

¹⁰¹ See chapter 4, p. 164.

¹⁰² If the reader is concerned about the personification of "evolution" here, let him or her be reminded that evolution is a process that describes the change of countless living beings. If those beings are not God's "tools," then the process that describes their changes cannot be God's tool either.

evolutionary process can serve God's purposes without being determined as long as God's purposes are broad and flexible.¹⁰³

My organic analogy only stands if evolution has not been determined to have certain outcomes because of God's establishment of the initial ordering of conditions of the universe. The reason we all know the son will not automatically do the bidding of his mother is because we also know the mother lacks the necessary power to cause the son to do her bidding. She may have all sorts of influence over him, and he may willingly choose to follow her instruction, but in the end, her gift of life to him also gives him a freedom that she cannot ultimately supersede. An omnipotent God, by contrast, *would* have the power that the mother lacks to determine another's action, but my argument in this section is that God's love for the world necessitates God's giving up the type of power that could determine all future events and actions. I will argue for this by deconstructing Coakley's critique of indeterminism.

What is it that Coakley actually argues in her critique of indeterminism? She makes three arguments tied up with determinism, creaturely freedom, and divine atemporalism. Her charge is that Moltmann et. al. picture "determinism as the inappropriate and restrictive control of individual humans by some sort of divine dictator."¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, she similarly chastises theologians for modifying the traditional attributes of God and rejecting determinism because they think determinism reduces human action to "mere 'puppetry' or 'ventriloquism.'"¹⁰⁵ Her argument, it is important to note, is about determinism, and not necessarily about compatibilism. A compatibilist could believe that indeterminism is true, since compatibilism is a position regarding the nature of free choice and not of

¹⁰³ See p. 182 below on the purposes of God in creation.

¹⁰⁴ Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," 206.

¹⁰⁵ Sarah Coakley, "Feminism," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed., eds. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 691.

the truth of the metaphysical question of determinism or indeterminism.¹⁰⁶

Because Coakley critiques the other thinkers' rejection of *determinism*, though,

it can be inferred that her sort of compatibilism is one that also thinks

determinism is true. If that is the case, and we rule out the indeterministic-

compatibilist,¹⁰⁷ there are four major positions available:

- 1) Hard Determinist - The hard determinist holds that "with respect to any type of event and to any token of that type, that an omnipotent being have power over them in the sense that he positively governs them." Positive governance means "government in which the governor bring about whatever he governs."¹⁰⁸ Every event is determined by God, and significant freedom is considered incompatible with that determination. This is the position that, in Coakley's depiction, is only one that libertarian free choice advocates

¹⁰⁶ In relation to determinism, Kirk Wegter-McNelly's suggests three distinctions of in/compatibilism:

- 1) Anthro-physical in/compatibilism: human freedom is in/compatible with physical determinism;
- 2) Anthro-theological in/compatibilism: human freedom is in/compatible with divine determinism; and
- 3) Theo-physical in/compatibilism: objectively special divine is in/compatible with physical determinism.

The first and second can easily be linked. If God sets the initial conditions of the universe, then physical determinism is the same thing as divine determinism. Yet even without full physical determinism, theological determinism could be true. It is theological determinism (roughly similar to 2) that is in question in this part of my argument. See Kirk Wegter-McNelly, "Does God Need Room To Act? Theo-Physical In/Compatibilism in Noninterventionist Theories of Objectively Special Divine Action," in *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action: 20 Years of Challenge and Progress*, eds. Robert J. Russell, Nancey Murphy, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2008), 305.

¹⁰⁷ Kirk Wegter-McNelly is an example of this position, since he argues for anthro-theological compatibilism while denying anthro-physical compatibilism. Either way, he is clearly distinguished from Coakley when he writes "Determinism might be compatible with the God of theism... but I believe it is deeply incompatible with the Christian God." See his classification of these terms in note 106 above. Wegter-McNelly, "Does God Need Room to Act?" 306-307, 313.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Helm and William Hasker, "Does God take Risks in Governing the World?," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004): 218-41, 231, 229. See also Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98 and 127. This theological determinism should be distinguished from philosophical determinism which states that "every event has a cause. The usual explanation of this is that for every event, there is some antecedent state, related in such a way that it would break a law of nature for this antecedent state to exist yet the event not to happen." Simon Blackburn, "Determinism," In *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Accessed 17 Jan 2014, available from <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430-e-905>. Philosophical determinism asks only about if there are causes to events, not if and how God might be involved.

acknowledge. She wants to point out the existence of soft-determinism/compatibilism.¹⁰⁹

- 2) Soft-Determinist/Compatibilist - The person who holds this position accepts that determinism is true, and that all future events will happen according to the unfolding of present realities. However, this person will still accept that creatures have responsibility for their own actions since they acted according to their own desire, even if those desires were entirely determined.¹¹⁰
- 3) Molinist/Middle Knowledge - This person does not think that the world is determined, but believes that all the indeterministic factors (such as the libertarian free choice of creatures) can be perfectly predicted by God. Therefore, God can choose to create a world where God can perfectly predict that every creature will freely choose the divine will in any given situation. William Hasker writes: "The majority of philosophers who have considered these and similar arguments have concluded that there are serious questions about the coherence and logical possibilities of middle knowledge."¹¹¹ Since Coakley does not argue for it, and because most philosophers find the position incoherent, I will not investigate Molinism further below.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Although, few would argue (even amongst strong determinists) that God determines absolutely every event, because real evil also occurs. Since positive governance of evil is incompatible with God's nature, God must only willingly permit evil rather than stand as the efficient cause of it. So even strong determinist positions do not usually argue that every event is determined by God. Instead, as Paul Helm argues, there is sometimes only the willing permissiveness of God for evil to occur—a position held also by Augustine. This permissiveness works together with God's foreknowledge so that God can "negatively govern" certain events by not allowing specific evils to occur that could otherwise overturn God's plans. Helm writes "God foreknows everything, and unconditionally governs everything, but does not causally determine everything in the sense that he is the efficient cause of everything. Nevertheless, nothing happens that God is unwilling should happen." See Helm, "Does God take Risks?" 234; Augustine, *Enchiridion*, ch. 100 & 102, trans. by J.F. Shaw, accessed 3 November 2013, available from <http://www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/augenchiridion/enchiridion97-122.html>.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Saunders, *Divine Action & Modern Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 44.

¹¹¹ William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Pinnock, et al., 126-154 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 144-146. The basic argument is that Molinism is built around a system of God knowing the various possibilities of freedom, also known as counterfactuals. Yet, to know one counterfactual as the event that will *definitely* occur, means that one knows that all the other possibilities will *definitely* not occur. The whole system of knowing counterfactuals collapses into simple foreknowledge, which leads back into the determinist problem of God controlling outcomes. On the other hand, if God knows all the possibilities of the future, but not which ones will actually take place, then there is no room for the control and assurance that the Molinist system strives for, and in practice you have libertarian freewill. Middle knowledge always either collapses into incoherence by trying to defend an impossible view of foreknowledge, or it does not provide the desired outcome. In addition, for God to choose to create creatures who God knows will freely choose to do all the tremendous amounts of harm that do actually occur, and not to choose to create ones that do not choose those harms, makes the question of theodicy even more problematic.

¹¹² For more on the incoherence of Molinism from both determinist and libertarian perspectives, see: Robert M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14:2 (Apr 1977): 109-117; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 19-52; Helm, "Does God Take Risks?" 229.

- 4) Libertarian free choice - The person who holds this position believes that free choice is incompatible with determinism, but also believes that free choice exists. Therefore, determinism must be false. In terms of choice, an agent can hold certain desires and choose to pursue them (which, alone, would be a compatibilist position), but the agent can also choose to desire something else or to refrain from pursuing action altogether. They make choices that are “causally originated” within themselves.¹¹³ Their actions are “not causally determined but not random either.”¹¹⁴ The sum of a creature’s choice, therefore, is more than the personality, history, and desire of the chooser: there is some deciding agent involved that acts in the moment and that self-determines the outcome.¹¹⁵

Part of the problem with using the regular terms of philosophical debate is that they have been developed for discussing human moral freedom. Since I am interested in the freedom within evolutionary development, most of which was pre-human, and much of which was not consciously chosen, I am not primarily concerned with the rational, autonomous, or moral choices of humans. I am interested in a non-human creature’s ability to have what might be called “freedom of behaviour.” John Polkinghorne has used the term “free process” to refer to the freedom of the evolutionary world, and Coakley has used the term “evolutionary contingency,”¹¹⁶ but since these terms includes non-living processes as well as the choices and behaviours of living creatures, I will not use them. Instead, when I talk about “freedom” or “freedom of choice” I mean the sort of “freedom of behaviour” that living creatures have. This is not always conscious choice, and not moral, but it is still choice. We might think of a trivial choice, such as a caterpillar choosing which pile of equidistant food to go after,

¹¹³ Nicholas Saunders, *Divine Action*, 44.

¹¹⁴ Blackburn, “Libertarianism,” In *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, accessed online 17 Jan 2014 at <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430-e-1834>.

¹¹⁵ Some might argue that libertarian choice is generated randomly, and therefore is no more free than compatibilist choice since it is not really chosen, but rather ‘generated’. If this were the case, though, we would expect people’s choices to be far less in line with their history and moral commitments than we find them. Behaviour itself would become random. But we do not observe this, so choice cannot be entirely random.

¹¹⁶ Coakley, “Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence,” in *Evolution, Games, and God: Principles of Cooperation*, eds. Martin A. Nowak and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 378. The same argument was formerly used by Coakley in “God and Evolution: A New Solution,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 35:2 & 3 (Spring/Summer 2007): 8-13.

or a more significant choice, such as the choice of a grizzly bear to hunt a deer, and therefore kill, or simply to forage for berries and tubers. Many small choices, or a few large ones, will have an impact on a creature's life. Many creatures' lives will have an impact on their ecosystem. The ecosystem will have an impact on life's history, and therefore on the paths that the evolutionary process takes. So the question is, how can we parse this freedom of behaviour in relation to God's love and presence in the world?

When Coakley argues for her compatibilist notion, she writes:

The intuition pump I want to propose here is what Peter Geach once called the chess-master model (Geach 1977). The basic idea is this: God is like a chess master playing an eight-year old chess novice. There is a game with regularities and rules, and although there are a huge number of different moves that the child can make, each of these can be successfully responded to by the chess master—they are already familiar to him. And we have no overall doubt that he is going to win.¹¹⁷

The illustration is a surprising one for a compatibilist. The first reason it is surprising is that we do not expect that someone who is trying to emphasise the notion of cooperation between God and the world should use an analogy that is inherently competitive. Two chess players are always necessarily competing against each other, even when one is a master and the other a novice and there is no question of the outcome. Perhaps some better analogies would be Tom Settle's suggestions of a shepherd and a sheepdog working together, ballroom dancing partners, or a horse and rider in the dressage ring.¹¹⁸ In these instances, the "following" partner expresses his or her own creativity and agency, but always in cooperation with, and in submission to, the "leading" partner.

¹¹⁷ Coakley, "Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence," 378. The analogy does not originate with Geach. It stretches all the way back to William James in 1884 who proposed it in "The Dilemma of Determinism," in *The Will to Believe: And Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 181.

¹¹⁸ Tom Settle, "The Dressage Ring and the Ballroom: Loci of Double Agency," in *Facets of Faith and Science*, Vol.4, *Interpreting God's Action in the World*, ed. Jitse van der Meer (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 17-40.

The second reason I find Coakley's analogy surprising is that it is one that is very familiar in philosophical circles, but it is usually always used to support those who defend a libertarian interpretation of free choice. The free choice advocates use it to show how a creature can have libertarian freedom without God's overall purposes in creation being thwarted.¹¹⁹ A player has complete freedom to choose any action within the rules of the game,¹²⁰ and the choice he or she makes is not determined in any way (for most of play, at any rate¹²¹) by the other player. While it may not be a skilful move, a player could choose, for example, to sacrifice a queen in order to capture a pawn. The salient point is that whatever choices a player makes in his or her freedom to move, none of them will significantly alter the outcome of the game. It will, however, have a very significant effect on the course of the game.

In terms of evolution, I think the chess-master analogy means that the ultimate purposes of creation, such as the Incarnation, and redemption through Christ, have always been assured. However, the course of evolutionary pathways have been largely free. Libertarian freedom allows the real chance that creation could take paths where the harms and disvalues were not chosen by God. Many biological disvalues, such as predation and parasitism, proceed from the free behaviour of creatures, not the design of God.¹²² I am not saying

¹¹⁹ See John Saunders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*. 2nd Edition (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 243-44; Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 127-128; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 195-96.

¹²⁰ One common misunderstanding about libertarian freewill is to think it means that a creature can always make absolutely any choice. But there are plenty of choices that are not open to me, even if I have freewill. I cannot choose to fly, for example. So staying "within the rules" means acting freely within the constraints and limitations of my being and environment. But, significantly, there is more than one choice available to me within those constraints.

¹²¹ At the late stages of a chess game, a player may in fact have all their choices determined by his or her opponent. Although, even in that case, the player could still choose to resign at any point, and therefore always has two significant options open to him or her.

¹²² Many of the goods of creation, such as cooperation and symbiosis, also proceed from the freedom of creatures.

that the occurrence of these disvalues are evil, or that God holds predators and parasites culpable for their actions. What I mean is that God did not choose for the tiger to have sharp teeth. A long line of undetermined creaturely actions combined with chance mutations and environmental constraints led to a tiger that has sharp teeth and an instinct to hunt. So the violence in the tiger's hunting reflects God's freedom-giving character, while not reflecting God's own moral character. Another way to understand this is to say that while God would not directly cause one creature to attack another, God did create a world in which giving freedom allowed creatures to use violence against each other. God is culpable for setting up a system with such significant freedoms that grave harms may occur, but such a system is essential to the nature of love.

Perhaps the reason Coakley uses the chess-master analogy to defend compatibilism is because she is using Peter Geach as her source. The chess-master analogy has, I think, been extended too far in Geach's 1971-72 Stanton Lectures, where he writes that God can so outplay the opponent as to choose the exact manner of the victory, down to "on that square I will upgrade my pawn to a queen."¹²³ I think such a view is counterintuitive. There are simply too many possible moves in chess, too many contingencies, to play a game with as much certainty about specific outcomes as Geach proposes.¹²⁴ The same, I think, is true of the countless contingencies of evolutionary history.

Coakley defines her challenge for both libertarian and hard-determinist incompatibilist positions as a lack of loving imagination. She writes: "what is palpably missing is a sustained or positive reflection on the nurturing and all-

¹²³ Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 58.

¹²⁴ Ironically, the sort of control Geach thinks is possible is probably more likely if the master is playing another advanced player. Another master will always make reasonable plays that are more easily predicted, whereas a novice is more likely to make startlingly unpredictable moves.

encompassing dimensions of divine love.”¹²⁵ Reflection on God’s love, she thinks, allows for compatibilist models of freedom. She notes Eleonore Stump as a “striking recent counter-instance”¹²⁶ to the rule of power-dominated philosophical dialogue because Stump describes life as existing “under the mothering guidance of God.”¹²⁷

It is, however, yet another puzzling move for Coakley to lionise Stump’s views, because Stump is one of the stronger advocates of the incompatibilist, libertarian freedom that Coakley rejects. Stump’s reflection on nurturing love leads her to adopt a libertarian freewill position; the very thing that Moltmann, Barbour, Peacocke, and Polkinghorne also find imperative. Stump even tries “to show that Aquinas cannot be classed as a theological compatibilist but has to be taken as a libertarian of a certain sort”¹²⁸ and hangs the success of her theodicy on the rejection of compatibilism.¹²⁹ The reason for Stump’s conclusion regarding indeterminism is that she insists that God’s “mothering guidance” presupposes a freedom of the will to accept, reject, or simply be quiescent under such guiding influence.¹³⁰

Now, Coakley is right to object to seeing a human as a perfectly autonomous choosing being who rationally makes every decision. She is right to emphasise that life involves dependence in all sorts of ways, and that life is limited, constrained, and guided by divine care. Yet none of this requires a compatibilist view of the world. Incompatibilism does not require that every

¹²⁵ Coakley, “Feminism,” 691.

¹²⁶ Coakley, “Feminism,” 691.

¹²⁷ Eleonore Stump, “The Mirror of Evil,” in *God and the Philosophers*, ed. Thomas Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 242.

¹²⁸ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 165.

¹²⁹ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 454.

¹³⁰ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 165-168.

choice be entirely uninfluenced; it only requires that creatures have some behavioural freedoms, some choices where the outcomes are not determined by prior states of the universe.

When it comes to elements that affect evolutionary processes, my position would be to say that all non-living elements of the universe are deterministic. I accept the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, and so I think that there are still indeterministic events that occur in the non-living world, but these only occur at the quantum scale, the outcomes of which are deterministic at the classical scale. So God could reasonably predict universal history perfectly until the emergence of life. Living things, however, will have various levels of freedom depending on their capacities. Very simple organisms will have very few freedoms. Complex organisms will have more freedoms. Humans will exercise complex moral freedoms. It is these outcomes of freedom, I argue, that cannot be known before they actually occur. They must be indeterministic, or else the control that God would exercise over them would exclude the possibility of love. Even, I think, God being able to predict all future creaturely actions is enough to exclude the possibility of divine love.

The last significant argument Coakley makes for her deterministic compatibilism rests on divine atemporalism and divine omniscience. She writes of her chess analogy that “God timelessly knows what will happen on any different scenario depending on what moves occur. But there is a crucial difference here between God *knowing* what will occur and God directly *causing* what occurs.”¹³¹ However, an atemporal God cannot know what “will” happen on any different scenario, as Coakley suggests, since an atemporal God would have to eternally “know” what scenario actually occurred. Atemporality makes

¹³¹ Coakley, “Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence,” 379. Italics original.

tense inappropriate. Divine atemporality also makes the notion of divine response inappropriate.¹³² In a classical understanding of God, which Coakley explicitly claims it is her desire to assume,¹³³ God is pure act, and therefore cannot respond, because action is already and always being fully expressed. David Burrell, in trying to express this classical understanding of God, writes:

It makes no sense to ask *how* pure-act acts, since it is *ipso facto* in act. So God's acting involves no mechanisms, no process (from potency to act), no *powers* by which divinity acts.... Moreover, pure act must be eternal (or better, must exist eternally) for reasons internal to the conception of pure act; there is no way it can be 'in time'.¹³⁴

God's actions and God's knowledge are eternal. Coakley cannot defend the classical understanding of God and suggest that God can respond to creaturely choice, or know what to do "depending on" what moves are made, for the classical God cannot depend on creation in any way, shape, or form.

If we take the classical understanding of omniscience seriously, and accept that God has eternal knowledge of creaturely choice, does God's (fore)knowledge rule out creaturely freedom and force a determinist view (either hard determinist or compatibilist)? Many thinkers have come to this conclusion. Jonathan Edwards, for example, held a strong theological determinist position, which ruled out significant human freedom because of God's foreknowledge.¹³⁵ Alvin Plantinga commented on Edwards's conclusion: "If Edwards's argument is

¹³² The reader will note that Coakley, in using the chess-master analogy above, talks about the chess master "responding" to the moves made in the game.

¹³³ She writes: "I am assuming a classical understanding of the Christian God—that is, a God who is Being itself, creator and sustainer of all that is, eternal (i.e. atemporal, omnipresent), omniscient, omnipotent, all-loving, indeed the source of all perfection." Coakley, "Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence," 376.

¹³⁴ David B. Burrell C.S.C., "Divine Practical Knowing: How an Eternal God Acts in Time," in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 93-94. See also David B. Burrell C.S.C., *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1986).

¹³⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will, which is supposed to be essential to moral agency, virtue and vice, reward and punishment, praise and blame* (Albany: Whiting, Backus & Whiting, 1804), 153-163.

a good one, what it shows is that if at some time in the past God knew that I will do *A*, then it is necessary that I will do *A*—necessary in just the way in which the past is necessary. But then it is not within my power to refrain from doing *A*, so that I will not do *A* freely.”¹³⁶ Compatibilists normally acknowledge this sense that the future is just as necessary as the past, which rules out any possibility that some other future might occur, or that a creature could ever choose in any other way than it is already foreknown that they would.¹³⁷ God’s eternal knowledge determines that future events will occur, even if it may not *cause* them (as Coakley points out).¹³⁸

The outcome of God determining such action in a hard determinist way seems to rule out the possibility of divine love. On the basis of the nature of love developed above as vulnerable and non-controlling,¹³⁹ God cannot love creatures if God determines them so completely. Without vulnerability to the creation, there is no love because there is no effective freedom. Where God eternally knows all events, there is no vulnerability. Furthermore, there are conclusions in the determinist position that stand completely contrary to the desire of love for the good of the beloved. Augustine, for example, wrote that since all people do not find salvation, then God cannot possibly will that all people find salvation:

[We are] to understand the Scripture, "Who will have all men to be saved," [1 Timothy 2:4] as meaning that no man is saved unless God wills his salvation: not that there is no man whose salvation He does not will, but that no man is saved apart from His will...Or, it is said, "Who will have all men to be saved;" not that there is no man whose salvation He does not will (for how, then, explain the fact that He was unwilling to work miracles in the presence of some who, He said, would have repented if He had worked them?), but that we are to understand by "all men," the

¹³⁶ Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3:3 (July 1986), 238.

¹³⁷ Helm, "Does God Take Risks?" 229.

¹³⁸ Coakley, "Evolution, Cooperation, and Divine Providence," 379.

¹³⁹ See discussion above, p. 167-171.

human race in all its varieties of rank and circumstances,—kings, subjects; noble, plebeian...For which of all these classes is there out of which God does not will that men should be saved in all nations through His only-begotten Son, our Lord, and therefore does save them.¹⁴⁰

By this argument, Augustine admits that there are those who God chooses not to save (I read “to save” to mean “to draw into eternal union with God”). If God does not desire and act toward their greatest good—which is indeed union with God—then God cannot love them. Therefore, the hard determinist position seems to fail the test of love.

Can either of the compatibilist positions pass the test of love? They are a little more tricky to parse, since they allow for the freedom of choice in a limited way, despite that choice still being determined. Since the choice of action is centred in the person—their personality, knowledge, and history—it can be maintained that the freedom of love is granted, since God is not making a choice for them. They could have done differently if they had chosen, or desired, differently. However, this would depend at least somewhat on whether the development of those desires came about freely. There are two different options.

The first option is that of the determinist-compatibilist, Coakley’s position, where the elements of personality that determine creaturely choices were themselves determined or foreordained by God. In this case the forces that were predetermined by God determined their choice and the agent was not really free to choose. The argument over what constitutes a truly “free” action has, of course, raged for centuries, and will not be solved here. Yet both determinist positions fail the test of love since only one outcome was possible and therefore God is never vulnerable to the choice of the other.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, ch. 103.

The second option is that of the indeterminist-compatibilist. In this case the personality was formed by the undetermined interaction of the agent with its environment, in which case a more coherent argument could be made that compatibilist freewill is possible to be held alongside God's love, since the production of the desire that makes the choice is outside of God's direct control, even if those desires then determine the agent's choices. The second option can more easily be reconciled with love's gift of freedom. However, this second type of compatibilism loses the very advantage that theologians want from compatibilist positions, namely that God can determine the outcomes of creation. So while one might hold this position, it still requires God's kenosis of omnipotence such that God does not determine every event. It equally necessitates either a temporal experience for God or a kenosis of omniscience. A longer discussion of time and eternity is pertinent here, but I will leave it for later in this chapter.¹⁴¹

To sum up these arguments, in relation to creation, a hard determinist position does not allow for freedom, and therefore makes the problem of natural evil very severe, for it seems that God intends every instance of suffering. Every natural disaster and every venomous or parasitic creature emerges directly from the will of God. There is no kenosis of omnipotence at all.

The determinist-compatibilist position rules out the possibility of love, not necessarily by compelling the creature, but by refusing the vulnerability of love from the divine side. There is no divine vulnerability in the compatibilist picture because God still determines every outcome, and therefore there is no love of the type described above. Love would not involve any risk or response for God. It might be argued that a God who gave up omniscience and simple eternity

¹⁴¹ See the section subtitled "Kenosis of Simple Eternity and Kenosis of Omniscience" below, p. 298-203.

alone could have the right relationship to the beloved with determinism being true. However, this God could perfectly predict all future events from present states, and therefore would regain the omniscience and would then lose the proper relationship to the beloved, since being able to perfectly predict the future puts one in essentially the same place as having simple foreknowledge.

In contrast, a position based on the kenosis of God's omnipotence will imply that God does not, ultimately, determine all events and thus room is left for libertarian creaturely choice. In their freedom, creatures can then choose to act with or against divine invitation or lure. The true empowerment of creaturely action that Coakley desires can only come about through a prior commitment to indeterminism. When Coakley says that free creaturely action is not a zero-sum game she is both right and wrong. It is only in a situation where the zero-sum game of determinism is first surrendered that the possibilities of cooperation open up. I will use an analogy of a creature walking to try to illustrate this point more clearly.

Imagine God placing a creature at the bottom of a narrow crevasse, with a wall directly behind it. There is a path stretching out before the creature, between the narrow and unclimbable walls. For the creature to rise up and walk that path freely is the sort of non-zero-sum action that Coakley supports. The creature has been enabled to rise and walk by the indwelling Spirit who empowers all movement, and so the walking creature is expressing freewill and autonomy while working with divine empowerment. None of this is a problem. What is a problem is that God has placed the creature in a narrow crevasse in which all of that autonomy and freewill can only be used toward one end: walking along the path in the determined direction. The creature has no effective choice about where to move. Not only that, but the very moment that

the creature decides to rise up and walk is determined by God as well. In a determinist-compatibilist scheme, the creature may have freedom to act, as Coakley says, but the creature does not have the necessary freedom to make effective choices with those actions.

In the libertarian scheme, the creature is placed by God on an open plain. The creature chooses its own direction, which it pursues in concert with God's empowerment of movement. In addition, the creature can choose to move in concert with the divine lure in a particular direction, but does so willingly rather than because that is the only direction in which the creature can move. So the creature still expresses the sort of cooperative action that Coakley argues for, both in being empowered and in cooperating with divine intention.

With libertarian freewill, the creature has freedom to choose its own path across the open plains. Sometimes those paths include great suffering for that creature or for others. God experiences the full cost of love when that freedom is used to cause suffering by co-suffering with those who hurt as a result of creation's freedom. Of the three positions we have investigated at length here,¹⁴² only the libertarian freewill perspective is consonant with the nature of love as freedom-bestowing and vulnerable because it does not control the path of creation by determinist all its outcomes. A libertarian freewill position alongside a temporal view of God, both of which I adopt, gives the creation freedom to explore the options of equally plausible futures without God controlling which outcomes develop. It means that God did not determine or design the snake's painful venom or the alligator's bite, or the suffering they cause. However, libertarian freewill raises problems of its own. Does the freedom envisaged here overthrow God's sovereignty? The most important

¹⁴² Again, there is the possibility of an indeterminist-compatibilist position, but as that is not what Coakley was arguing for, I did not develop it at length.

objection to libertarian freewill is that the kenosis of omnipotence in this sense offers no guarantee that God can bring about a good outcome from creation. The risk of creation is too great. Process theists accept this risk: in process thought the outcome of creation is unknown, even to God, and evil may triumph over good in the end.

However, there is another way forward. I would argue that although freewill causes events that are not according to God's will, the creativity and responsiveness of God will allow any action to find ultimate redemption. No event, no action is so evil as to be able to overthrow the possibility of redemption because the creativity of God's work for life is as infinite as God's own being. Everything other than God is finite, and therefore evil must also be finite. In contrast to evil, God's goodness and mercy are unlimited. God does not need to control each evil event in order not to be triumphed over: God's goodness can simply out-create evil.

If God can bring redemption through resurrection out of the worst evil of human history—the slaughter of the perfectly innocent Christ—how much more can God bring good out of the disvalues of the natural world that do not arise out of moral wrongdoing?¹⁴³ The scope and nature of redemption will be further explored in chapter 6, but here the salient point is that libertarian free choice need not overturn God's sovereignty over creation's outcomes, as long as there is more than one path that can lead to redemption, or more than one redemptive state that will satisfy all suffering. This goes back to what was said at the beginning of this section about the purposes of God for creation

¹⁴³ I do not mean that it is better that an evil event, *A*, happened rather than didn't happen because it will one day contribute a better perfection to the realised eschaton than the alternative less evil event, *B*. If *A* happens rather than *B*, then it is because of the freewill of creatures. Both *A* and *B* would be redeemed, and result in equally perfect though different eschatological realities. Therefore the event of *A* really is gratuitous, but is not beyond the scope of redemption.

necessarily being broad and flexible.¹⁴⁴ If creation is free to choose its own paths, and therefore its own disvalues and evils, redemption will have to be a creative response to those particular realities. Redemption will be brought about, and the eschatological vision of creation will be realised, but the details of that new creation will be in part dependent upon the free action of creatures throughout history. Had a different path been chosen, redemption would also be realised in a different way.

The kenosis of God's omnipotence means that God gives up the possibility of determining all events in order to allow for the freedom that love requires. That freedom is most coherently realised within a libertarian understanding of free choice.

To what extent can free choice be extended to the natural world? Some theologians try to implement a classic freewill defence to the non-human world by extending morality beyond humans. Nicola Hoggard Creegan writes that in instances such as chimp cannibalism, "something like sin can be pushed further down into the evolutionary tree."¹⁴⁵ Her position seems to be based simply on the fact that some chimps perform cannibalistic acts and the analogy that if a human were to perform a cannibalistic act it would be sinful. However, it is theologically difficult to consider a chimp's actions as sin since they have no conscious recognition of God's laws, and therefore cannot be held culpable on a moral level, whatever proto-moral concepts of fair and unfair they might have. A theological definition of sin as conscious rebellion against God's standards is important if sin is to have any substantial meaning apart from aesthetic whim. Pannenberg, writing on the concept of sin in the Hebrew Bible, finds that the

¹⁴⁴ See p. 177.

¹⁴⁵ Nicola Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering & The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 77.

understanding of God's law is central: "the idea of the heart that is intent upon evil and that of the new heart that is in harmony with God's command refer always to our relation to the command of God, whether in the form of breaking it or keeping it."¹⁴⁶ In the New Testament, a text of central importance is Paul's discussion of sin in Romans 7, where he is teasing out the place of law in relation to sin. He allows that sin was not created by the law (7:7) but that through the law sin becomes active. Thus Paul writes:

Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.¹⁴⁷

So, "sin expresses itself in desires that are against the commands of God and therefore against the God who issues them."¹⁴⁸ Sin seems to require some knowledge of the moral law to be "alive." If non-human animals are to be ascribed "something like sin" it could—at most—only be the sin that Paul here calls "dead." The argument by analogy to human sin simply does not provide a strong case for assuming either sin or a freewill defence for the non-human world.

A much more satisfying account of non-human sin comes from David Clough who contends that "the primary evidence for the [non-human] fall is that Christ came to effect reconciliation between all things and God."¹⁴⁹ If Christ's reconciling work is for all of creation, as passages such as Romans 8 and Colossians 1 suggest, then there must be something left to reconcile beyond

¹⁴⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.2, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 239.

¹⁴⁷ Romans 7:7b-10, NRSV.

¹⁴⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2., 240.

¹⁴⁹ David Clough, *On Animals*, Vol.1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012), 125.

human sin. In what sense must the cosmos be reconciled? I will explore my own response to this question in chapter six, proposing how Christ might be a reconciler for those without sin. For Clough, however, the alleged estrangement from God is shown in predator/prey relations and the violence throughout creation. The consequent reconciliation needed is one of creating peaceable relations between predators and prey.¹⁵⁰ However, Clough's foundation for such an argument is open to serious challenge. He draws primarily from prophetic passages anticipating a peaceable nature (Isaiah 11:6-8) as evidence that violence was not intended in the original creation, but these passages are not sufficient evidence for his claim. First, there are many passages where God points to the violent creation with approval and even emphasises God's own part in orchestrating it (Job 38:39-41; Psalm 104:21, etc.). Second, although there are certainly prophetic passages that envision the end of predator/prey relationships—most notably that the wolf will lay down with the lamb and the calf and the lion will be bedfellows in Isaiah 11:7, and the lion will eat straw in Isaiah 65:25—these must be read together with the images in Isaiah 35:9 which state: “no lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast.”¹⁵¹ Should we believe that there will be no lions in the new creation, or that there will be lions but that they will be vegetarian?

The contradictions between the passages forbid the literalistic readings that Clough suggests. Rather these passages, highly symbolic as they are, should be understood as exalted imagery of peacefulness and harmony. None of the images should be taken as concrete photographs of the new creation, nor should we read their imagery back into our evaluation of the non-human world

¹⁵⁰ Clough, *On Animals*, 127.

¹⁵¹ Another similar issue is raised with Revelation 21:1 and the vision that “there will be no sea.” Should we perhaps think that the existence of the sea itself is a result of the mysterious fallenness of creation and contrary to the will of God?

today. There is no reason to think from these passages that the creation was initially meant to lack predator/prey relations or other types of violence.¹⁵² Instead, we must see the redemption and reconciliation of all creation in Christ as something that is more than the simple recovery of something once lost, as the gathering up of all of existence into a new creation that is radically different from any past historical reality. We should not assume that because predator/prey (or parasitic) relationships exist, that they are necessarily directly willed by God in all their present forms.¹⁵³ Predator/prey relationships are one of the possibilities of creation's freedom that have been productive of a great goods such as complexity, diversity, and a quickening of the evolutionary process, but also productive of great and sometimes needless suffering. As Southgate says, "creation, then, is both 'good' and 'groaning.'"¹⁵⁴ The good process, by its very nature, involves the inevitability of unintended groanings. How can this be?

The freedom of creation is the freedom for agents to act with real causative effect on earth history without that effect being determined by God.¹⁵⁵ If God loves all created beings, then God will not wilfully withdraw the "otherness" of those creatures by determining their behaviour; their freedom is part of their status as beloved. The same is true at the larger scale of the pathways of evolutionary development. If God has made creation to be an object of love, then God will not control the ways in which creatures choose to live, or how evolutionary tactics emerge. Darwin famously exclaimed to Joseph Hooker "What a book a Devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful,

¹⁵² Indeed, the inclusion of the great sea monsters (Genesis 1:21) in the original creation suggests just the opposite.

¹⁵³ See the discussion above, p. 182-183.

¹⁵⁴ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ That is not to say that there is no providence at work in creation. I think there is, in the ways which I will describe in chapter 5. However, that providence does not determine earth history. It only guides, and perhaps sometimes protectively constrains.

blundering low & horridly cruel works of nature!”¹⁵⁶ From parasitic wasps to the devastating fungal cordyceps, nature is full of survival techniques that inspire horror. If God had specifically designed these mechanisms to function as they do, Darwin’s horror-filled reaction would be justified. However, in a creation established by the freedom of love, the creator does not choose for the creatures how they must live. Instead, creatures make their own choices (to whatever level is within their capacity) in order to survive and reproduce, and descendants stand in the genetic and cultural traditions passed on to them which they themselves innovate on.¹⁵⁷ There is no path set out by God for creatures’ development. God works with creation, but as Vanstone writes, “the activity of God in creation must be precarious. It must proceed by no assured programme. Its progress, like every progress of love, must be an angular process—in which each step is a precarious step into the unknown.”¹⁵⁸ The path of creation is improvised; a dance between God and creation, and between creatures themselves. No creature has complete and unencumbered freedom, including humans.¹⁵⁹ Every creature is limited by its own innate capacity and by environmental factors, but it is free to develop within its physical environment

¹⁵⁶ Charles R. Darwin to Joseph D. Hooker, “Letter 1924,” 13 July 1856. Accessed 19 October 2013, available from <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/entry-1924>.

¹⁵⁷ Peter and Rosemary Grant, ornithologists at Princeton, have beautifully demonstrated the interplay between genetic inheritance and the effect of innovative behaviour during a thirty-four year study on Darwin’s finches in the Galapagos islands. Particularly after a drought in 1977, finches with large and powerful beaks who were able to feed on hard seeds (that are regularly ignored by all finches) survived, while the medium sized finches starved. The relevance of this story is that the birds, in order to survive, had to choose to eat foods outside their normal diet. It is evident that the birds normally *choose* to ignore the large, hard seeds. It was not part of their instinct to eat those seeds if only they had the physical capability. When the regular food ran out, those finches who had the physical ability (genetically passed on) innovated and chose to eat the once-ignored seeds. Innovation and creaturely choice are sometimes dismissed too easily. Peter R. Grant and B. Rosemary Grant, *How and Why Species Multiply: The Radiation of Darwin’s Finches* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 52-55.

¹⁵⁸ Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour*, 62-63.

¹⁵⁹ God’s intention, in this sense, is not to simply maximise freedom, which might be done in various other ways, from increasing intelligence, to providing unlimited resources to each creature. God’s intention is to live in free relationship with self-developing creatures in community.

with internal freedom and teleological openness. There is no eternal decree of God toward which a creature is invariably drawn: rather there are fields of possibility (with boundaries¹⁶⁰) within which the creature explores. These fields of possibility include outcomes that inspire our horror, and as such are not spaces only of idealistic perfection. This is not the best of all possible worlds in the sense that only the best possible choices, given all relevant circumstances, are ever realised. It is a world where value and disvalue, including gratuitous disvalue, are intermingled. In order to ontologically have such freedom, two other forms of kenosis are necessary: the kenosis of simple eternity and the kenosis of omniscience.

Kenosis of Simple Eternity and the Kenosis of Omniscience

The kenosis of simple eternity means that God does not stand outside of time, viewing all of time and space as a single instant of experience. Instead, God gives up this timeless vantage point and enters into an experience of time in order to facilitate responsive relationship with creatures.¹⁶¹ There is a “present” moment in God’s experience, a bright line in the time-space continuum that marks what is happening now.¹⁶² The content of that present moment is created by creaturely and divine action. For that creaturely action to be free, it must be undetermined. If undetermined, it must be unpredictable. If

¹⁶⁰ See the discussion of the constraints on initial conditions in divine action in chapter 5.

¹⁶¹ John Polkinghorne, “Kenotic Creation and Divine Action,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001): 90-106, 103-104. Some theologians do not conceive of this lack of future knowledge as a kenosis, but think that God cannot know the future since it does not ontologically exist: Peter Geach, “The Future,” *New Blackfriars* 54:636 (May 1973): 208-128; Clark Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 121.

¹⁶² For a philosophical treatment of how this bright line could exist in light of the Minkowski interpretation of Special Theory of Relativity, which would seem to make such a line meaningless, see David M. Woodruff, “Presentism and the Problem of Special Relativity,” in *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism*, eds. William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Dean Zimmerman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011): 94-124.

unpredictable, creaturely action cannot be foreknown. Therefore, God's omniscience, like God's experience of simple eternity must be laid aside.¹⁶³ God knows the past and present perfectly, but in so far as the future depends on free creaturely action, it is knowable only as varieties of possibilities. The inclusion of God in time means that God will be able to act in creation in ways that are impossible in the classical tradition: most notably, God can respond to, co-suffer, and act directly upon the creation.¹⁶⁴

Another result of God's temporal experience is that it lends a different perspective to the question of gratuitous evil.¹⁶⁵ In 1979 William Rowe famously challenged the theistic world to respond to the question of gratuitous natural evil. His example of extreme and unnecessary animal suffering comes from what must have been a reasonably common experience throughout the long ages of evolutionary development:

Suppose in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. So far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless.¹⁶⁶

The typical theodicy response is to say that the fawn's suffering is not at all pointless, but is actually a working out of the essential qualities the world must hold if there are to be greater goods such as moral choice or physical skill. In chapter 2 we explored how C.S. Lewis, Michael Corey, Philip Clayton, Michael Murray, argued that physical regularity—what Murray called “nomic regularity”—was absolutely necessary for the capacity for moral choice.

¹⁶³ Alternatively, one could simply assert that the definition of omniscience is that God knows all that is logically possible, and since the future does not exist, it is not predictable. Therefore God cannot logically know it. With this strategy, God remains omniscient, but with a limited omniscience in comparison to the classical tradition's definition.

¹⁶⁴ See chapter 5 for more on divine action in creation.

¹⁶⁵ See the definition of gratuitous above, p. 145.

¹⁶⁶ William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16:4 (October 1979): 335-341, 337.

Actions must have reliable consequences for choices to have effective force. If no harmful or ill-intentioned action was effective, moral choice would be cut off. Only good actions could be effective, while harmful actions would only isolate a person further and further into a world where irregularities would cut off the effect of every action he or she tried to take. No moral choice would be possible, and the worth of all love and altruism would be completely ruled out because altruistic action would be the only effective choice. Similarly, for the non-human world, any physical skill or action would be made obsolete in a world where feather mattresses appeared every time something fell from a tree, or where a lion cub's claw softened upon touching a brother's ear.

Yet, think again of the fawn convulsing in agony for days in the forest and consider whether the arguments above answer the problem. The various arguments that propose that the fawn's suffering is not gratuitous have a sound logical basis, but they do not ultimately satisfy. While the overall system that leads to the fawn's suffering may not be gratuitous, this particular instance is gratuitous since the suffering does not directly lead to a greater good or prevent a greater harm. If a human were present they would undoubtedly and rightly relieve the suffering of the fawn in whatever way possible.¹⁶⁷ Allowing it to continue to suffer leads to no greater good. So why does God allow it to continue to suffer?

One implication of the combined kenosis of simple eternity and of omniscience is that God can experience events as gratuitously evil. An event at the time of its occurrence may be without any further teleology: it is an event that happens simply due to the chance meeting of natural forces. Gratuitous disvalue, or natural evil, means that the harm was not something that God

¹⁶⁷ William Hasker notes the difference between thinking about a class of events, such as gratuitous evil, and particular events themselves in *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God* (London: Routledge, 2004), 68.

intended with the outcomes being necessary to some greater purpose. There was no reason that the fire had to burn that particular fawn, or that it should fail to burn enough for a quick death; the horrific result simply happened. So, when God allows the fawn to suffer, God is not allowing it with some greater purpose in mind that is directly reliant upon that event happening—the fawn’s suffering is not in any way instrumental in a good-harm analysis.¹⁶⁸ Claiming gratuitous evil exists represents a significant challenge to what Jeff Jordan has called “the Standard Claim” that “among both atheists and theists... no possible world contains both God and pointless evil... [but that] every evil is necessary for divine purposes, or God does not exist.”¹⁶⁹ In one sense, there is no event that is *totally* without any value, *totally* pointless, because every event does point to nomic regularity or creation’s freedom. William Hasker, in particular has argued for what he calls the “necessity of gratuitous evil.”¹⁷⁰ However, Hasker’s argument deals primarily with moral evil, and where it deals with natural evil it does so with an unapologetically anthropocentric bias. To prevent gratuitous natural evil, he says, would be to either diminish the goods that natural evils produce in humans, such as promoting foresight and courage, or to perpetrate a “disinformation campaign” by seeming to allow natural evil without actually allowing it.¹⁷¹ However, there seems to remain a great many events in the pre-human world that contain vast amounts of gratuitous disvalue or natural evil to which Hasker’s arguments do not apply. There is a great deal of suffering that

¹⁶⁸ See chapter 2 for a full description of the instrumental good-harm analysis.

¹⁶⁹ Jeff Jordan, “Divine love and human suffering,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 56 (2004): 169-178, 170.

¹⁷⁰ Hasker, “The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil,” in *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 58-79.

¹⁷¹ Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 74.

did not specifically *have* to happen for God's purposes in the world to be achieved.

Does it help theologically to say that the suffering of the fawn in the fire was gratuitous from God's perspective as well? At the very least, it rids us of the image of God as an abusive being who causes horrendous suffering in order to work out a master plan. The theologian does not have to try and squeeze meaning out of gratuitous events through logical gymnastics in order to make them seem non-gratuitous. Second, it allows the theologian to advance co-suffering arguments with greater force: God's experience of the evil is unmitigated by the knowledge of how the suffering will one day be re-woven into the new creation's harmony, and so God feels the full brunt of the evil with creation. Third, it turns the theologian ever more forcefully toward that creative redemption which can give new meaning to events. The only answer to gratuitous evil is the creative and redemptive response of God.

One of the challenges of acknowledging gratuitous harms and the kenosis of omniscience is that if God does not know what harms might arise out of the evolutionary process, how can one be sure that they will eventually be brought to harmony? How can God be sure that they are actually redeemable? The response to this challenge must be that trust is not in God's overwhelming power to force every event into the form God wants, but in God's limitless skill and abundant creativity to reshape events into redemptive outcomes. Perhaps there are some "rules" or initial constraints in place in the very makeup of the

cosmos, so that the possibilities of evil are limited to things which are redeemable.¹⁷²

When it comes to gratuitous suffering, Thomas Merton wrote that “the grace of Christ is constantly working to turn useless suffering to something useful after all.”¹⁷³ The ability to reformulate past events in light of future events is another advantage of a God who takes on a temporal aspect. A God outside of time either cannot fully co-suffer with creation—because the foreknowledge of how the suffering will be resolved already alleviates the suffering—or God is guilty of using horrific suffering as a means to an end. Instead, if God experiences the world in a temporal way, God co-suffers with the creature fully, and can act responsively to the evil or suffering in order to redeem it. We can say that God did not intend evil or particular instances of suffering to happen, but can and will redeem all suffering and evil.¹⁷⁴ New meaning is brought to old events in light of new realities, a concept I will discuss further in chapter six. For God to act in the world with such effective power, but without the advantages of omniscience and eternity requires John Polkinghorne’s fourth kenosis: the kenosis of causal status.

Kenosis of Causal Status

¹⁷² Vernon White proposes this caveat in *The Fall of A Sparrow*, 144. The very fact that all life is inevitably mortal may be one such constraint. Nothing suffers forever, and nothing can cause suffering forever. Christopher Southgate also suggests that the “only way” argument might equally be applied to redemption: “that the sort of world we live in is the only sort of world that could make possible that redemption to which the Christian gospel testifies—reconciliation to God through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the divine Son.” in “Does God’s Care Make Any Difference? Theological Reflection on the Suffering of God’s Creatures,” in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, eds. Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Denis Edwards (London: T&T Clark, 2014): 97-114, 110.

¹⁷³ Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oats, 1955), 80.

¹⁷⁴ It is a very different thing to create a world where there is the possibility, even the inevitable possibility, of suffering and to will a specific instance of suffering. If I someday choose to bring a child into the world, for example, I could only do so knowing that the child will experience suffering. That is very different from willing them to experience a particular instance of suffering.

The kenosis of causal status, according to Polkinghorne, allows “*divine special providence to act as a cause among causes.*”¹⁷⁵ If all events are not predetermined, and God can respond in causally effective ways, then God must have some part in acting in creation that opens up new possibilities and therefore inaugurates new chains of causality. For God to do so requires that God become a cause among causes. The Incarnation is the most obvious example of God’s kenosis of causal status, and the possibility of the Incarnation opens the door to other forms of divine action.

The types of divine action in the world and in redemption will form the content of chapters 5 and 6, so I will not further investigate them here. Instead, let us move on to some of the difficulties of this kenotic characterisation of the divine-world relationship.

Does God Need Creation?

One struggle of speaking of divine responsiveness and vulnerability to creation is that it seems God becomes dependent upon creation. Needs are formed in the divine person that may or may not be satisfied depending upon the response of creation. It is, as Paul Fiddes says “a dangerous kind of theology” to propose “that a God who creates ‘out of love’ has needs to be satisfied.”¹⁷⁶ Does the concept of divine need overthrow God’s self-sufficiency or threaten God’s perfection? It might, depending on how they are conceived. Robert Jenson, for example, realises the worst fears of the classical theists when he proposes that through creation God develops a narrative of self-discovery. That is, God’s own identity is found through interaction with creation,

¹⁷⁵ Polkinghorne, “Kenotic Creation,” 104. Italics original.

¹⁷⁶ Fiddes, “Creation out of love,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 169.

or as Jenson writes, God “can have no identity except as he meets the temporal end toward which creatures live.”¹⁷⁷ God’s own character and abilities are tied essentially with creation.

David Bentley Hart rails against Jenson’s notion of divine temporality, passibility, and mutability with good reason: namely that it makes evil part of the development of the character of God.¹⁷⁸ Encounter with evil becomes the place where God grows into God’s ultimate self by overcoming evil, and thus the fullness of God’s goodness becomes dependent upon the existence of evil. As Hart suggests, this cannot be tolerated.

Rather than making God dependent upon evil, I suggest—with Keith Ward—that there is only mutability within certain parts of God’s existence, and not within the central attributes of God’s character.¹⁷⁹ God can add to the store of knowledge by moving through time, for example, but God cannot grow in love or goodness, since God already contains the perfect fullness of these attributes. God can change in act, but not in character. Creation, then, becomes a place where God finds room for the manifestation and expression of the divine character in dynamic relationship to creation, but creation is not a place for the development of God’s identity. The same is true of divine needs in relation to creation. If the needs aroused by creation are necessary and essential to the being of God, then creation can pose a devastating threat to God. However, the danger can be avoided if the needs are seen as contingent rather than necessary needs to the essential being of God, although this still constitutes an important change to the classical list of divine attributes.

¹⁷⁷ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1, *The Triune God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.

¹⁷⁸ Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 165. Cf. David Bentley Hart, “No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility,” *Pro Ecclesia* 11:2 (Spring 2002): 184-206, 191.

¹⁷⁹ Keith Ward expresses it as: “God possesses both necessary and contingent properties.” *Religion and Creation*, 190.

The choice of God to humbly take on need in creation—rather than having an intrinsic need that compels God to create—makes all the difference.

Fiddes, for example, writes:

God does not ‘need’ the world in the sense that this is some intrinsic necessity in his nature, binding his free choice (thus far Aquinas is right); but he does need the world in the sense that he has freely chosen to be in need.¹⁸⁰

The need aroused by creation arises out of the previous free choice to create, and therefore the need is self-chosen by God. Vanstone illustrates the difference between the two types of need with the example of a happy family.¹⁸¹ All their essential needs are met. Yet, out of the fullness of their love, the family chooses to adopt a child. Now, when the family gathers together, if the adopted child is missing, something from the whole of the family is missing as well: the circle is no longer complete without the additional member. A new need has been created by the very act of love, and the fulfilment of the family’s needs now rests also in the adoptee’s hands. This need was not essential, but contingent upon the previous act of love. In Vanstone’s words “Love has surrendered its own triumphant self-sufficiency and created its own need. This is the supreme illustration of love’s self-giving or self-emptying—that it should surrender its fullness and create in itself the emptiness of need.”¹⁸²

In the same way, we can think of God as having no necessary needs: there existed no lack, nor was there need for fulfilment beyond what was

¹⁸⁰ Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 74.

¹⁸¹ Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour*, 69.

¹⁸² Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour*, 69. Walter Kasper makes the same point: “The lover allows the other to affect him; he becomes vulnerable precisely in his love. Thus love and suffering go together. The suffering of love is not, however, a passive being-affected, but an active allowing others to affect one.” Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 196.

existent in the society of the divine persons. However, God freely chose¹⁸³ to undertake the activity of creation with the knowledge that it would create a need that previously did not exist, and the fulfilment of that need now lies within the power of creation by its response of love or resistance.¹⁸⁴

Even strict classical theists cannot seem to avoid the language of goal and fulfilment, and the desire and needs that lay behind goals. Gilles Emery, for example, writes that: “God does not create so as to acquire the good that he lacks, but acts freely in order to communicate a participation in his own perfection.”¹⁸⁵ So although God creates out of a superabundance of being and not out of necessity, God still creates with a goal: “to communicate a participation...” Although creation is freely made it is still made with a purpose toward which God and creation must journey, and therefore there must be something like desire in God to see the outcomes of that purpose realised, and a need in God to find that participation in order to be satisfied.¹⁸⁶ God could only be free of any desire or need if God had no purpose or goal in creation at all.

As soon as we infer a purpose that has not yet been achieved, even if that desire is not to fill a lack in God, it implies desire. The existence of desire, though, does not necessarily mean the imputation of lack, as was explored above. A desire could be a further good, an added perfection. Keith Ward writes that “divine desire is a good, the good of creative activity itself, in which

¹⁸³ God’s freedom in choosing to create has been hotly debated. Standard in Christian theology has been that God chose to create freely, whereas others propose that God *had* to create. See Keith Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 178. Since I adhere to the idea that God was complete without creation, then I do not (as Fiddes and Jenson do) think that God needed to create in order to self-realise the divine nature.

¹⁸⁴ Any such proposal of a “before” and “after” creation must also include a temporal aspect to God’s character. This I freely acknowledge and support.

¹⁸⁵ Emery, “The Immutability of the God of Love,” 72.

¹⁸⁶ See Wendy Farley’s reflections on divine desire in *The Healing and Wounding of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 101-103.

the creator realises new and imaginative forms of beauty and intellectual complexity... God wants to have the desires God has, desires for future goods... it would be contradictory to wish to have them already realised without creative action.”¹⁸⁷ Even God cannot shortcut the process of creation, and since God’s desires are desires rooted in the fullness of God’s being and God’s free kenotic acts, God’s desires do not collapse into the essential necessities that the classical theists fear.

God’s self, then, is given freely and vulnerably to the world in creative engagement, and it is this self-giving that brings about the fullness of creaturely existence. Southgate describes kenosis by drawing on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s concept of “that movement of the inner life of the Trinity that enables us to understand God as the creative, suffering origin of all things.”¹⁸⁸ Southgate calls this understanding “deep intratrinitarian kenosis.” Moltmann, too, argues that God’s kenotic actions toward creation are a picture of the inner life of the Trinity: marked by self-surrender, self-limitation, and obedience.¹⁸⁹ The origin of the movement of creation, then, begins deep in the personhood of God: in the giving of the Father to the Son, through the Spirit—the self-abandoning love that is the template for all creative endeavours. The nature of the Trinity, the nature of love, is toward self-giving union with the other, which extends to creation.¹⁹⁰ Arthur Peacocke writes “there is a creative self-emptying and self-offering (a *kenosis*) of *God*, a sharing in the suffering of God’s

¹⁸⁷ Ward, *Religion and Creation*, 185.

¹⁸⁸ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 58.

¹⁸⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001):137-51, 140.

¹⁹⁰ Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, xxiii.

creatures, in the very creative, evolutionary process of the world.”¹⁹¹ The effect of this kenosis, as Moltmann points out, is that the inner-trinitarian kenosis “premises that the world of human beings and death does not exist outside God, but that from the very beginning it lies within the mystery of the Trinity.”¹⁹² The world is based upon the surrendered self-giving of one self in love to another modelled first within the being of God.

The journey toward that self-giving for creation, however, is a long and arduous process. Andrew Elphinstone proposes an elegant link between the development of creation’s capacity for self-giving love and the ubiquity of violence and suffering in his book *Freedom, Suffering & Love*.¹⁹³ For Elphinstone, the key to understanding disvalue in nature is to pay attention to the whole evolutionary narrative. As opposed to the familiar Garden of Eden narrative where love and wisdom coincide with or even precede pain and violence, the evolutionary story sees creaturely love as a very new development on the world stage. Against the background of evolutionary suffering, he writes “we now see love slowly dawning, a newcomer amid the tougher ingredients of the evolutionary scene... It kindled and struggled to existence when pain had long been indigenous to life.”¹⁹⁴ Yet those tougher aspects are indeed “ingredients.” Central to Elphinstone’s argument is that the pain and violence of the world are the very components of love in their raw form. By a process which Elphinstone calls “divine alchemy” the base materials of selfishness, pain, and aggression are transmuted into the stuff of love. If we think of love as the

¹⁹¹ Arthur Peacocke, “The Cost of a New Life,” in *Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001): 21-42, 38. Italics original.

¹⁹² Moltmann, “God’s Kenosis,” 141. See also Fiddes on the concept of the death of God: *Creative Suffering of God*, 189-206. He argues that we can, in a sense, understand God as “perishing” but not as having “perished.” God can fully enter into the experience of death, and thus defeat and redeem it.

¹⁹³ Andrew Elphinstone, *Freedom, Suffering & Love* (London: SCM, 1976).

¹⁹⁴ Elphinstone, *Freedom, Suffering & Love*, 30.

interaction of certain desires, this actually makes quite a coherent picture: selfishness, fear, aggression; all can be thought of as desires. They are desires for safety, security, or power—usually for oneself. Love, by contrast, is desire focussed on the good of the other. It is altruistic. If Elphinstone is right in his theological construction, then a world *with* love and *without* suffering, violence, and aggression can no more exist than a diamond can exist in a world without graphite.¹⁹⁵ Here the argument shifts slightly from the defence that God will not, in love, control the evolutionary pathways which we were following, to a developmental argument that the end product of love requires the process of suffering and violence. Because love must, by definition, be free it cannot be created in final perfection. It must grow. Elphinstone helps us see that love's base materials are selfish and aggressive desires which metamorphose into love through the work of the Spirit and the pressure of evolutionary selection.¹⁹⁶ The hope in this picture is that the very strength of the selfish desires, which cause so much suffering, are directly proportional to the magnitude of love possible once the desires have been transmuted.¹⁹⁷ A human can suffer much and love much; a worm cannot do very much of either. The greater capacity for suffering and selfishness is in direct correlation to a greater capacity for love.

The contribution of Elphinstone helps us see that the freedom of creation given in love has resulted in the strengths of certain disvalues, certain inclinations that seem to be at odds with the very love that created it. However,

¹⁹⁵ Desire itself being, in this case, the carbon atoms that make up both diamonds and graphite.

¹⁹⁶ For more on Elphinstone, see Bethany Sollereeder, "From Suffering to Love: Evolution and the Problem of Suffering," *The Christian Century* 131:19 (September 2014), available online at <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-08/survival-love>.

¹⁹⁷ More will be said about the nature of redemption emerging from our understanding of love in chapter 6.

with the promise of redemption, even the disvalues of violence and selfishness become the foundation of hope and love.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this chapter to show that divine love is the proper starting point for a theodicy, instead of the weighing scales of goods and harms in either an instrumental or developmental way. The starting place of theodicy is a property-consequence GHA, where the primary property is that of divine love. If love is (as Aquinas argues) the result of a desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire for union with the beloved, then the freedom of action of the beloved creation is a necessary consequence. The freedom of life, or even of the evolutionary process itself, can result in methods of survival that do not necessarily reflect God's design or purpose, but are coherent from within a perspective of the freedom extended by divine love. Therefore, to use a concrete example, God did not design the parasitic Ichneumonidae to lay eggs within a living host, but God's love created a free process in which the Ichneumonidae would have the freedom to develop that survival technique. The love of God, by this definition, means that God can act towards different creatures in different ways, and so the "not-even-once" principle does not apply.

I then explored how the Thomist definition of love can be integrated with theological concerns about love's limitlessness, precariousness, and vulnerability, and how these considerations affect traditional notions about the attributes of God. Through a kenotic approach, I argued that the nature of love suggests that concepts such as divine need, passibility, and vulnerability are necessary to the divine nature and a central component of the God-world relationship. I explored different possibilities of creaturely freedom, and argued

that a non-deterministic world with creaturely free choice, was necessary to the nature of love I had explored. Gratuitous events were also argued to be possible in light of a God who takes on a temporal experience of the world. Finally, I explored the question of whether God, in taking the risk of love and therefore creating needs that could only be satisfied by creaturely action, created an insurmountable challenge to God's nature. God's unique transcendent character can be reconciled with the vulnerable nature of love through a self-assumed act of kenosis.

One of the trickiest parts of beginning with the nature of love is that the nature of love does not make economic sense. Love does not reach its goals economically or efficiently. It is not always rational, and seldom fair. Think of the parables of the kingdom that Jesus tells. In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd is willing to leave ninety-nine sheep exposed on the hills to go after the one.¹⁹⁸ In the same way, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard strikes at our sense of fairness.¹⁹⁹ Those who work only one hour are given the same compensation as those who worked throughout the whole day. Neither parable makes economic sense. Yet both, when viewed from the vantage point of love have a certain logic. The shepherd is unwilling to lose one of his precious sheep, because it is unique and irreplaceable in its particularity. The landowner has compassion on the labourers who could find no work and gives generously to fulfil their daily needs. Love takes extraordinary risks, and its limitless nature does not calculate the costs of its own existence. Therefore, although we may construct partial theodicies based on GHA approaches, they will never fully satisfy because the logic of love is not one of efficient calculation. Any theodicy rooted in love will have to make an account of the seemingly

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 18: 10-14.

¹⁹⁹ Matthew 20:1-16.

illogical nature of love's endeavour, a task I try to address most fully in the sixth chapter on redemption.

In terms of the theodicy I am beginning to construct, four points can be drawn from the contents of this chapter. First, some disvalues are simply part of a biological package deal and therefore are not theologically problematic. Pain systems in the body, for example, are necessary for sentient, mobile creatures to survive and flourish. Second, many of the disvalues in the evolutionary process are attributable to the freedom that is a result of divine love for creation. Third, the love of God for each creature is individually particular. God's treatment of each creature is uniquely considered, and each creature is unable to be substituted for another. Finally, God is vulnerable to creation in God's love, which means that we can understand God as co-suffering with the creation, and thus participating in and accompanying the pain of the non-human world.

In the next chapter, I will explore how the kenotic love of God, and the limits placed on divine power by the nature of love, shape our models of divine action in the world.

Chapter 5: Special Divine Action

“We know that, if the love of God is authentic, God is not ‘detached’ from His creation.”

-W. H. Vanstone¹

In the last chapter, I built a case that the starting place of theodicy is in the nature of divine love. Love was described as vulnerable, limitless, and freedom-bestowing. This chapter will explore how God, characterised by such love, is active in the world. Divine action will be explored both on its own terms and in reference to the suffering of the non-human world. The first half of this chapter will comprise a survey of various different proposed models of divine action in evolutionary development. The second half will advance a multi-faceted (or compound) view of divine action that will use and build upon previous models of divine action as well as develop a new proposal on how special divine action can be understood as the shaping of meaning in events. The latter proposal will be part of the mosaic picture of redemption that I will develop in chapter six.

Introduction

God’s action has traditionally been divided up into two different categories: general divine action (GDA) and special divine action (SDA). For this chapter, I will use the distinction made by Nicholas Saunders in his noteworthy book, *Divine Action & Modern Science*:

General Divine Action (GDA): Those actions of God that pertain to the whole of creation universally and simultaneously. These include actions such as the initial creation and the maintenance of scientific regularity and the laws of nature by God.

¹ W. H. Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1977), 67.

Special Divine Action (SDA): Those actions of God that pertain to a *particular* time and place in creation as distinct from another. This is a broad category and includes the traditional understanding of ‘miracles’, the notion of particular providence, responses to intercessory prayer, God’s personal actions, and some forms of religious experience.²

One of the major questions about SDA is whether it ought to be conceived of as an overthrow of the laws of nature. The definition offered above does not demand that it does, but if we include the concept of “miracle” in SDA, or even if we only concede that SDA is action which opens up possibilities for new lines of causation, we must find some way to describe why that effect took place. For David Hume, emerging out of the mechanistic worldview of the eighteenth-century, a miracle (or SDA in general) could only mean a violation of the laws of nature.³ Hume’s definition has become the layperson’s definition both of miracle and SDA: an intervention contradicting the regular working of the natural in order to produce a desired result. Paul Davies, for example, picks it up when he defines intervention as those times when “God acts like a physical force in the world. God moves atoms and other microscopic objects about, but to do so, God must violate the physical laws studied by science.”⁴

There are three concepts with definitional overlap here: SDA, miracle, and intervention. SDA is the broadest of these terms, encompassing the other two, and more. In no way should the term “special divine action” be understood to mean “non-naturalistic event.”⁵ Rather, SDA is a general category that

² Nicholas Saunders, *Divine Action & Modern Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21. Italics original.

³ For a discussion of Hume’s critique of miracles, see Christopher Southgate, “A test case: divine action,” *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, 3rd ed., ed. Christopher Southgate (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 293-294.

⁴ Paul Davies, “Teleology Without Teleology: Purpose Through Emergent Complexity,” in *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology: Scientific Perspective on Divine Action*, eds. Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J., and Francisco J. Ayala (Vatican City/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 1998), 152.

⁵ Double agency, NIODA, and all the other models below which we will explore later, apart from “No SDA” are examples of special divine action that do not involve intervention.

contains all divine action that is not universally and uniformly performed by God. Miracle has been defined in various ways that do not involve the overthrow of natural laws, so we cannot use it in Davies's limited way.⁶ Intervention alone, for now, will be defined in Davies' sense of events occurring outside the course of nature.⁷ Let us explore this third concept a little further. Does God intervene in such a way as to violate the natural laws of the world?

There are various reasons scientists and theologians do not find the concept of interventions in the world order appealing.⁸ Such a violation is problematic on at least two counts: first, science cannot recognise such action since it lies outside the ability of science to study. The scientific endeavour can only study natural causes. If something has a supernatural cause, as the case would be with an intervention, it is beyond the ability of science to investigate.⁹ Second, it raises questions about the character of a God who would set up natural laws and then violate them. We can classify these as either the scientific and theological objections, or the mechanistic and the moral.

The claim that interventions are anti-scientific¹⁰—that they cannot be explained or studied by science—is less problematic than the second objection. If interventions happen at all they would be expected to be extremely rare. We

⁶ See Alan G. Padgett, "God and Miracle in An Age of Science," in *The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, ed. J. B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 533-542. See also Southgate's definition of miracle: "an extremely unusual event, unfamiliar in terms of naturalistic explanation, which a worshipping community takes to be specially revelatory, by dint of the blessing or healing it conveys, of the divine grace." Southgate, "A test case: divine action," 294.

⁷ For a much longer discussion of various definitions of intervention (depending as it does on one's conception of natural laws), see Saunders, *Divine Action*, 48-60.

⁸ See Arthur Peacocke's discussion in *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human*, enlarged edition (London: SCM, 1990,1993): 141-143.

⁹ One might be able to study the effects of miraculous action, but not the cause, since the cause is outside the realm of nature.

¹⁰ Gordon D. Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'Act of God'," *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968): 175-201; John Polkinghorne, *Science & Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 1998), 92; Robert J. Russell, "Does 'The God Who Acts' Really Act? New Approaches to Divine Action in Light of Science," *Theology Today* 54:1 (April 1997), 49-51; Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 139-142; Southgate, "A test case: divine action," 279.

should not expect scientists to find them, or be able to study them, in any sort of systematic way because they do not fall under the regular operations of the world. If an intervention occurred on the 100th occurrence of a repeated event, a scientist could not expect it to happen the next 100th time, and so he or she could not make predictions regarding the intervention, nor prepare to observe it again. Yet, while interventions would not be able to be studied by science, that does not mean that they could not occur.¹¹ They would simply have to be studied by other disciplines, or through other means. The scientists (or scientific theologians), then, can have little to say about the occurrence of intervention except that the reliable predictions that science can make of the world seems to discourage one from making claims that such events are common, particularly in poorly-understood areas of natural phenomena. Yet, there has been a great deal of work to develop non-interventionist ways of conceiving divine action that do not require the overthrow of natural law, and so are open to scientific discussion.¹² To these we will presently turn.

The second reason why thinkers do not want to countenance an intervening God is for moral reasons: because it strikes at God's character. One moral argument is that interventions create a contradiction in the understanding of God's faithfulness: why would a God who creates and sustains the laws of nature then flout them?¹³ Another argument is that interventions challenge the traditional notions of God's omnipotence, perfection, impassibility, and atemporality.¹⁴ An omnipotent and perfect God would not

¹¹ John Polkinghorne writes "strictly speaking, science cannot exclude the one-off, though the more it discerns a regular world, the more problematic become the claims for such unique occurrences." *Science & Theology*, 92.

¹² The most important research programme in this regard was the 20-year CTNS/Vatican Observatory cooperative project that produced 5 volumes subtitled *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, edited by Robert J. Russell, et. al.

¹³ Polkinghorne, *Science & Theology*, 92; Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 142.

¹⁴ See descriptions of Maurice Wiles, David Burrell, and Denis Edwards below. p. 219-232.

create a world with such obvious flaws that God had to intervene to correct them. God's impassibility would mean that God could not be affected or changed by worldly occurrences and, therefore, there would be no motivation to intervene. Finally, for an atemporal God, no intervention would be possible because it would be impossible for God to relate to the world in time-bound ways. For classical theists, an intervention would also make God one agent among others in creation, rather than the source of all being—a serious diminution of God's being.¹⁵ A different type of moral argument is raised by Clayton and Knapp's "Not-even-once" principle, which argues that if God intervened even once to save a creature from innocent suffering, God would be morally obliged to do so in every case, which would lead to the collapse of the regularities of our world. If God did avert evil in some circumstances, it would seem to make God capricious or neglectful in all the situations in which God did not respond.¹⁶ In the last chapter, I spent some time challenging both the traditional attributes, and the underpinning assumptions of the "not-even-once" principle. Nevertheless, for all these reasons, interventionist divine action has been largely rejected by theologians.¹⁷ Indeed, it is so out of favour, that it does not even appear as a possible model of divine action in one introductory text book.¹⁸ Instead scientists and theologians have developed various models of

¹⁵ Davies, "Teleology Without Teleology," 152; Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 168; Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 63; David B. Burrell C.S.C., and Isabelle Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas and Dionysius," *Modern Theology* 24:4 (October 2008), 642.

¹⁶ Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44-52; Wesley J. Wildman, "Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty, Disconcerting Truth: Ultimate Reality and Suffering in Nature," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 267-275. See also my critique of this position in chapter 4, p. 163.

¹⁷ Polkinghorne, *Science & Theology*, 93. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 142. Southgate, "A test case: divine action," 294.

¹⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Science & Religion: A New Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 93-101.

non-interventionist divine action that propose how God can be objectively active in the world without the need for overriding natural laws.¹⁹

There are many models of divine action. Some only allow for GDA, some only for SDA, and some for a mixture of both. The following section will explore various available models and explore how they might be useful or not in addressing the question of the suffering of the non-human creation.

Models of Divine Action

No Special Divine Action

One model is that there simply is no SDA. Maurice Wiles, for example, understands all of the world and all of creation to be one great, primary act of God.²⁰ Wiles specifies “the proposal that I want to make is that the primary usage for the idea of divine action should be in relation to the world as a whole rather than to particular occurrences within it.”²¹

To make this collapse of SDA into GDA more concrete, Wiles borrows an analogy from John Lucas, who points to the language of Solomon building the temple.²² While we might say “Solomon built the temple” we do not mean that Solomon placed every stone, or wove every curtain. Instead, Solomon had an intention and a goal that a temple should be built. He made provision for others to carry out the actual building of the temple, without micromanaging the workmen's strokes. In fact, the temple building did not even require Solomon's direct presence, despite the building being attributed to his action. In saying “Solomon built the temple” we point out one unified act which, in practice, was

¹⁹ Russell, “The God Who Acts,” 51; Southgate, “A test case: divine action,” 285.

²⁰ Maurice Wiles, *God's Action in the World* (London: SCM, 1986), 28-30.

²¹ Wiles, *God's Action*, 28.

²² Wiles, *God's Action*, 61-62.

made up of many other actions by many other agents. In the same way, the whole world and its history is, for Wiles, a single act of God.

Gordon Kaufman, who inspired Wiles, makes a similar distinction between master-acts of God and sub-acts.²³ All of history is one master-act of God with a set purpose and goal, while the first instantiation of any new events that bring history toward that goal (whether it be the creation of stars or the emergence of life) are sub-acts of God.²⁴ Therefore, there is no reason to say that God acts further in “special divine acts” since to do so would be to make God into a causal agent alongside other causal agents and raise the paradox of God intervening in what is already God’s action. Instead, God’s primary action of creation allows all other actions to be and directs them toward the ultimate goals of history. Creatures are free to act, and their actions are made more intelligible in light of higher realms of meaning, in the same way that the specific act of a carpenter hammering a nail is made more intelligible in light of an architect’s vision.

Wiles does not recognise any particular or special divine interaction within creation, such as the answering of prayer, or any sort of directive agency. All such notions of divine action are “to be firmly rejected”²⁵ because, according to Wiles, they propose a trivial and inconsistent view of divine action and, crucially, they seem to oppose the consistency with which science describes the world. Instead, if all divine action is conceived as one act, there is room for interpreting portions of that act as special acts of God. There may be moments where one part of the divine act seems to become especially significant, but the

²³ Kaufman, “On the Meaning of ‘Act of God’,” 175-201.

²⁴ Kaufman, “On the Meaning of ‘Act of God’,” 197. Kaufman avoids talking about whether these sub-acts were determined by previous events and were inevitable or if some other history might have emerged if God had acted differently.

²⁵ Wiles, *God’s Action*, 100.

action itself does not become special in such a way that it could be distinguished from the original act of creation.²⁶

If creation is one act, then there is no special response to evil or suffering; no special care of the suffering creature. In Kaufman's blunt words: "This is no God who 'walks with me and talks with me' in close interpersonal communion... this is the Lord of heaven and earth, whose purposes we cannot fully fathom and whose ways are past finding out."²⁷ Redemption, so far as it exists, is tied up with the initial action of creation. "Evil was part of the risk taken by God in bringing a world into being out of the triviality of the pre-existing chaos,"²⁸ writes Wiles, and the process of overcoming evil is part of the overall movement of creation. There is no divine response, and therefore no divine comforting, or relating to the pain or suffering of creatures. In the end, although Wiles describes his view as being founded on the nature of the love of God, his conclusions end up denying the very love he first espouses because, without significant union and empathy, there is no love.

To illustrate that there is no love in Wiles's system let us look at when Wiles claims that any response of God to human prayer is highly unsatisfactory because "the picture follows too closely the analogy of one human person's relation with another."²⁹ This is a confusing objection, since Wiles also puts a great deal of emphasis on the character of God as personal—as defined by love. It is contradictory to use personal analogies of relationship and also to reject them. Another contradiction arises when Wiles objects to views that see human action and divine providence as mutually exclusive: "The value of using

²⁶ Wiles gives the example of redemption history as a place where the one act of God in creation-redemption becomes specially significant. *God's Action*, 93.

²⁷ Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'Act of God'," 200.

²⁸ Wiles, *God's Action*, 45.

²⁹ Wiles, *God's Action*, 101.

the personal analogy of love or friendship is that it can help us form a false conceptuality in which divine grace and human freedom are seen as competing explanations, so that the more one ascribes to the former, the less can be ascribed to the latter.”³⁰ Later, the very same concept is rejected, and the very existence of any special divine action is seen as a threat to the unity of the world and the freedom of the human agent. In Wiles’s final description of divine action, to go back to the temple analogy, Solomon may only order the temple to be built, but can no longer pick up a hammer and a chisel or talk to the workers. This view of providence ends up losing any sense of engagement or divine response to the creation— notions that are central to the type of love I argued for in the previous chapter. In the end, Wiles concludes his treatise with a highly unsatisfactory notion of divine action: “This then is the fashion of God’s acting in the world—making possible the emergence, both individually and corporately, of a genuinely free human recognition and response to what is God’s intention in the creation of the world.”³¹ Alone, this manner of acting in the world would not allow for the Incarnation, or other important acts of God in the Christian tradition.

Everything is Special Divine Action

On the other side of the theological spectrum Denis Edwards and Niels Gregersen collapse the category of GDA altogether into the category of SDA.³² Instead of seeing God’s action as something that is always and everywhere

³⁰ Wiles, *God’s Action*, 76.

³¹ Wiles, *God’s Action*, 103.

³² Niels Gregersen, “Special Divine Action and the Quilt of Laws: Why the Distinction between Special and General Divine Action Cannot be Maintained,” in *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action: Twenty Years of Challenge and Progress*, eds. Robert J. Russell, Nancey Murphy, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican City/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2008): 179-199; Edwards, *How God Acts*, 37-39.

repeated without variation, they argue that we should see each particular event as a special divine act which (because of the consistency of God's character) has many similarities with all the other particular acts of God, and therefore looks patterned. What we have taken to be GDA in its faithful regularity is in fact multiple instances of SDA: there is no ontological difference.

While preferable to Wiles and Kaufman's collapse of SDA into GDA, the collapse of GDA into SDA raises serious problems for theodicy. Every occurrence in history becomes something brought into being by the special, willed act of God. When this includes destructive and horrific suffering, it raises further questions about the goodness of God. If, on the contrary, occasionalism is not being argued for by this position, as Gregersen would suggest,³³ and God is simply working with natural agents, then the position is open to the same critiques as the "SDA in Secondary Causes" model explored below, which includes its own problems for theodicy.

Constraint on Initial Conditions

Even in a world of spontaneity and randomness, if the initial conditions of creation could be carefully ordered, it would have a marked effect on the outcome of later natural processes. By constraining, ordering, and sustaining certain initial conditions God could create a universe that would substantially create itself toward certain ends through chance, law, and creaturely agency. The definite outcomes need not be defined, but the propensity for life to emerge could be made to be overwhelmingly probable. Paul Davies advocates a view where the initial action of creation can be sustained by uniformitarian divine action and still result in a complex and emergent world. For him, God continues

³³ Gregersen, "Special Divine Action and the Quilt of Laws," 194.

to be involved in the world through sustaining action, but God is not involved in any way to move creation toward certain ends that were not inherent in natural laws instilled in the original moment of creation. The laws of creation are of such a particular sort that “though nature’s complexity gives every appearance of intentional design and purpose, it is entirely the result of natural processes.”³⁴ Davies likens the natural world to a chess game: the rules are set by God to encourage some sorts of action, discourage others, and limit some altogether, in order to facilitate rich and varied play by the free agents or “chess pieces” of creation.³⁵ In one way, this view seems to ease the theological burden of suffering, since God is not directly to blame for any suffering: any particular form of disvalue in nature is the outcome of chance or freewill. Nor is God responsible for alleviating suffering, for God does not generally have any direct engagement with the world. However, God is still culpable for setting up the system in such a way that suffering would be an inevitable outcome. The cost paid, however, for the advantages of Davies’s system is very dear: any hope of direct eschatological action is dissipated since God has no direct contact with the world, and there is no personal notion of God’s direct relationship with creatures.

In a different way, Christopher Knight also advocates for a uniformitarian view, though his approach allows for the appearance of SDA.³⁶ He uses the analogy of children appealing to their parents for money while away at school, and gives three options of parental action. First, a parent could set up regular

³⁴ Davies, “Teleology Without Teleology,” 151.

³⁵ Davies, “Teleology Without Teleology,” 155.

³⁶ Christopher Knight, “Divine Action: A Neo-Byzantine Model,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58 (2005): 181-199. Knight identifies his own position as “theistic naturalism” and sometimes speaks in the language of secondary causes (see the next section below). Yet, since he closely associates with 18th century deism and eschews the concept of “special providence,” he does not belong in the same camp as the Neo-Thomists.

standing orders that would give a certain amount of money at certain times: roughly equivalent to GDA. Second, a parent might occasionally deposit money in the child's account because of a special appeal: likened to SDA. Third, a parent might set up a trust fund that gives regular payments, but can also have stipulations in which, under particular situations, extra money will be deposited. This third option has the non-interventionist reality of the first option, with the appearance of responsive or interventionist engagement of the second. Thus, Knight can defend a non-interventionist approach while maintaining that our experience might sometimes point toward what seems like interventions. Knight is insistent that there is no real-time divine response to creation: about prayer he writes that theistic naturalists cannot "see intercessory prayer as having any purpose—other, perhaps, than that of refining the religious sensibilities of those who indulge in it."³⁷ All divine action has been set from eternity into the initial conditions of the world.

While this model is appealing if one wants to defend an unchanging, untouched Aristotelian God, it has little appeal for those who see vibrant relationship at the heart of being. To take Knight's analogy: would it be a good parent who simply sets up a watertight trust fund and does not actually interact with their child? What does this tell us about the nature of the parent? Of the nature of the parent's love? What would we think of a parent who preferred to simply set up a trust to be invoked with every new need of his or her child rather than actually interact with his or her child? As in the models of Kaufman and Wiles, God remains a distant figure, far removed from the suffering creation. In attempting to draw the problematic thorn of suffering from the neck of theology, these theologians have decapitated their theology instead. Their solutions do,

³⁷ Knight, "Divine Action," 185.

in one sense, solve the problem: the thorn can be extracted without difficulty. But living forms of theology die when too great a chasm is made between the intimately personal God we see in Christ and the theological abstractions we create in response to philosophical quandaries.

Special Divine Action in Secondary Causes

A very different approach to SDA in physical events is held by Neo-Thomists, including Denis Edwards, William Stoeger, Elizabeth Johnson, and David Burrell.³⁸ These theologians maintain that God works in and through secondary causes; this upholds “both God’s transcendence and creaturely autonomy.”³⁹ Basing their model on the Aristotelian division of primary and secondary causation, Neo-Thomists recognise God as the primary cause of events in the world, while creatures are the secondary cause. The advantage to this approach is that it does not see God as one agent amongst others—thus maintaining God’s distinction from creation—and it maintains a clear view of divine action without intervention. A disadvantage is that there is no way to explain how God is at work in the world. The work of God will never be able to have any sort of scientific explanation or “causal joint” since the (secondary) causes are already evident.⁴⁰ It also means that divine work is impossible to “find” since it is perfectly hidden in the secondary causes. John Polkinghorne, who finds this apparent paradox unsatisfactory, calls Austin Farrer’s version of

³⁸ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 62-66; William R. Stoeger, S.J., “Conceiving Divine Action in a Dynamic Universe,” in *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action: Twenty Years of Challenge and Progress*, eds. Robert J. Russell, Nancey Murphy, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2008): 225-247; Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 154-180; Burrell and Moulin, “Albert, Aquinas and Dionysius,” 642; David B. Burrell C.S.C., “Creation, Metaphysics, and Ethics,” *Faith and Philosophy* 18:2 (April 2001), 204-221.

³⁹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 62.

⁴⁰ The term “causal joint” was first used, pejoratively, by Austin Farrer in *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967), 65.

secondary causation, known as double agency, a kind of “theological doublespeak.”⁴¹

Another critique of the model of secondary causation comes directly out of the problem of suffering. If God works in and through secondary causes, is God the primary cause of evil events as well? Some defenders say “yes,” and hold that in every evil event can be found deeper good. Vernon White is a good example of a theologian who attempts to approach theodicy from this perspective.⁴² White does not accept that some events are only permitted as instrumental to other goods. For White every event, and therefore every activity of God in every event, has a self-contained meaning. Nothing is reduced to a means to an end.⁴³ Nicholas Saunders raises the objection that on this view there can be no distinction in importance between various divine acts: “The problem is that not only are the falling rain or any other natural events and the resurrection similar accounts of God’s action, but they must be given an equal status in our theological understanding.”⁴⁴ Any distinguishing, when all actions are equally caused by God, become instances of special pleading.⁴⁵ This is especially problematic when it comes to evil—a problem White tries to evade by saying that evil events should not follow the rule of being events in themselves, but need to be understood in their wider context where they lose ontological reality.⁴⁶ “Evil only exists in a certain configuration of events which can always be seen from a different perspective, and as such may never have an ultimate

⁴¹ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief: Theological Reflections of a Bottom-up Thinker* (London: SPCK, 1994), 81-82.

⁴² Vernon White, *The Fall of a Sparrow: The Concept of Special Divine Action* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985), 125-142; particularly 134-136.

⁴³ White, *Fall of a Sparrow*, 128-132.

⁴⁴ Saunders, *Divine Action*, 31.

⁴⁵ White’s attempts to make these distinctions is found in *Fall of a Sparrow*, 139-142.

⁴⁶ White, *Fall of a Sparrow*, 133-136.

hold on reality.”⁴⁷ If this is true, then either there is no reason for the action of God in redemption because there is no ontological reality of evil to be redeemed (one need only wait to see apparent evil resolved), or the model becomes absolutely tied to an atemporal understanding of God, meaning, and history, where the resolution of the wider context is eternally real.⁴⁸ However, since my concept of love and freewill is tied to temporal understandings of God, I cannot accept this solution.

Other defenders of the model will not accept the unpalatable notion that White is willing to engage, and would say “no, God does not cause evil.” It is unclear how they can defend themselves without ending up in various difficulties. They might say that God is the primary cause behind only good events, which leaves evil events without a primary cause, or sets up a personal dualism of some sort to cause the evil events. Both solutions end up with problems: the origin of a dualism, or an incoherent world where evil actions are without a cause. In White’s solution, God becomes one for whom the ends justify horrific means. In the other solution, one has a world full of actions with no explanation.

Edwards tries to avoid these problems by saying that God’s primary causation, God’s will and intention in creation, is limited by the creaturely agents who act as secondary causes. God accepts creaturely limits, and those creaturely limits are the source of natural evil.⁴⁹ The problem with this is that those very same natural evils are often deeply productive, and Edwards would want to ascribe that productivity to God. It seems an inescapable fact that natural evils are necessary for the emergence of valuable goods. If the

⁴⁷ White, *Fall of a Sparrow*, 136.

⁴⁸ A point White acknowledges. *Fall of a Sparrow*, 144.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 63.

cougar's carnivorousness, for example, is a result of creaturely limitation, then so is the skill and agility of the fleet-footed deer. Taken to the extreme, very little in the world would be attributable to God's creation.

Edwards tries to uphold both creaturely autonomy and SDA toward desired ends, but it doesn't seem to hold together logically. When Edwards explores the question of evolution, he writes:

In the approach I am advocating, [the emergence of life] can be seen as a special act of God in the sense that God chooses, eternally, that the universe would bring forth biological life on our Earth by means of emergence and increasing complexity. What makes this act special is that (1) this action of God has a specific effect in creaturely history, the emergence of life in the universe, and (2) this specific effect is intended by God.⁵⁰

Edwards goes on to note other things that had to occur for this intended outcome: the formation of stars, the placement of our planet from the sun, the formation of the atmosphere, and so on. "In all these events," writes Edwards, "God is acting in specific and special ways."⁵¹ Edwards is defending something more robust than God creating by simply upholding and sustaining the natural processes: there is an ordering to the course of history that had to be what it is in order to produce the intended outcome of the emergence of life. Yet there is no explanation of how God might have achieved God's aims had the autonomy of the creation gone down routes unfavourable to life. Instead of proposing that God might protect the possibilities of life, as Southgate does,⁵² Edwards only affirms after the fact—in light of the emergence of life—that this is the creative work of God. The argument is circular in the same sense as the Weak Anthropic argument: it is an argument made after-the-fact, once the results are already in place.

⁵⁰ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 64-65.

⁵¹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 65.

⁵² Southgate, "A test case: divine action," 301-302.

If I take a highly improbable situation, for example, that in a hundred throws of a die I roll a six over fifty percent of the time, and then announce “I have acted in such a way that I would roll a six about 50% of the time” I am simply stating the obvious. I could only say something significant about the intentionality of my action if I announced beforehand “I intend to roll a six in more than half these throws,” and then am able to do so, rather than the likely statistical outcome of rolling 17 sixes. In another scenario, if I were happy with any outcome, I could show intentionality by saying “I will roll for any amount of sixes.” But Edwards insists that God has specific intended outcomes (a life-bearing universe) in a system that easily could have produced other results, as the fine-tuning arguments show us.⁵³ God, to use my analogy, was rolling for a significant amount of sixes against staggering odds. Edwards’s strong emphasis on the freedom of the individual combined with the non-directionality of secondary causation does not give sufficient reason for why the intended outcome (“a life-bearing universe” or “plenty of sixes”) should have emerged amongst the many other probabilities. Nor—even if such a thing were to be found, if the universal die was found to be “loaded”—does the argument have any metaphysical force in determining whether the outcomes are the result of divine action. Polkinghorne points out:

If the evolution of life is seen to be almost inevitable, the atheists say that naturalism reigns and there is no need for a Creator, while the theists say that God has so beautifully ordained the order of nature that creation is indeed able to make itself. If life is so rare as to make its occurrence on Earth seem a fortuitous event, the atheists say that it shows that humans have emerged by chance in a world devoid of significance, while theists are encouraged to see the hand of God behind so fruitful but unpredictable an occurrence. Science influences metaphysical

⁵³ Whether we attribute the fine-tuning of the universe to God or some other cause is a different question. However, the startling exactness of our universe is explored in Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999).

understanding but it certainly does not simply determine it. In the end, metaphysical answers are given for metaphysical reasons.⁵⁴

In the end, all Edwards offers the reader is a set of fideistic statements.

The other point to consider in Edwards' view is that he says "God chooses, eternally, that the universe would bring forth biological life."⁵⁵ In that one word, "eternally," he opens up all the complexities of interaction between time and eternity. It might be possible, for example, that God could eternally intend something which—from the vantage point of a timeless observation point—already exists, but seems only a remote future possibility from our current perspective. However, all the language Edwards uses implies the usual pattern of intention-action-result: "God wants a world of diverse living creatures to evolve on our planet and acts in all the regularities and contingencies of the natural world to bring this about."⁵⁶ Without a discussion of the nature of time and eternity Edwards uses the language of a temporal agent at work (such as "intends," "wants," and "brings about") in ways that could be seen as deeply misleading, since he does not actually mean that God acts in any such way.⁵⁷

An argument of SDA entirely through secondary causation is too non-specific to be useful, for it does not tell us how God acts in the world, where God acts, or even if God is at work in any particular situation.⁵⁸ The view becomes simply a proclamation of faith in light of certain favourable outcomes.

⁵⁴ Polkinghorne, *Science & Theology*, 79.

⁵⁵ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 64.

⁵⁶ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 65-66.

⁵⁷ There is a semantic muddle here. Presumably, no verb with a tense other than present would be proper of an atemporal God. The states of intending something to happen, then acting to bring it about, and being satisfied with it being brought about are not appropriate to such a being. God might be able to have intentions, but since they would either be eternally realised or eternally disappointed, one could not really speak about their having been brought about.

⁵⁸ Stoeger, "Conceiving Divine Action in a Dynamic Universe," 244-245.

Stoeger is more careful, and upholds the freedom of creation to act as an agent, yet does so at the expense of saying that God only works “metaphorically” in and through the laws of nature.⁵⁹ Stoeger explains, “When we refer to God or God’s action we can do so only ‘symbolically’ or ‘analogically.’”⁶⁰ Once again, we are left in a place where nothing can be said of divine action that would help one recognise it or allow us to speak meaningfully of special divine action rather than the providential divine action of upholding being. Ultimately, the differentiation between God’s overall creative action (which may include initial boundary conditions that constrain the possible paths of history toward certain overall aims) and SDA is lost.⁶¹ In which case, we may call creative action “special,” but we are really only redefining semantics and no longer talking about SDA. No act is special precisely because every act is.

Special Divine Action in Quantum Indeterminacy

In pursuit of a model of divine action with more traction, several theologians have attempted to find ways for God to be involved in the world in objectively physical but non-interventionist ways, also known as NIODA. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, Thomas Tracy, George Ellis, Keith Ward, and John Polkinghorne are all examples of scientist-theologians who have searched for a “causal joint” in creation that would allow for SDA to engage with and change the nature of physical events without intervening in such a way as to overthrow the integrity of the natural world processes.

⁵⁹ William R. Stoeger, S.J., “The Big Bang, quantum cosmology and *creatio ex nihilo*,” in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, eds. David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 173.

⁶⁰ Stoeger, “The Big Bang, quantum cosmology and *creatio ex nihilo*,” 174.

⁶¹ This loss is admitted by Stoeger who continues to view some events through secondary causes as specially revelatory of God’s work largely because they are the result of self-choosing individuals or communities who intuit God’s purposes and actively pursue them. This does not, therefore, apply to the non-human world. Stoeger, “Conceiving Divine Action in a Dynamic Universe,” 245.

For Murphy, Russell, Tracy, and Ellis, God is thought to be able to influence the outcome of indeterminate quantum events to bring about desired physical outcomes through the causal openness of certain chance processes. There is disagreement over how involved God is: whether God controls all quantum events (Murphy), some (Tracy), or even only those events that would affect non-sentient beings (Russell).⁶²

Two major problems have emerged from the line of enquiry on divine action in quantum realms. First is that the “basis of quantum theory is a paradigm deterministic theory... [therefore] incompatibilist SDA is not possible in a non-interventionist sense.”⁶³ Nicholas Saunders shows convincingly that for God to determine purposeful outcomes toward a desired end would, in the Copenhagen interpretation, involve just as much intervention as a macroscale act of intervention.⁶⁴ Even if it were possible, the outcome of indeterministic systems at quantum levels of scale do not have macroscopic effects.⁶⁵ Therefore, the outcome of these quantum events do not have the desired

⁶² Nancey Murphy, “Divine Action in the Natural Order: Buridan’s Ass and Schrödinger’s Cat,” in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 1995): 325-58; Thomas F. Tracy, “Particular Providence and the God of the Gaps,” in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 1995): 289-324; Thomas F. Tracy, “Creation, Providence, and Quantum Chance,” in *Quantum Mechanics: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert Russell, Philip Clayton, Kirk Wegter-McNelly, and John Polkinghorne (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2001): 235-258; Russell, “Does ‘The God Who Acts’ Really Act?” 58; Robert J. Russell, “Natural Theodicy in Evolutionary Context: The Need for an Eschatology of New Creation,” in *Theodicy and Eschatology*, eds. Bruce Barber & David Neville (Hindmarsh, Australia: ATF, 2005), 126; Robert J. Russell, “Divine Action and Quantum Mechanics: A Fresh Assessment,” in *Quantum Mechanics: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert Russell, Philip Clayton, Kirk Wegter-McNelly, and John Polkinghorne (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2001), 314-316.

⁶³ Saunders, *Divine Action*, 132.

⁶⁴ Saunders, *Divine Action*, 144-156.

⁶⁵ See Jeffrey Koperski, “God, Chaos, and the Quantum Dice,” *Zygon* 35:3 (September 2000): 545-559; Arthur Peacocke, “Some Reflections on ‘Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action,’” in *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action: Twenty Years of Challenge and Progress*, eds. Robert J. Russell, Nancey Murphy, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2008), 216-217; John Polkinghorne, “Physical Process, Quantum Events, and Divine Agency,” in *Quantum Mechanics: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert Russell, Philip Clayton, Kirk Wegter-McNelly, and John Polkinghorne (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2001), 182.

theological importance, since there are few ways these effects can be amplified into macroscopic events.⁶⁶ Saunders states his final conclusion bluntly “on the terms of our current understanding of quantum theory, incompatibilist non-interventionist quantum SDA is not theoretically possible.”⁶⁷

Special Divine Action in Complex Systems

To avoid the difficulties of bridging quantum and non-quantum worlds, John Polkinghorne has pursued the idea that God could act in non-interventionist ways through macroscopic complex or chaotic systems.⁶⁸ Supported by Polkinghorne’s formula that epistemology models ontology, he holds that the unpredictability of complex systems speaks to an “emergent property of flexible process, even within the world of classical physics”⁶⁹ within which God could be at work without overturning natural law. However, chaotic systems are still deterministic even if they are unpredictable. It is unclear, therefore, how God could affect these systems toward desired outcomes without intervention, unless (as suggested by Tracy⁷⁰) the highly-sensitive initial conditions were involved with the uncertainty in quantum systems and amplified

⁶⁶ One good example of this kind of critiques is Timothy Sansbury, “The False Promise of Quantum Mechanics,” *Zygon* 42:1 (March 2007): 111-121. Defence of the influence of microlevel events on macrolevel structures (that it can be amplified up in meaningful ways) is found in George F. R. Ellis, “Quantum Theory and the Macroscopic World,” in *Quantum Mechanics: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert Russell, Philip Clayton, Kirk Wegter-McNelly, and John Polkinghorne (Vatican City/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2001): 259-291.

⁶⁷ Saunders, *Divine Action*, 172. Italics original.

⁶⁸ Polkinghorne, “Physical Process, Quantum Events, and Divine Agency,” 181-190.

⁶⁹ Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence*, 35.

⁷⁰ Tracy, “Creation, Providence, and Quantum Chance,” 255-257.

through the chaotic system.⁷¹ In the end we are still left with an unsatisfactory model that is highly limited in its outcomes.

Special Divine Action in Mental Events

If we move away from the concept of God working to bring about the divine will from a bottom-up approach, there is still room for God to be at work in the world through “top-down” approaches. One way this could happen is through the influencing of mental events.

Philip Clayton and Stephen Knapp advance a theory that revolves around the nonlawlike nature of mental events, which depends entirely on Donald Davidson’s concept of “anomalous monism.”⁷² Clayton and Knapp categorise mental events as a form of emergent complexity. According to them, the underlying laws of physics and chemistry no longer determine the outcome of events in these highly complex processes.⁷³ Instead, mental events are open to divine interaction because they do not rely directly upon the physical processes that make them possible. Despite this being a very limited model of divine action, Clayton and Knapp insist it is necessary—from a mechanistic perspective—because scientific understanding gives such complete explanations of the universe’s interactions that God could not undertake SDA without overthrowing those interactions.

Clayton and Knapp also argue from a moral perspective that such a limited view of divine action is necessary is based on the premise that if a good and benevolent God could have averted such profoundly evil events as the

⁷¹ Keith Ward does not choose between the quantum and chaotic systems, but allows both to be places where God can interact with the world, through non-deterministic systems. Keith Ward, *Divine Action* (London: Collins, 1990), 74-102.

⁷² Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 54.

⁷³ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 53-54.

Indonesian tsunami of 2004 or the Holocaust, God would have done so. Since God did not avert them, God must therefore not be able to intervene in the physical world. Clayton and Knapp's first argument presupposes there is a certain type of response to evil that God "ought" to do. Yet, God's ways of defeating evil are rarely transparent. In the Incarnation, for example, God's action was seldom obvious or predictable, despite being physical and "interventionist" in the sense of directly changing human history. Jesus' way of responding to evil, most notably in the cross, did not at all meet expectations of how people thought the coming Messiah should encounter their oppressions. So there may be room for divine action in the physical world in response to evil, beyond simply averting the evils in question, which is what Clayton and Knapp assume God would have to do.

What can God do? According to Clayton and Knapp, God can only interact with the world through the mental states of creatures, although those messages can be resisted or ignored. "What God cannot do," they write "if the problem of evil is answerable, is to give us thoughts or feelings that compel an automatic or reflexive response, because if that was the way God acted in the world, God would have an obligation to prevent or correct our mistakes and other failures whenever they might occur."⁷⁴ But it seems from their position that God does not even need to make it clear to the recipient of this divine action that anything out of the ordinary is taking place, since they say these messages can take place on a subconscious level.⁷⁵ If it is subconscious, the divine action is neither accepted nor rejected by the agent and has no way of being discerned by the agent themselves. This is a point that Clayton and Knapp acknowledge: "There is no reliable way, then, to separate the divine from

⁷⁴ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 62.

⁷⁵ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 63.

the human contributions to any particular instance of divine-human interaction.”⁷⁶ Nor can God impart information directly, in this view, but can only introduce axiological lures or a sense of divine presence, for the direct impartation of information would override creaturely freedom and introduce a moral dilemma.⁷⁷

Problematic from a scientific perspective, Clayton and Knapp’s view is founded upon the assumption that mental events are not reducible to physical brain events, a step which has come under criticism.⁷⁸ Ultimately, it leaves the theologian with one more possible place where further scientific discovery might edge God out of the picture if further neuropsychological study should find that minds do in fact work on nomological principles.⁷⁹

Problematic from a theological perspective, the model leaves no clear distinction between divine and creaturely action, and a very limited sphere for divine action. The outcomes of Clayton and Knapp’s approach may resonate more or less with the divine values of love, but it does so at great cost. The most troubling aspect of this line of thought is that the Incarnation itself, as classically understood, would be ruled out as a possible distinctive divine action, and with it, all the theodicies built on Christological foundations.

Conclusions on Divine Action Models

In the end, the search for a mechanism, or the “place,” of divine action falters. No one system stands out amongst the rest as a better possibility for

⁷⁶ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 63.

⁷⁷ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 61.

⁷⁸ See the critique in Christopher Southgate’s review of *The Predicament of Belief* in *Religious Studies* 49:1 (March 2013), 127.

⁷⁹ The same is true of the quantum indeterminacy argument which is based on the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. Currently, the Copenhagen interpretation has far more consensus than the theory of emergent complexity, but as these models are open to change and revision, they are always precarious places to hang too many theological concepts.

the location of SDA. All of them struggle with the same problems: if the action is non-interventionist, can it still be powerful enough to bring about divine goals and intentions? How does SDA interact with our understanding of deterministic systems? And, most crucially, *when* should something be considered SDA? In light of these challenges, many theologians have chosen instead to investigate the character and the nature of SDA. Christopher Southgate observes, “the divine action debate is ever more markedly being framed not in terms of mechanism but morality.”⁸⁰ The rest of this chapter will do just that: look at the character and nature of God’s action in the world without focussing on the mechanisms of divine action.

Character of Special Divine Action

My proposal is that divine action should not be reduced to just one type or level of action, but instead recognise that SDA happens in multiple realms, in various ways. Brian Hebblethwaite writes: “It will be apparent that God’s action in relation to any one human being at any one time will be a multi-faceted and multi-level business.”⁸¹ The same is true of divine action in relation to any particular non-human animal, and by a different scale of measure, to evolutionary history as a whole. To do justice to the complexity of divine action, we must avoid the temptation of saying that God is always and everywhere doing one and the same thing.⁸² Southgate warns: “It is best not to limit God’s action to a particular locus—or indeed to focus on efficient causation as the

⁸⁰ Southgate, “A test case: divine action,” 299.

⁸¹ Brian L. Hebblethwaite, “Providence and Divine Action,” *Religious Studies* 14:2 (June 1978), 231.

⁸² See Gregersen on the problem of uniformitarianism in divine action, see “Special Divine Action and the Quilt of Laws,” 183-84.

sole way of thinking of God's acting."⁸³ I want to propose four different ways of understanding SDA which, together, form a robust whole: SDA as the gift of being, as divine presence, as divine lure and invitation, and as participation in creation.

Gift of Being

The gift of being is perhaps the least obvious category to be listed as "special" divine action, since traditionally the provision of being would have been labelled as GDA—along with the upholding, sustaining, and empowering of creation. I argue that the gift of being—that is, the gift of allowing something to be rather than letting it fall into non-existence—becomes an act of SDA in the case of living beings. The ongoing existence of rocks or stars do not require SDA, only general divine sustaining action. The gift of being to an individual creature (whether human or non-human) involves—to borrow language from Christopher Southgate—the gifts of the Logos and of the Spirit: form and particularity.⁸⁴ As each creature participates in the life of which God is the source, it is a particular instance of special divine action for that creature to be, and to have the room to be, what it is.⁸⁵ The gift of being in the instance of living creatures is the special provision of the particularity of the individual, the upholding of its being, and the creation of the possibilities that its life might

⁸³ Southgate, "A test case: divine action," 299. In the same place, Southgate quotes Thomas Tracy's opinion that "what is needed is not so much a theory of divine action as an array of coherent possibilities that can be called upon as needed to articulate the claims of a particular religious tradition." I hope to present such an array of coherent possibilities below.

⁸⁴ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 62. I am not assuming the idea of form relates to the species of the individual as Southgate does. Instead, it may relate to the best form of flourishing that individual can attain.

⁸⁵ In similar ways, John Haught and Jürgen Moltmann also both speak of the letting-be of creation, but they do so by advocating for the absence or self-restricting of God in creation. Haught calls this kenotic withdrawal, and Moltmann advocates for the kabbalistic notion of *simsum*. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and The Spirit of God*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 88-89; John Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 47-56. See also the discussion of Ruth Page and *Gelassenheit* in chapter 2, p. 81-82.

have. The gift of being to a living individual is received and participated in in a way that is not true of an inanimate creature. There are two gifts here: the first allows a creature to exist (the ontological sustaining of being), the second gives it the power to act according to its own agency. It is this giving of the power of agency that makes living beings unique recipients of this SDA. A rock does not have any independent agency—it accesses only the first gift. Elizabeth

Johnson uses similar imagery in her panentheistic vision of creation:

To be imaginative for a moment, it is as if at the Big Bang the Spirit gave the natural world a push saying, ‘Go, have an adventure, see what you can become. And I will be with you every step of the way.’ In more classical language, the Giver of life not only creates and conserves all things, holding them in existence over the abyss of nothingness, but is also the dynamic ground of their becoming, empowering from within their emergence into new complex forms.⁸⁶

General providence sets the ordering of the initial cosmos in place, and continues to sustain and uphold it, while a particular type of SDA gives uniqueness and relational freedom to every living individual.⁸⁷ The non-animate world is constrained by the initial conditions of the universe to certain configurations, thus partially creating (and limiting) the conditions and possibilities for life. In this way, God acts in generally providential ways—through giving being to the physical boundaries of the universe—to create only certain corridors or avenues through which the universe must develop and out of which life might emerge.⁸⁸ This GDA works in concert with the SDA each living creature is given in form and particularity.

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 150.

⁸⁷ Precisely what constitutes an individual can sometimes be ambiguous (as in the case with slime mould), but it is not really an important question until a creature has a sense of self, at which point the definition of an individual is usually clear. It is also true that one could conceivably classify the giving of free-process/free agency as a general rather than a special divine act. However, since I see it as a particular act of love from God toward the individual, it is better classified as SDA even though something very similar could be conceived under the rubric of GDA, where creatures automatically have this sort of freedom.

⁸⁸ Arthur Peacocke, *Evolution: The Disguised Friend of Faith?* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation, 2004), 73-74. See discussion in Christopher Southgate, *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, 3rd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 299-302.

Viewing being as a gift is problematic for those creatures whose particular circumstances necessarily means that there will be no chance of their flourishing. Imagine a leopard born with deformed legs who will never walk, never hunt, never be a leopard in the full sense. The leopard may seem a tragedy, but the argument could be turned on its head by pointing out that God does not give the gift of being generously only to those who embody the regular or successful forms of life, but instead abundantly bestows life upon all sorts of unlikely candidates. There is a super-fecundity of being that lies at the foundation of the universe, reflecting the abundance of divine generosity. Instead of only choosing desired outcomes and then driving natural forces to promote those outcomes, God gives abundantly to as many lives as there are possibilities taking form.

In terms of the non-human creation this means that it is through the superabundant provision of life that the moment of novelty is created. If only the creatures who could most perfectly benefit from life received it, there would be little change to life forms. It is the abundant variation amongst creatures that provides the source for evolutionary development. Syndactyly, for example, is a genetic disorder in humans where connective tissues between the digits remain fused. Yet, in flying squirrels, this genetic anomaly has been developed to expand the surface area of the patagium—the flap of tissue between wrists and the hind limbs.⁸⁹ If the environmental circumstances are right, and an abnormal feature is favoured, it may become the beginning of some new element of flourishing. If, as is often the case, the creature is not favoured either by a mutation or by conditions—does not survive to reproduce and pass on a new

⁸⁹ The patagium itself was likely a genetic anomaly at one point. Humans are sometimes born with similar connective tissues attaching the arms to the body.

way of living—then God will redeem its life in ways we will explore in the next chapter, as well as comfort it in its suffering.

Co-Presence

A second type of divine action is found in the co-presence of God with the creature. Distinct from the gift of being, which creates the possibilities of life, co-presence allows us to dispel notions of deism and envision God as living with the created world. Ruth Page proposes the term “pansyntheism” to describe this divine presence, drawing from the Heideggerian concept of *Mitsein*, or “with being.”⁹⁰ We know that it is utterly impossible for creatures to live independently of a complex web of relationships: with other creatures of the same species, with the creatures they eat and are eaten by, with the air (or water) around them, and with the ground beneath them.⁹¹ Always and everywhere, all beings live in relationship. God, in creating, freely chooses to enter into relationships as well. God’s co-presence, or co-experience, can be thought of as the continual act of kenosis of the classical attributes that God undertakes to maintain loving, responsive relationship with creation.⁹² Co-presence is the special divine act of continual re-commitment to the project of creation, the continual divine humbling, in the form of not exercising divine power, knowledge, and eternity to their full extent. It is not a necessary commitment for God, but one entered into out of the fullness of love.

Divine co-presence is therefore closely linked to divine co-suffering.

Because God is with creation, God also co-experiences the suffering of

⁹⁰ Ruth Page, *God and the Web of Creation* (London: SCM, 1996), 42.

⁹¹ There may be some solitary species where the creatures do not live in ongoing relationship with others of the same species. Yet, even the most solitary creatures at one point depended on another of their own species, and sexually reproducing creatures would normally have periodic encounters for mating purposes.

⁹² See chapter 4 for the full exploration of how these attributes relate to the nature of love.

creation. Too often, theologians have understood God as distant. Holmes Rolston famously said that “if God watches the sparrow fall, God must do so from a great distance.”⁹³ Completely transcendent, God watches the cosmic drama from the heavens, while creatures are left to whatever fate might fall. If the work on love developed in chapter 4 is correct, and love requires the desire of union, then Rolston’s God cannot be one of love. In the 2001 movie *Shrek*, the Lord Farquaad brilliantly encapsulates this distant sort of rulership.⁹⁴ At one point, as Farquaad stands on a balcony far above the gathered knights below, he makes his will known that they should embark on a perilous journey to rescue the lovely princess Fiona so that Farquaad can marry her. “Some of you may die...” he says as the audience murmurs in sadness and worry, “but it’s a sacrifice I am willing to make.” Rapturous applause bursts from the crowd.

The picture is not very far from what many theologies have suggested is the purpose of the suffering of non-human creatures. God, standing aloof from the danger and hurt of creation, voices God’s plans that the universe should produce life, which would one day include human beings whom God would take as an eschatological bride. But God does not engage with the process of evolutionary formation until humans arrive. Just as Lord Farquaad sends others into peril to rescue Fiona, so God sacrifices numberless creatures in the pursuit of the realisation of humans with free moral choice.⁹⁵ To glorify God for such a creation is morally repugnant; as absurd as the crowd’s applause at Lord Farquaad’s declaration. But if God is instead *with* the creation, accompanying it and co-suffering with it, the objection fades.

⁹³ Holmes Rolston III, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey*, 2nd ed. (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation, 1987/2006), 140.

⁹⁴ *Shrek*, DVD, Directed by Andrew Adamson & Vicky Jenson (2001; Glendale, CA: Dream Works).

⁹⁵ This is precisely what Michael A. Corey proposes, as we saw in chapter 2, p. 36.

Does divine co-presence actually *do* anything for the suffering creation?⁹⁶ For humans, it has often brought a great deal of comfort to those who suffer. The notion that they are not alone, but that God suffers with them, can alleviate some of the mental suffering they experience.⁹⁷ We do not know if the same is true of the non-human animal creation. Christopher Southgate, drawing on the work of Jay McDaniel, reflects on this eloquently:

When I consider the starving pelican chick, or the impala hobbled by a mother cheetah so that her cubs can learn to pull a prey animal down, I cannot pretend that God's presence as the 'heart' of the world takes the pain of the experience away; I cannot pretend that the suffering may not destroy the creature's consciousness before death claims it. That is the power of suffering, that it can destroy selves. I can only suppose that God's suffering presence is just that, presence, of the most profoundly attentive and loving sort, a solidarity that at some deep level takes away the aloneness of the suffering creature's experience.⁹⁸

If divine presence changes a non-human animal's experience of suffering and death, it will do so in a way that is inaccessible to us. Having said that, we should not imagine that the presence has to be consciously acknowledged to be effective: babies respond to, and are comforted by, a mother's presence long before they can grasp abstract concepts like "self" and "mother" and "love." Perhaps the most important thing is that the concept of divine co-presence and co-suffering radically alters our understanding of the type of world we live in. It is not a world in which we are left alone to struggle through whatever mayhem

⁹⁶ David Clough challenges the co-suffering argument in the following way: "The pain inflicted on an individual by a surgeon, for example, may or may not be judged to be justified on the basis of benefit to the patient or to others, but if the surgeon decided to inflict the same pain on themselves, it would not materially alter the judgement one way or another." David Clough, *On Animals*, Vol.1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012), 124.

⁹⁷ A classic example of this is found in the life of Julian of Norwich, whose visions of the crucified Christ comfort her in her own physical suffering, and turn her illness into an experience of God's love.

⁹⁸ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 52. See also Southgate's newer analysis on presence and encouragement in "Does God's Care Make Any Difference? Theological Reflections on the Suffering of God's Creatures," in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, eds. Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bermann, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Denis Edwards (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 110-112.

may come, like *Lord of the Flies* made large. It is instead a world where perilous journeys must be undertaken, but in which God is accompanying the creation every step of the way. Rather than Lord Farquaad, we might imagine God as a historical midwife attending creation's labour pains.⁹⁹ Before anaesthetics, the midwife could not take away the pain of the mother, nor even significantly lessen it, but instead she accompanied, encouraged, embraced, and sat in solidarity with the suffering (and sometimes dying) mother. Therefore, in the venture of theodicy, God's presence in creation goes a long way toward understanding a creation that suffers through to new life, even if God's presence does not necessarily alleviate creation's pain or brutality.¹⁰⁰

Lure

Another type of SDA is present in the divine lure. This lure can be parsed in several different ways. First, it is found in the lure toward the good and harmonious that is so central to process thought. Ian Barbour, John Cobb, David Ray Griffin, John Haught, and Jay McDaniel are the major recent representatives of this approach to divine action.¹⁰¹ God does not coerce creation into pre-formed plans. Instead, God lures every entity of creation toward greater inter-relational harmonies and goods, and every entity of creation has the power to either accept or reject this divine lure. Insofar as the creation is self-determining and holds creative autonomy, entities may diverge

⁹⁹ Note the birthing imagery in Romans 8:22.

¹⁰⁰ A further point might be that the acceptance of a temporal frame of reference makes possible the occurrence and the redemption of gratuitous evil. See the section in chapter 4 on time and gratuitous evil, p. 200-204.

¹⁰¹ Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 284-300; Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science: The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991* (London: SCM, 1990): 232-234; John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969); John B. Cobb Jr. & David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville, TN: Westminster John Knox, 1976), 48-54; McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 38-39. Haught, *God After Darwin*, 165-184. Historical defenders of this position include Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.

from the divine invitation to order and novelty. The great strength of process thought is that it explains evil in the world as those moments when entities resist the divine lure toward the good, and so explains evil without creating a dualism or leaving evil without any explanation. Another strength is that process theology is rooted in the concept of God's unfailing love for each and every part of creation.¹⁰²

A major challenge posed for process theology by classical theology is that process theology offers no guarantee of good triumphing over evil, no certain annihilation of evil.¹⁰³ God can never decisively destroy evil, nor (if the track-record of the world is any evidence) is there a guarantee that creatures will one day respond positively toward divine suggestion. There exists only the long, slow, uncertain lure toward the good which may or may not result in harmony and goodness.

How far does this lure extend? For process theists who adhere to the concept of panpsychism, the divine lure extends to every conceivable "entity" of creation: to quarks and electrons just as much as to humans and hippos. I do not follow them in this reasoning, and would argue that the extent of lure is similar to the extent of love (discussed in chapter 4).¹⁰⁴ Lure is an idea loaded with personal concepts such as desire and fulfilment. As such, I would restrict the objects of divine lure to living beings.¹⁰⁵ It might be objected that personal categories are just as inappropriate when applied to bacteria as to stone. From a human perspective, that would be true: since I cannot know a bacterium,

¹⁰² McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 35-41.

¹⁰³ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 326.

¹⁰⁴ See chapter 4, p. 164-165.

¹⁰⁵ Ian Barbour notes that not all aggregates of creation would be considered entities in Whitehead's thought. So an atom could in principle be an entity, but not necessarily a stone. *Religion in an Age of Science*, 224-225.

there can be no appropriate union with it in the sense of the desires of love.

God, however, can know a bacterium intimately: can know its range of responses and what constitutes its good, can share a history with it, and can share an office of love with it—at the very least—as Creator and creature.

Therefore, the concept of lure can also presumably apply, although it would not be lure towards a choice of moral good (as it would be for humans) but simply a lure toward actions for its own good and the good of the rest of creation.

The process paradigm also highlights one of the paradoxes we have been struggling with all along: the violence we wish to reject is the seed of the novelty we admire. On the one hand, one is tempted to say that the Ichneumonidae's parasitic eggs planted within caterpillars are an evil expression of the gift of life that God did not design and does not intend. Their survival tactic is allowed, tolerated, rather than rejoiced in. On the other hand, the life style of the wasp demonstrates skill, complexity, and ingenuity. Their reproduction can be a saving grace for the trees and shrubs that the caterpillars would otherwise destroy. It is a constant temptation to put the "peaceable elements"—the bunny rabbits, the swallows, and the autotrophic life—in one category of "God approved" evolutionary developments, and snakes, lions, and parasites into another camp of "not approved, violent" developments. But this is too simple. The "peaceful" species rely upon the violent species for their own flourishing, and the "peaceful" species only exist because they have entered into competition in their own ways with other species. Even autotrophic organisms compete with those around them for resources, squeezing out other organisms in the race for space and sunlight. Therefore, instead of having two categories in our minds of "violent" and "peaceful" creation (*pace* Messer), or even "wheat" and "tares" (*pace* Hoggard Creegan), we must see the creation as

one community. As a whole, it stands as God's very good creation, including its components of violence and suffering. Creation is, as Southgate reminds us, "*both good and groaning.*"¹⁰⁶ The wheat, *as wheat*, inflicts its own forms of violence on the organisms which surround and relate to it. Therefore, if God is the God of all of creation, then violence too must be part of God's creation (*pace* Messer).¹⁰⁷ Until we encounter humans and moral decision-making (possibly also present to some degree in some of the other most complex forms of life) the only category of creation is the "very good." So the conclusion is that while the divine lure may indeed be toward the good, we cannot characterise that good as being exclusively the harmonious or the peaceful, as process theists do, and thus blame every instance of violence on resistance to the divine lure.¹⁰⁸ Equally, an attempt like Sarah Coakley's to point to inter-species cooperation as evidence of goodness and altruism in evolution falls short. It would be like talking about the coordination of gang members as evidence of human cooperation and love: cooperation happens because it leads to greater strength as a unit, which then competes against other units, usually violently. Instances of true altruism are surpassingly rare in the non-human realm, if evidenced at all.¹⁰⁹

A better proposal than the process lure toward harmonious relationships comes from Christopher Southgate who speaks of the divine invitation to self-

¹⁰⁶ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 2. Italics original.

¹⁰⁷ Neil Messer, "Natural Evil After Darwin," in *Theology after Darwin*, eds. Michael S. Northcott and R. J. Berry (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009): 139-154.

¹⁰⁸ In chapter 6 I will expand on one sense of what this "good" might entail in the form of redemptive eschatological patterns.

¹⁰⁹ See Christopher Southgate's critique along the same lines in "Does God's Care Make Any Difference?" 107-108. Southgate (in this same place) also acknowledges with Coakley that there may be a "natural *praeparatio* in the process of selection for the potential later heights of saintly human self-sacrifice."

transcendence.¹¹⁰ This self-transcendence in humans involves the call to altruism, to self-sacrificial love, but in the non-human realm self-transcendence is the Spirit's work helping the individual in "growing to maturity in the form of its species, and in the sense of its possible explorations of new behaviours, going beyond what was previously the character of that species."¹¹¹ In neither of these instances is self-transcendence linked to what we might consider the "good" or "pleasant" aspects of creation. The parasitic wasp growing to maturity is just as much the work of the Spirit as is the bunny rabbit. The work of the Spirit is active in the moment when the wasp stretches its wings to fly for the first time, when it wrestles an insect and feeds, or when it explores new territory. In each moment the Spirit lures the wasp toward self-transcendence, toward its own characteristic "selving," and toward playing its role in the unfolding history of life. Therefore, creation is not divided up into the "good" and the "evil." All creatures are invited to self-transcendence. Sometimes, Southgate would note, the answer to this invitation does result in cooperation and symbiosis, but is not limited to those outcomes.¹¹² The basis of the ability for creatures to explore is found in "deep intratrinitarian kenosis" where a creature "is conforming to the pattern offered by the divine Word, and begotten in the Spirit out of the perfect self-abandoning love of the Father."¹¹³ In this sense, the lure of God is also intrinsically linked to God creating the possibilities of action as well, or in other words, creating the fabric of the fitness landscape the creature explores.

A different sort of proposal of divine lure altogether comes from Robert Farrar Capon. Instead of assuming that the divine lure is something situated in

¹¹⁰ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 61-62.

¹¹¹ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 62.

¹¹² Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 161.

¹¹³ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 63.

the action of God, as if God were trying to actively lead creation down certain paths, Capon proposes that desire for God is intrinsic in creation. Capon writes colourfully: “What [God] does to the world, he does subtly; his effect on creation is like what a stunning woman does to a man... She doesn’t touch his freedom, and she doesn’t muck about with the constitution of his being by installing some trick nusus that makes Harry love Martha.”¹¹⁴ Creation is not led along fortuitous paths like a donkey lured by a carrot and coaxing words, rather the very stuff of creation is attracted to the divine being the same way the earth is attracted to the sun, or (in Capon’s personal example) a man is attracted to a beautiful woman. Both the sun and the woman simply exist, and are attractive. No further action is necessary, and we don’t have to search for the particularity of how God lures, for example, by implanting thoughts in the tradition of Clayton and Knapp. Divine goodness is its own explanation for why creation pursues it. And the effect on creation is marked: it is drawn toward God-likeness, most evidently in humans. The explorations of creation—the bio-diversity and increase of complexity—can all be seen as creaturely attempts to pursue the satisfaction of that elusive attraction.

A fourth type of lure is the model advanced by Philip Clayton and Stephen Knapp where SDA is active in mental events, explored earlier in the chapter.¹¹⁵ Less metaphysical than either Southgate’s or Capon’s models, they say that “it is possible that the lure is highly differentiated, calling different individuals to different types of action or response” by direct action on the mind of the individual.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Robert Farrer Capon, *The Third Peacock: The Problem of God and Evil* in the 3-book compendium *The Romance of the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 201.

¹¹⁵ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 53-65.

¹¹⁶ Clayton and Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 63.

Each of these models of divine lure, particularly those of Southgate, Capon, and Clayton and Knapp, give us helpful ways to talk about the directionality of evolutionary pathways without looking for intervention. They also include robust accounts of God working in and with the non-human creation in ways that extend well beyond simply sustaining action.

Participation

Finally, we come to SDA as participation. In an important way, all the other forms of divine action investigated so far are also participation in as much as they are descriptions of God at work in the world. The gift of being, the divine accompaniment of creation, and the divine lure are all types of action that place us firmly in the camp of theism. However, in using the word participation, I want to bring our attention to at least two ways in which God acts that are not covered by these other ways of thinking: embodiment and the shaping of meaning.

Participation: Embodiment

God's action of embodiment in creation is primarily evidenced in the Incarnation. This stands in contrast to the proposals of Sallie McFague or Grace Jantzen that the world can regularly be thought of as God's body, with God's spirit as the body's mind.¹¹⁷ In the Incarnation, God was significantly present—uniquely united to the world—in one man, Jesus Christ.

Denis Edwards has worked a great deal on the impact of the Incarnation for reflecting on how God acts. Drawing from the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus' acts of healing, his keeping an open table, and the character of his

¹¹⁷ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (London: SCM, 1993); Grace M. Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984).

community, Edwards concludes that God's love leads to divine action with a "radically participatory character"¹¹⁸ characterised by two central aspects. First, God actively and lovingly waits upon creation, and second, that God's love results in divine vulnerability.¹¹⁹ In the death of Jesus, we see that God awaits creaturely response and does not overwhelm creaturely action even when it means the crucifixion of Jesus. In the forgiveness and resurrection of Jesus, we see that God still can achieve the divine purpose in, through, and with creaturely choices, even when those choices are evil.¹²⁰ Although God remains unchanging in constant love and faithfulness, God can still suffer and is vulnerable to creaturely action, as exemplified in the cross. God is not left at the mercy of creatures, however, because God can always "bring all things to their promised fulfillment."¹²¹ According to Edwards, "the true nature of divine power is revealed in the vulnerability of the crucified—and in the resurrection of the crucified."¹²² It is both God's ability to suffer, and God's ability to redeem suffering (especially, perhaps, the suffering caused by evil), that reveals the full extent of divine power. Edwards' reflections on the Incarnation resonate with my own explorations of the philosophical nature of love found in chapter 4. In addition, reflection on the Incarnation gives a strong reason to maintain that SDA occurs as something very different from GDA, and that divine participation is more involved than we might otherwise believe, even to the point of becoming one cause amongst others in the physical world.

¹¹⁸ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 24.

¹¹⁹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 26.

¹²⁰ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 29.

¹²¹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 30.

¹²² Edwards, *How God Acts*, 31.

Many theologians, particularly those who are advocates for God's action through secondary causes, shy away from the idea that God could act as one agent amongst others. Take the example of Roman Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson: "The living God," she writes in response to the causal joint thinkers, "is not part of the causal nexus of the created world. Inserting divine action into indeterminate systems reduces holy Mystery who creates and sustains the whole to a bit player."¹²³ Yet, in the Incarnation, God inserts Godself into human history, and seems satisfied to reduce holy Mystery to a helpless babe. Denis Edwards, who reflected above so helpfully on the Incarnation, seems to overlook the Incarnation when he states: "God is never found as a cause among other causes in the universe."¹²⁴ David Burrell also rejects the possibility of God becoming one agent amongst others. He writes, commenting on Aquinas's metaphysical assertion that God is the *cause* of being rather than *a* being, "it would be idolatry to think one could speak of the creator bereft of so powerful a metaphysics, for it would then become one being among others, however large or powerful."¹²⁵

In GDA, I would agree that God does not act as a cause among causes: God sustains all creation equally and (we might say) invisibly. However, the scandal of the Incarnation is that God became just one person amongst others, that God fully participated in the joys and constraints of humanity by becoming

¹²³ Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 168. The same could be said of David Burrell and Denis Edwards. David B. Burrell C.S.C., "The act of creation: theological consequences," in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, eds. David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48.

¹²⁴ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 47. It is unclear in Edwards' approach how this coincides with his view that in the Christ-event God is "acting in Jesus, in his words and deeds, in his death and resurrection in a way that is special, specific, and historical." *How God Acts*, 37. Edwards roots his approach to divine action in Christ, yet does not allow the Christ-event as a particular action of God to influence what he later says about how God could act creatively. Niels Gregersen also advocates for this approach, writing "On the view taken here, God cannot act as one factor among others at the level of secondary causes." "Special Divine Action and the Quilt of Laws," 195.

¹²⁵ Burrell and Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas and Dionysius," 642.

fully human.¹²⁶ If we take the Incarnation as the prime exemplar of SDA, we see God joining creation while not overriding it.¹²⁷ Jesus did not compel those around him to listen or obey, he simply and seamlessly joined the world of causal agents.

There are, to be sure, different models of the Incarnation which accentuate or mute the scandal of God incarnate to various degrees.¹²⁸ Trenton Merricks's view of the Incarnation, for example, where the divine person literally becomes a human body (as necessitated by Merrick's essential physicalism) represents the most extreme example of God directly becoming a causal agent.¹²⁹

Aquinas's compositionism is a mediate approach.¹³⁰ In his model, the divine nature is hypostatically united to the human nature, and it is the human nature of Jesus that interacts with the world. So God does have a causal effect in the world, but only as mediated through the human nature of Jesus. Brian Leftow has used the analogy that the Son's relationship to the world is like that of a diver in a dry suit to the ocean: the diver's contact with the ocean is

¹²⁶ I hold here, as do Edwards and Johnson, to an orthodox model of the Incarnation, as advanced in Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds.

¹²⁷ I realise that not every aspect of the Incarnation is necessarily representative of divine action. We should not, for example, assume that God's action has to be male or Jewish because the particularities of the Incarnation included those aspects of Jesus' life. Embodiment, however, is the main action that is undertaken. How that embodiment happened is contingent. Therefore, in the Incarnation the embodiment is central, whereas the particularities of that embodiment were contingent. See Wendy Farley, *The Healing and Wounding of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 102.

¹²⁸ For an overview of different models see Jonathan Hill, "Introduction," in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, eds. Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-19.

¹²⁹ Trenton Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh: Dualism, Physicalism, and the Incarnation" in *Persons Human and Divine*, eds. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 281-300.

¹³⁰ For an in-depth investigation of Aquinas's account of the Incarnation, see Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas's Metaphysics of the Incarnation," in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall S.J., and Gerald O'Collins S.J. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 197-218.

mediated by the suit, or, in the Son's case, the second person of the Trinity is mediated through the body and soul (i.e. the human nature) of Jesus.¹³¹ Still, the diver does have a direct causal relationship with the suit, and the suit has a direct causal relationship with the ocean. Therefore the diver does have a direct causal effect on the ocean, it simply takes one more step to get there. In the same way, in so far as the Son has a direct causal effect upon the created human nature of Jesus, which then interacts directly with the world, God remains one agent amongst others in the Incarnation.

Further along the spectrum lie those models of the Incarnation which propose that Jesus was simply a man who found a unique connection with God, or was simply a regular human who happened to be perfectly concurrent with God's actions. Examples include the models of Schleiermacher and John Hick. This last set of models is what Brian Hebblethwaite calls "non-incarnational Christologies" since they do not actually affirm that the second person of the Trinity assumed a human nature in Jesus.¹³² If one holds to these models, it could be coherently maintained together that God never acts as a cause amongst causes and that the Incarnation happened. However, supporters of secondary causation—particularly Edwards, Johnson, and Burrell—do not hold to these non-Incarnational Christologies. Instead, they each affirm either the Nicene or the Chalcedonian Creeds which advance an orthodox model of the Incarnation.¹³³

¹³¹ Brian Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall S.J., and Gerald O'Collins S.J. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 273-299, 292.

¹³² Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Incarnation: Collected Essays in Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6-7. See also: John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2012); Lori Pearson, "Schleiermacher and the Christologies behind Chalcedon," *The Harvard Theological Review* 96:3 (July 2003), 356; John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 206-207.

¹³³ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 41; Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 16, 194-195; David B. Burrell C.S.C., "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," *Modern Theology* 12:2 (April 1996), 214.

Elizabeth Johnson clearly states that “the doctrine of the Incarnation... [is] the belief that the living God who is utterly beyond comprehension has joined the flesh of earth in one particular human being of one time and place.”¹³⁴ Later, she emphasises again that “All emphasis in this gospel text [John 1:14, “the Word became flesh and lived among us”] is on the entry of the Word who is God into this mortal realm of earthly existence.”¹³⁵ David Burrell equally affirms an orthodox conception of the Incarnation: “Jesus could not be a mere visitor. So from the beginning, if Jesus was divine, he could be none other than the ‘Word through whom the world was made.’”¹³⁶ Denis Edwards is equally explicit in his avowal of the Word becoming flesh.¹³⁷ In none of these definitions do we find a hint of either Nestorianism (that the Incarnation is simply a union of two wills) or a model like Schleiermacher’s which denies any true Incarnation. Yet, for these orthodox thinkers, there does not seem to be any recognition that their acceptance of the Incarnation stands in direct contrast with their statements about the possibilities of divine action. If God can become one agent amongst others in the Incarnation, why should we consider it impossible in every other situation? I therefore argue that the theologians who argue that God became incarnate in Jesus according to an orthodox formula can have no reason to deny God’s ability to become one agent amongst others in creation.

Incarnation and the Character of Divine Action

In the Incarnation, the other forms of divine action become the principles or character of God’s embodied acts rather than the actions themselves. Take

¹³⁴ Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 194.

¹³⁵ Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 195.

¹³⁶ Burrell, “Incarnation and Creation,” 214.

¹³⁷ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 41.

divine lure, for example. Ruth Page, in exploring Jesus' action as a type of *concursum*, speaks of how "the power exercised in relationship is that of attraction, of drawing the attention and concern of the other without extinguishing that other's freedom... [Jesus] was there among the people; his words and actions were there for any who would hear or see."¹³⁸ Now, Jesus' type of lure in preaching on hilltops is qualitatively different from the sort of lure that God might be seen to be making in the invitation to self-transcendence. Yet they both reflect the same character because they are both rooted in the nature of God's love.

My interest in embodied forms of divine action is not motivated by the claim that there are numerous instances of divine embodiment: indeed, I think it likely that such instances are exceedingly rare. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge all the exceptions we can in order to allow for as full an account of SDA as possible. If God is able to become one human being amongst millions of others in the Incarnation, then the objection to God ever being seen as one agent amongst others in creation must be problematic. If we open the door to God being one agent amongst others in creation (even once) through participatory human embodiment, then perhaps God is able to engage with creation through other forms of embodiment as well.

The Hebrew Bible theophanies which visualise God's presence as pillars of cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21), then, become something more than simple imagery, and may be seen as instances of God actually participating in the world in physical ways.¹³⁹ In other passages God is equally described as having physical forms, such as Moses being able to see God's backside

¹³⁸ Page, *Web of Creation*, 60.

¹³⁹ Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

(Exodus 33:17-23), Jacob wrestling with God at the ford of the Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-32), and appearing to Abraham as the three strangers (Genesis 18:1-2). I will not speculate long on how God might participate in these ways, since to do so would involve a much longer discussion of the historical and theological reliability of these texts in light of critical methods of reading.¹⁴⁰ If we were to speculate at all, we might imagine God taking up—inhabiting—the air molecules in a particular place, rearranging the concentrations of gases or molecules to suit the action that God wishes to take. After all, in Jesus, God did embody carbon, and nitrogen, and all the other assorted atoms that make up the human body.¹⁴¹

The mechanism of God's action is less important than its nature. The action must be reminiscent of God's gracious action in incarnating the divine form in human form; bearing the non-coercive and power-in-weakness stamp of love. God, in this view, can interact physically and particularly in history in the same physical sense that the second person of the Trinity did by becoming Jesus. The embodied view of God's work opens the door to interaction with the world that is more than just sustaining or concurrent.

In some ways, advocating that God can participate in the world in physically embodied—and thus physically causative ways—opens up many more problems than it solves in regard to theodicy. Clayton and Knapp argue (as we have seen before) that “a benevolent God could not intervene *even once* without incurring the responsibility to intervene in every case where doing so

¹⁴⁰ For more, see Terence Fretheim, “The God Who Acts: An Old Testament Perspective,” in *Theology Today* 54:1 (1997): 6-18; and Nicholas Saunders, *Divine Action and Modern Science*, 1-12.

¹⁴¹ Pointed out in particular by the advocates of “Deep Incarnation”: Niels Gregersen, “Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World,” *dialog* 40:3 (Fall 2001): 192-207, 205; Celia Deane-Drummond, “Who on Earth Is Jesus Christ? Plumbing the Depths of Deep Incarnation,” in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, eds. Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Denis Edwards (London: T&T Clark, 2014): 31-50.

would prevent an instance of innocent suffering.”¹⁴² For God to have the ability to participate in an embodied way that could conceivably change the fortunes of a creature caught in innocent suffering, and for God to rescue in some cases and not in others, does raise a serious charge.

Two responses can be made. The first emerges directly from the discussion of the nature of love that was explored in chapter 4. Emerging out of a Thomistic view of love, it was concluded that love is necessarily particular, historical, and unique to the office of love shared between the lover and the beloved. As such, the action taken in each case need not be identical.¹⁴³ The not-even-once principle, on the contrary, assumes that every instance of innocent suffering is problematic in the same sort of way. But there are as many different types and circumstances of suffering as there are instances. Someone stubbing their toe and a seal being eaten alive are both instances of innocent suffering, but they should not be compared: they exist in totally different realms. Clayton and Knapp don't agree with this assertion. Although people see differences in suffering, they argue “God sees no such dichotomy but a vast continuum of suffering far more pervasive, intense, and immediate in its need for relief than we could ever allow ourselves to appreciate.”¹⁴⁴

Let us, for the sake of the argument, run with Clayton and Knapp's idea that there is only a grey-scale of suffering, no black and white. It does not follow that if intensities of suffering exist on a continuous scale in creation, that instances of suffering in an individual's life are likewise scaled. In fact, we see just the opposite: many instances of suffering help us to grow and develop as an individual (in physical even if not in spiritual ways). But some instances of

¹⁴² Clayton & Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 49.

¹⁴³ See this discussion at length in chapter 4, p. 161-163.

¹⁴⁴ Clayton & Knapp, *Predicament of Belief*, 51.

suffering are key turning points in the life of an individual, forever crushing any sense of self. This is most obvious in death, but can exist in other ways as well, such as a crippling accident. So it is not necessarily with the intensity of suffering that we should be concerned, but with the effect of the suffering. When an innocent creature has their selfhood destroyed by suffering, this makes a different sort of appeal for divine action than the suffering which will not destroy a self. A differentiation can be made, especially for God who will be in the best position to anticipate what sort of impact any one instance of suffering will have.

With the recognition (established in chapter 4) that love does not have to treat all objects of love in exactly the same way in order to still be equally loving to all, the possibility opens to acknowledging that God could prevent an instance of suffering without being morally required to do so in every case. For example, God would not be morally required to prevent an instance of suffering that did not lead to the destruction of a self, if in another case, God did prevent such suffering. Why, then, does God not observably end the many instances of innocent suffering of creatures, if God can? The question takes one more step back and has to ask if the office of love of Creator to a particular creature ever ought to mean that God should prevent such suffering. When Austin Farrer asks the question of why, if we are moved to put severely injured animals out of their misery, God is not moved to do likewise, he answers “the question is amiable, but it is confused. God loves his animal creatures by being God to them, that is, by natural providence and creative power; not by being a brother creature to them, as he does for mankind in the unique miracle of his incarnation.”¹⁴⁵ For Farrer, God’s lack of prevention of suffering in the non-

¹⁴⁵ Farrer, *Love Almighty*, 104. Of course, the concept of “deep Incarnation” would challenge this by pointing out that God *did* in fact become a brother creature to all of creation.

human creation is not because of issues of fair play in moral responsibility, but because the office of love between God and the non-human creation is not the type that would call for it. Miracles, in Farrer's mind, do not happen simply to relieve suffering, but serve as signposts indicating the coming Kingdom of God, which are totally unable to be interpreted by the non-human world.¹⁴⁶

For God to act to alleviate the suffering of a God-conscious human being is to give them an opportunity to grow closer to God, to build faith, or to reconstitute their personhood.¹⁴⁷ These goods would not be available to a non-human who had their suffering alleviated. The arguments that the goods of nomic regularity, the integrity of ecosystems, and the process of evolution itself are greater goods than what would be achieved by relieving the individual creature of pain are well rehearsed.¹⁴⁸

Participation: Shaping of Meaning

The second type of participation I want to highlight is that God is active in shaping the meaning of events. This is radically different from God's embodied work of participation since it does not involve any sort of change in the actual events of history. Rather, it recognises that the meaning of past events is not fixed or isolated, and that depending on new events that occur, the meaning of past events also changes.

When we think about how we have interpreted various events in our lives, we can see intuitively how the meaning we ascribe to—and the

¹⁴⁶ This stands in line with the usual contemporary definition of miracle: a wonder-inspiring occurrence that points to the Kingdom of God, rather than an overthrow of the laws of nature. Padgett, "God and Miracle in An Age of Science," 533-542.

¹⁴⁷ See Eleonore Stump's argument concerning human suffering to this effect in *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010).

¹⁴⁸ See Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 130-192 and the property-consequence GHAs in chapter 2, p. 30-36.

interpretation we have of—one event can become closely tied to events that may be quite distant from the original occurrence in time or place. Equally, we may revise the meaning of an experience: what seemed like a fortuitous event at one time becomes a tragic turning point at another distant time, and vice versa. This is perhaps most famously demonstrated in the story of the Taoist Farmer:

There once was an old man and his son who owned a horse which provided their only source of income. One night the horse ran away. The next day, all the villagers trotted out to the old farmer's and said: "Oh no! This is the worst thing that could have happened to you." The old farmer quietly answered, "It's too early to tell." Soon thereafter the horse returned with five others. The next morning all the villagers trotted out to the farmer and said, "Congratulations! This is the best thing that could ever happen to you." But the old farmer quietly said, "It's too soon to tell." Shortly thereafter, his son tried to ride one of the new horses. The horse was wild, and threw him into the corral fence. He was left with a permanent limp. The next morning the villagers came again and said, "This is the worst tragedy that could ever happen to you." But the farmer said quietly, "It's too soon to tell." A year later, the army came through the village to take all the healthy young men off to war. The old farmer's son was of no use to them and was left behind. None of the other young men ever returned.¹⁴⁹

No doubt most of us have similar stories we could tell where we have jumped, like the villagers, at the meaning of an event only to find that with the passage of time, it has come to mean something else entirely. Meaning is not inherent in an event: it changes as we change, and see it from different perspectives.

Traditionally, Christianity has not held such a view of the meaning of history because it was assumed that, from God's eternal vantage point, there was an objective point of view which could perfectly interpret all events in light of both past and future. However, if the nature of love demands libertarian freewill, and if the possibility of that sort of freewill demands (at the least) a

¹⁴⁹ This is the story as taught by Lao Tzu. Retold by Kenneth Kramer in *World Scriptures: An Introduction to Comparative Religions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1986), 118.

kenotic descent into time for God,¹⁵⁰ so that God does not know all that will happen, then we cannot imagine that there is any such objective viewpoint from which to determine the meaning of events. God, with perfect knowledge of the past and the present, will certainly be best placed to understand events as they occur, but even to God the meaning of events is not fixed. Therefore, God can have an active hand in crafting and shaping the meaning of events by interpreting them with other events in time and evoking unforeseen conclusions from them.¹⁵¹ We might, poetically speaking, say that God is telling and re-telling the narrative of creation. As the history of the world unfolds, there is no limit to the creativity that God can bring to the unfolding process.

The advantage to theodicy of this sort of view is that God does not ordain events to happen, but God can redeem disvalues within the scope of history as well as beyond it. There is no one corridor down which God must force events for them to find redemption, but rather God can creatively bring about good in a variety of ways. What this implies is that no evil or disvalue is ordained by God to happen, but when they happen gratuitously,¹⁵² God will work to ensure that they do not remain gratuitous by creating meaning out of their occurrence. How this works in terms of redemption will be explored in a more explicit way in the next chapter.

¹⁵⁰ See argument in chapter 4.

¹⁵¹ An example is that the death of a dinosaur could be directly responsible (in a very long line of causes) for the composition of one of Mozart's symphonies. Without the dinosaur's death, Mozart would not have been born. Therefore, the dinosaur's death has new meaning in light of the beauty and significance of *The Violin Concerto #3*. This will be explored at greater length in chapter 6.

¹⁵² In a sense, even gratuitous events, such as the impact of an asteroid or the chance injury of an animal from a falling tree limb, is not gratuitous in a property-consequence sense. However, they may be gratuitous in an instrumental sense in the life of an animal. That is, had the deer been standing five feet to the right when the tree branch fell, world history would have continued happily on. There was no foreordained plan needing to be fulfilled by the the death of the deer at that point in history. See the discussion of gratuitous evil in chapter 4, p. 200-203.

Primacy of Biological Telos?

Another issue that needs discussion at this juncture is an exploration of creaturely *telos*. Where does a creature's life find meaning? What is its final end? In Darwinian terms, the meaning of a creature's life is found in survival and reproduction. If it passes on its genes, its life has been successful. Thus, for many creatures—spiders and praying mantises, but also octopi and salmon—one or both parents die in the act of reproduction. It is the grand finale after a life of winning the odds in a battle for survival. But should we assume that this type of biological flourishing is the only worthwhile end, the only—or even the primary—creaturely telos?

For humans, it is clear that this is not the case. Human life has many other good and worthwhile ends. We have to look no farther than Jesus to see that this is true. As the paradigmatic human being, Jesus demonstrated what it means to be fully human. Yet Jesus had no children,¹⁵³ nor did he live to a grand old age. He lived to maybe a third of what a regular human body can ultimately sustain. Biologically speaking, Jesus was a failure.¹⁵⁴ Yet he was the one who perfectly fulfilled the human vocation. Many others throughout the ages have set aside childbearing in order to pursue other vocations.

The question of creaturely value and the meaning of life becomes even more poignant when we consider serious illness. John Swinton, for example, writes about dementia and the loss of a person's memories.¹⁵⁵ He chastises theologians for having "hyper-cognitive theological assumptions" of what it means to be human, where dementia is seen as the loss of personhood entirely, rather than only the loss of memories. Swinton rejects outright the usual

¹⁵³ At least, as far as historical records attest.

¹⁵⁴ Niels Gregersen, "Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," 203.

¹⁵⁵ John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 1-15.

practice of adopting medical and societal evaluations of the worth of a person's existence rather than rooting the person's worth in theological considerations. He writes: "At a very basic level, well-being within Christianity is not gauged by the presence or absence of illness or distress... Theologically speaking, well-being has nothing to do with the absence or reduction of anything. It has to do with the presence of something: the presence of God-in-relationship."¹⁵⁶ If there is the presence of God-in-relationship, then there is the presence of worth and well-being. For humans, at least, we must concede that reflections on Jesus' life and on the lives of those who suffer severe illness reveal that there is far more to life than Darwinian success.¹⁵⁷

Can we legitimately extend this thought beyond humans into the non-human realm? From a theological perspective, I think we can (with Swinton) reasonably put forward other reasons for being: to live in relationship with others and to participate in the divine gift of life. All creatures are necessarily in relationship with those around them: being sustained by and sustaining others. Ruth Page reminds us that this relationship provides a different *telos*: "Fellowship, concurrence or relationship among creatures and between creatures and God is the greatest good of creation. The possibility of such relationships is what creation is about."¹⁵⁸ For Page, relationship is not simply a great good, but the greatest good. If a creature has participated in relationship, then it has achieved a meaningful life. Having a meaningful life does not mean that a creature has participated in every possible creaturely good.

¹⁵⁶ Swinton, *Dementia*, 7. Italics original.

¹⁵⁷ Similar conclusions have been reached by parents of children with severe illnesses. See Andrew Solomon, *Far From the Tree: A Dozen Kinds of Love* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 167-217; Sarah C. Williams, *The Shaming of the Strong: The Challenge of an Unborn Life* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2007); Frances M. Young, *Face to Face: A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

¹⁵⁸ Page, *Web of Creation*, 105.

As above with the argument on divine shaping of the meaning of history, the question is less about the events of a creature's life and more about what they mean. By redefining what is meant by a purposeful life, we can expand the number of creatures who fulfill that category, and thus lessen the burden that the theodist carries. The penguin chick who has spent many months being nurtured by doting parents (up to 13 months for the King penguin) and congregating with other young and then is killed, within a matter of moments upon entering the water, by a leopard seal, is not nearly the hardest case. It has experienced rich relationship, even if only briefly. The much more difficult case is that of the second pelican chick who is denied primary relationships with sibling and parents, while all the while the majority of its life experience involves the suffering of starving. Even that chick, however, is involved in a complex ecosystem of relationships, and it is not denied a relationship with God, and it will (as I will argue in the next chapter) receive the gift of redemption in the new life. As the burden of my argument begins to hint more heavily toward themes of redemption, it is perhaps time to move onto those subjects in a more straightforward way.

Conclusion

In the first half of this chapter I investigated the divine action debate. I looked at why the concept of intervention has been almost universally rejected, and then surveyed models of divine action that have been formulated to avoid the problems of interventionism. Models that rejected the ontological division between GDA and SDA included those that deny SDA altogether (Wiles, Kaufman), those that consider all divine action to be SDA (Gregersen), and those that see God as setting up the initial conditions of the universe in such a

way that the later unfolding of the universe gives the impression of SDA (Davies, Knight). Models that work with the distinction between GDA and SDA proposed models of SDA that include God working through secondary causes (Edwards, Stoeger, Johnson, Burrell), quantum indeterminacy (Russell, Tracy, Murphy, Ellis), complex systems (Polkinghorne), and mental events (Clayton, Knapp). The inability to find a conclusive “place” for divine action prompted an investigation into the character of divine action rather than its mechanism. The second half of the chapter, therefore, proposed models of SDA without reference to their mechanisms in the world.

In the second half of the chapter, I argued that divine action is a multi-faceted phenomenon, ranging from divine co-presence and sustenance to physical embodiment. Instead of embracing a divine uniformitarianism where God is always thought to be doing the same thing in the same way, I proposed that there are multiple ways in which God can be understood as acting, and that each of these different ways of acting have various implications for the issues of theodicy.

The gift of being implies that God creates the possibility of possibilities and allows creatures to explore the paths that they choose. The result is a free process characterised by significant freedoms and a superabundance of diverse forms of being that explore the created possibilities. The co-presence of God ensures that no creature dies alone, separated from God’s consolation and co-suffering. The concept of divine lure can be seen as either an invitation to self-transcendence, or as creaturely attraction to the divine. The second in particular begins to offer some explanation for how one can have teleology without control; desired outcomes without preordained paths. Finally, two types of participation round out my picture of special divine action. The concept of

embodiment allows for the mighty acts of salvation history and the Incarnation in a human context without necessarily widening the sphere of this special involvement to all creatures. The shaping of meaning, to be explored further in the next chapter, provides another non-interventionist way to speak about divine action from a narrative perspective. Most of these positions do not envision any sort of intervention on the part of God, except the embodied form of participation. The gift of being, the co-presence of God, the divine lure, and the shaping of meaning all work in and through natural means, or (in the case of shaping meaning) beyond the physical realm, on a metaphysical plane. Embodiment allows an avenue for how God might be more directly active, even intervening, and the particularity and purpose of such acts may offer a reason for why God would intervene in one case and not another. Woven throughout all these concepts of divine action lies the central act of redemption which deserves a chapter all of its own.

Chapter 6: Redemption

“It is the divine act of redemption that determines what creation will have meant, and this can be determined only eschatologically.”

-Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett¹

In the last chapter, the themes of divine action moved ever more strongly toward the necessity of redemption for a comprehensive account of theodicy. Without redemption, without the completion of God’s work, creation stands without a coherent logic: the story remains unfinished. Nor can the suffering of creation find final resolution without redemption. It is the task of this chapter to explore the type and scope of different redemption models, and see how each helps to justify the suffering of the individual. In addition, I will propose an image for how several of these models of redemption can work together to provide a more robust account of redemption—especially in light of the Christ event. I will move from four models of redemption, to the redemptive image of a photo mosaic that incorporates three of the models, and then investigate how this picture can be understood in light of the Christ event.

Models of Redemption

Redemption of the non-human world has long been debated. Scripture gives only a few hints and those are often far from straightforward.² Various guesses have also been made in the works of later thinkers. Thomas Aquinas did not think that non-human animals had the aptitude for resurrection, because they did not have immortal rational souls.³ John Wesley, to the contrary, not

¹ Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 160.

² Romans 8:19-22, Colossians 1:17-19, Isaiah 11, 35, 65, and Revelation 21-22 are all examples.

³ Paul Griffiths, “What Remains in the Resurrection? A (Broadly) Thomist Argument for the Presence of Nonrational Animals in Heaven,” delivered at Blackfriars, Cambridge, 31 January 2013.

only thought that non-human animals would be included in the general resurrection, but that their capacities would increase so that they would have the ability to be able to understand the full implications of the gift they would be given:

May I be permitted to mention here a conjecture concerning the brute creation? What, if it should then please the all-wise, the all-gracious Creator to raise them higher in the scale of beings? What, if it should please him, when he makes us 'equal to angels,' to make them what we are now, -- creatures capable of God; capable of knowing and loving and enjoying the Author of their being?⁴

Yet, there has been far less reflection in the tradition on the fate of the non-human world than might be expected or desired. More recently, there has been an increase of speculation on the scope of non-human redemption. In the first part of this chapter, I will explore various contemporary concepts of redemption. I shall organise this exploration by analysing what is proposed as the content of redemption (what redemption will look like), the scope of redemption (what creatures will be redeemed), and the motivation of redemption (why those who are redeemed will be redeemed).

What is redemption? Andrew Elphinstone has remarked that what is often meant by the term is nothing more than "creative results brought from discouraging events."⁵ Jay McDaniel lays out four possible meanings:

It can mean (1) freedom from the consequences of sin, in which case it applies almost exclusively to humans. But it can also mean (2) freedom from what distresses or harms, (3) contribution to lives beyond one's own, and (4) transformation into an improved state of existence.⁶

All of the categories of redemption below will exclude definition (1) since it applies only to humans (*pace* Clough and Hoggard Creegan), and all of them

⁴ John Wesley, "The General Deliverance: Sermon 60" available online at <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/60/>, accessed 18 October 2013. See also the section on resurrection in chapter 2, p. 84-88.

⁵ Andrew Elphinstone, *Freedom, Suffering and Love* (London: SCM, 1976), 19.

⁶ McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 42.

will include (2). (2) alone, however, is not sufficient. If a creature dies, it is indeed freed from the circumstances that distresses or harms it, but it could hardly be considered redeemed. (Biblically, the notion of redemption as liberation is usually used in reference to freedom from slavery.⁷ A slave who dies in chains is not redeemed, while one who is redeemed is not only released from slavery, but allowed to live free.) One must not only be *freed from* but *redeemed to* some reality in which some sort of benefit is seen in the redemption. My focus in this chapter will therefore be primarily on definitions (3) and (4). What is redeemed from the life of the suffering of the individual, and how is that accomplished?

The content of redemption can be divided up into two categories: this-worldly and other-worldly. These can be further divided into four sub-categories: in this-worldly, as immanent or ecological; in other-worldly, as objective or classical.

Immanent Redemption

This-worldly redemption, as the name implies, refuses to see the redemption of suffering as occurring in some distant time or place, or in another dimension or world order altogether. Its proponents do not think that redemption is an eschatological category, but a present one. The first sub-category, immanent redemption, is represented by Ruth Page who finds redemption in the present moment, a notion she calls “Teleology Now!” Page writes:

Neither the purposes of God nor the judgment and apotheosis of creation have to wait for some end-time when the books will be balanced. Rather, they are continually happening now, from moment to moment, and from

⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of the Bible*, 2nd edition, ed. W. R. F. Browning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), online version, accessed 2 June 2014.

possibility to possibility....when God is believed to be present, then every moment becomes eschatological.⁸

Like a song, or a dance, the meaning of the activity is found in the doing of it, not in arriving at its end.⁹ Once a song is finished there is no further scope for redemption—no way early faults can be made up for. It is finished. However, while a song is still being played, there may be scope for redemption within the song itself. Imagine a jazz trio composed of a master musician and two novices. As they play, the novices make outright mistakes, interrupting the flow and progression of the music with discordant, unintended notes made worse by bad timing. In response, the master musician improvises so that these mistakes become intentional thematic foci later in the song. The maestro wraps the mistakes into resolutions and appropriate timings so that what was an unintentional mistake becomes part of the necessary structure of the song. For Page, the content of redemption is in the immediate possibilities of relationship offered by the creative, dynamic nature of the world. “As far as creation is concerned,” she writes, “the Kingdom of God is the synthesis of those moments where freedom and love become actual, while the achievement of these purposes of God for the world are always among current possibilities.”¹⁰ The scope of immanent redemption is broad: all things in relationship are offered redemption simply by their participation in life, so no creature is left out.

One problem is that Page’s view does not actually guarantee any of McDaniel’s four definitions of redemption, and so it could be questioned whether she is advancing a view of redemption at all. I think she would respond that redemption is always offered in new moment-to-moment possibilities, but is

⁸ Page, *God and the Web of Creation* (London: SCM, 1996), 63. Page does actually have a category of future redemption as well. See below, p. 273.

⁹ This is an analogy Page borrows from Peter Geach. Page, *Web of Creation*, 63.

¹⁰ Page, *Web of Creation*, 65.

not always realised. The unscripted ending of creaturely narratives always offers the chance of redemption, and where that possibility is seized, it becomes a moment of immediate redemptive power, as well as a place where future redemption can be reaped. When this happens, that moment becomes a place where love is actualised and freedom from harms and distress are realised.

Page does not hold entirely to a this-worldly view, as she links the concept of redemption with an eternal “harvest of creation” in the joy of God. Present redemptive moments are caught up into God’s very being and are there preserved. Acts of selfishness are judged as evil by falling into oblivion. In this way, Page holds two views on redemption: her immanent redemption, and a form of objective immortality (which we will explore below). Together, they gather everything into the scope of redemption except for those instances “where there is no concurrence, or where there is no renunciation of consuming selfishness, [because] there is nothing to harvest.”¹¹ The motivation of Page’s scheme is clear: “A distant teleology goes with belief in a distant God who will sort everything out in the end.”¹² Immanent redemption is found in the logic of a radically immanent God, even if this is sometimes at the cost of the individual.

There is much to be admired in Page’s view. The insistence that redemption should not be relegated only to some hoped-for future, reminds us that the Kingdom of God is a present in-breaking reality.¹³ It opens up our eyes to the ways in which God is currently at work, and helps us to picture a God who is immanent, and therefore can co-suffer with creation. Still, Page’s immanent redemption alone eliminates the chance to allow for any future hope

¹¹ Page, *Web of Creation*, 65. There is here an unacknowledged debt to process theism. Christopher Southgate points out the similarity in *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 69.

¹² Page, *Web of Creation*, 63.

¹³ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and The Spirit of God*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 164-166.

for those whose lives have held little but suffering and neglect, where relationships were perhaps forged, but not given time to be fruitful. Even with the addition of her objective “harvest of creation,” the whole of creation is not redeemed. Evil is not redeemed in the senses of definitions (3) and (4) above—it is not transformed into something of benefit—it is only forgotten or made *nihil*. But the story of Jesus is not that the cross is forgotten, but that the tragedy of the event is transformed by the glory of the resurrection. Page’s view of redemption does not help us understand how this happens.

Ecological Redemption

Ecological redemption, the other category in this-worldly redemption, is a view advanced by Holmes Rolston III. He suggests that while there may be no redemption for particular individuals who die in ways full of pain and suffering, their lives will be redeemed in the ongoing fruitfulness and creativity of the evolutionary process.¹⁴ For example, the second white pelican chick lives a short life full of neglect, but, because it does, white pelicans as a species continue to exist since they are almost always able to raise a chick into adulthood. More than that, the body of the chick who dies is not wasted: it is eaten by a passing fox, or decomposed by a variety of insects and microorganisms that then go on to feed other organisms, which drives the evolutionary process into further achievements. When translated into theological terms, the evils are redeemed by the ongoing story of evolution.¹⁵ Since all life is caught up in the evolutionary process, the scope of this redemption is perfectly universal. Unlike Page’s system, there is no unredeemed act lost in judgment or excluded from the harvest of creation, no

¹⁴ Holmes Rolston III, “Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?” *Zygon* 29:2 (June 1994): 205-229.

¹⁵ Rolston, “Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?” 213.

wasted life, because every event ripples into the far distant future where it finds redemption. Rolston's view of redemption is motivated by the fact that it can be equally affirmed by both theologians and biologists: one need do nothing more than to look at the history of evolutionary development to see the blueprint of redemption. The model does not depend on any future act of God being different from what God has already historically done in the creative process of evolution.

Rolston, like Page, does not rule out the possibility of another-worldly redemption, but does not think other-worldly models are the primary loci of redemption. Where Page chooses an objective immortality model, Rolston speculates instead about classic redemption: "Perhaps there is some eschatological sense in which there will, in the further future, come an ultimate redemption of both heaven and earth, of culture and of nature. I am not sure I know what that means."¹⁶ His preference seems to be for a more metaphorical interpretation of the biblical language: "If we place Paul's image [of the body as a seed of resurrection] on an evolutionary scale, you can plant a protozoan and get, a billion years later, a person. If we plant persons, and wait a million years, what might we get?"¹⁷

There is a great deal of value in Rolston's approach, but it does not give much hope of redemption for the suffering individual themselves. They are part of a bigger scheme, but they do not find any personal redemption. This is a critique raised by Christopher Southgate and Jay McDaniel. However, it is rebutted by Lisa Sideris who considers their concern for the individual anthropocentric; projecting on to non-human animals the sort of justice we

¹⁶ Rolston, "Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?" 227.

¹⁷ Rolston, "Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?" 228. See also: Holmes Rolston III, "Naturalizing and Systematizing Evil," in *Is Nature Ever Evil? Religion, Science and Value*, ed. Willem B. Drees (London: Routledge, 2003): 67-86.

would wish to see in human communities.¹⁸ I disagree with Sideris because I think she, ironically, falls into her own trap of anthropomorphism. Neither Southgate nor McDaniel ever raise the complaint that the suffering of individuals in the evolutionary process is a matter of “injustice.” Instead, they point out the difficulty of reconciling the care of God for these creatures in their suffering with God’s power and apparent ability to alleviate their pain. They do not defend that non-human animals have a right to not suffer, they only point out that God’s benevolence and omnipotence are called into question by the tragedy of sentient suffering and the untimely death of so many.

Rolston’s approach also raises the question of what kind of redemption would be available if the ongoing story were to end quite suddenly. If we plant persons, and they plant enough hydrogen bombs or release enough carbon dioxide, it may be that in a million years we only get a completely desolate planet devoid of life. What hope is there then for ecological redemption? It seems that if redemption is God’s work, it must have a reality that cannot be trumped by cosmic accident or human stupidity and greed.

Objective Immortality

Moving to other-worldly redemption, we begin with John Haught who represents the category of objective immortality.¹⁹ Usually advanced by

¹⁸ Lisa Sideris, “Writing Straight With Crooked Lines: Holmes Rolston’s Ecological Theology and Theodicy,” in *Nature, Value, Duty: Life on Earth with Holmes Rolston, III*, ed. Christopher J. Preston and Wayne Ouderkirk (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2007): 77-101.

¹⁹ John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993), 131. Haught borrowed the term from Alfred North Whitehead.

process theists, going back to Charles Hartshorne,²⁰ Haught's proposal is that while the individual creature does not experience a new life, "everything whosoever that occurs in evolution—all the suffering and tragedy as well as the emergence of new life and intense beauty—is 'saved' by being taken eternally into God's own feeling of the world."²¹ In another place, he likens God to a foundational registry upon which all things that occur—all things that have truth—are written and therefore preserved.²² The scope of this redemption is universal, but, as with the other forms of redemption, it does not do much for the individual. Haught, contrary to other supporters of objective immortality, acknowledges that a fulfilment of human striving, at the least, would entail that "beyond our own deaths the pursuit of meaning, truth, goodness and beauty that orients our specifically human lives would be open to a conscious, experiential fulfillment."²³ However, the rest of his writing seems to say that this conscious, experiential fulfilment does not belong to the human individual but to God. It is God who experiences the bringing together of all things into a harmonious whole: "In God's assimilation of the events that make up our personal lives, biological evolution and cosmic process, things that appear

²⁰ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1984), 117. John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, two of the most prominent process theists, have actually affirmed the possibility of the soul's survival of bodily death and the possibility of personal life after death (albeit the temporarily), and so I cannot use them to illustrate this position that is usually held by most process theists. David Ray Griffin, "Process Theology and the Christian Good News: A Response to Classical Free Will Theism," in *Searching For An Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, eds. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 3. Cf. John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (London: Lutterworth, 1966), 63-79; John B. Cobb Jr., "The Resurrection of the Soul," *Harvard Theological Review* 80:2 (1987): 213-227; John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd./Westminster, 1976), 124-125; Granville C. Henry, "Does Process Thought Allow Personal Immortality?" *Religious Studies* 31:3 (September 1995): 311-321.

²¹ John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 43. See also p.114ff.

²² John F. Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003), 152.

²³ Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin*, 154.

irredeemable from our narrow perspective may contribute to the limitless depth and breadth of God's own life."²⁴

Haught's motivation is to find a hope beyond death, but where Christianity has traditionally anticipated "personal, subjective survival beyond death... in an age of science, it has become more difficult than ever to believe in such a prospect."²⁵ Haught seeks to find a solution that acknowledges and soothes human existential angst while maintaining the scientific predictions of the end of life in the universe.

Ernst Conradie presents a slightly modified version of objective immortality, which he calls "material inscription."²⁶ In this model, every act throughout history is being inscribed into the multidimensional material reality of the cosmos. Like writing in a book, the story of creation is being written—not in a book with words—but on the three dimensions of space and the added dimension of time. God, from the supra-time/space dimension of eternity, encapsulates and holds these dimensions (and thus everything in them) in existence and they can be retrieved in the eschaton.²⁷ Evil events can be judged and put forever away, while good events can be brought forward and celebrated. Since these are inscribed in four dimensions (the same number of dimensions they initially took place in, rather than a two dimensional video), the

²⁴ Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin*, 159.

²⁵ Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin*, 150.

²⁶ Ernst Conradie, "Resurrection, Finitude, and Ecology," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, eds. Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 292.

²⁷ Conradie explains that in the same way that a square both encapsulates and transcends a line, and a cube contains and transcends a square, so God's dimension of eternity contains and transcends our 4-dimensional existence. Eternity is not the negation of our existence, but is its transcendence. Conradie, "Resurrection, Finitude, and Ecology," 288-290.

“retrieval of these events would be as real and concrete as the original lived experiences.”²⁸

Insofar as Conradie’s proposal involves the re-telling of the world’s narrative in redemptive terms, it is similar to my own proposal explored below. In addition, Conradie allows for a subjective experience of life for those who are redeemed: the re-playing of the celebrated parts of life will be just as real as they are now. While Conradie does not dwell on non-human resurrection, if everything that has ever happened is inscribed as outlined above, then one can safely assume that every non-human being is also present in this redemptive form. What is not clear in Conradie’s picture is how healing can be extended to those who only experience neglect and suffering. The insurance pelican chick, for example, would not have many, if any, moments worthy of being recalled since it has had no experience of love, joy, or peace. Conradie indicates that for humans, through the “mediation of our own embodied human consciousness”²⁹ there is scope for finding healing for the “unfinished business” of earth. It is unclear how this can be the case without novel experiences also being introduced: how can business be wrapped up by endlessly re-experiencing the same event? It is even more unclear how this sort of resolution could be achieved for the non-human animal creation. What is missing from the pelican chick’s redeemed life on the Conradie model is precisely the experience of flourishing that was alien to its earthly life. The new life ought to include some sort of possibility for extending to it a fully flourishing life.

Haught’s views also struggle with explaining how the evil of events can be transformed. If only all that is good, true, and beautiful is registered into the

²⁸ Conradie, “Resurrection, Finitude, and Ecology,” 295.

²⁹ Conradie, “Resurrection, Finitude, and Ecology,” 294.

life of God, we are left with no concept of what happens to the evil. Redemption seems to be little more than a sort of universal divine nostalgia.³⁰ The second pelican chick, whose life consists of neglect, starvation, and death does not seem to have much worth saving, while the life of the successful older chick, who has already had the joyful experiences of care and growth, would have much more to save into God's life. The lack of flourishing in the second pelican's life is not solved by objective immortality, it is enshrined eternally.

Classical Resurrection

Finally we come to the classical view of redemption: the resurrection of the body. This model holds that there will be a subjective experience of harmony, peace, and new life by individuals after death. It has been developed most prominently by Jay McDaniel and Christopher Southgate, but is held to various degrees by others as well.³¹ It is not traditional that this form of redemption—physical resurrection—should extend to the non-human creation. Here, perhaps more than in the other three categories, the scope of redemption is closely linked to the motivations for redemption.

For Paul Griffiths, non-human animals might be present in the new creation only because they are a benefit to human well-being, and not because they have any place there on their own merit.³² Therefore, it is not necessary for all creatures to be resurrected, but only those needed for human enrichment. For C.S. Lewis and John Polkinghorne the motivation for non-human resurrection is that some creatures (particularly those we tame) have been

³⁰ I am indebted to one of my students in the class "Evolution, God, and Gaia" 2013 at the University of Exeter for this apt phrase.

³¹ McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 44-47; Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 78-91. The work of other proponents of this view will be explored below, including Paul Griffiths, C.S. Lewis, John Polkinghorne, and Denis Edwards.

³² Paul Griffiths, "What Remains in the Resurrection?"

“humanised” by interaction with us.³³ Therefore, they are involved in resurrection by merit of their link to personhood in and through humanity. I am tempted to call this the “Velveteen Rabbit” model of redemption.³⁴ Lewis only confesses ignorance as to the fate of those who do not have this happy link with humanity, while Polkinghorne speculates that perhaps there will be representatives of other species there as well, either for human or divine benefit.³⁵ Polkinghorne has argued that in terms of resurrection, with the exception of pets, “animals are indeed to be valued, but more in the type than in the token... I think it likely, therefore, that there will be horses in the world to come, but not every horse that has ever lived.”³⁶

For Christopher Southgate, the motivation for a renewed life is threefold: “specific scriptural texts, a general sense that human life at its richest will be set in the context of relationship with other creatures, and the need to marry a sense of the goodness of God with the evident lack of blessedness in the lives of many creatures.”³⁷ Since the texts give little detail of the new life, the second two concerns are the primary informants. Southgate argues that the human need for relationship does not require that all creatures be included in the redeemed life, and that the goodness of God can be satisfied with the

³³ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1940, 1996), 143-147; John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 123.

³⁴ *The Velveteen Rabbit: Or, How Toys Become Real* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922) is a children’s story by Margery Williams in which a toy rabbit is turned by a fairy into a living rabbit because a little boy loved it. Toys that are not *truly* loved by humans do not become real in the story.

³⁵ John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 123.

³⁶ John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 152. In another place he writes “What are we to expect will be the destiny of non-human creatures? They must have their share in cosmic hope, but we scarcely need suppose that every dinosaur that ever lived, let alone all of the vast multitude of bacteria that have constituted so large a fraction of biomass throughout the history of terrestrial life, will each have its own individual eschatological future.” *The God of Hope*, 122.

³⁷ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 89. See also page 82.

redemption of all the creatures who consciously suffered. Therefore, Southgate concedes that simple organisms who may possess “little distinctive individual experience or agency” may only be represented in the eschaton by a type.³⁸ However he goes on to warn against such an attitude towards all non-human creatures, especially the higher animals who are centres of consciousness. Of these higher animals, redemption is most urgently needed for those who have not experienced any flourishing.³⁹ For those creatures that do not suffer or who have experienced flourishing, Southgate advises a position of bold generosity and trust that there will be, in God’s grace, abundant provision for all.⁴⁰

The advantage of Southgate’s approach, even as opposed to the positions of Griffiths, Polkinghorne and Lewis, is that it finally addresses the question of the suffering non-human individual. There is full redemption for those who have innocently suffered. But I wonder if it goes far enough?

From my perspective, the scope of redemption is shaped, not by compensation or by anthropocentric concerns, but by the motivation of God’s love. The scope of redemption is completely universal because a universal redemption is required by the universal love of God. If what I have argued in chapter 4 about the irreplaceability of the beloved has any traction, then the main issue at stake is simply “Does God love each creature?” If God does love each creature individually, then a creature cannot be adequately represented by a token, no matter how little distinction lies between it and another individual of the same species. God’s interest with *that* individual includes a unique history and a unique relationship in time and space that cannot be held by any other. Therefore, I propose that not only will non-human animals exist in the

³⁸ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 84.

³⁹ This is a view Southgate shares with McDaniel. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 46.

⁴⁰ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 85.

resurrection, but that every individual of every species will be included, because of God's great love for each. I am led toward Moltmann's position, that "true hope must be universal, because its healing future embraces every individual and the whole universe. If we were to surrender hope for as much as one single creature, for us God would not be God," for God would not be the lover of every being.⁴¹

One of the regular objections that arises from conjecturing that every creature will be raised is that it might seem redundant. "Surely," it is thought, "there could not be any use for every bacteria, or every beetle, that has ever lived to be raised?" John Wesley once addressed this question:

If it be objected to all this, (as very probably it will,) "But of what use will those creatures be in that future state?" I answer this by another question, What use are they of now? If there be (as has commonly been supposed) eight thousand species of insects, who is able to inform us of what use seven thousand of them are? If there are four thousand species of fishes, who can tell us of what use are more than three thousand of them? If there are six hundred sorts of birds, who can tell of what use five hundred of those species are? If there be four hundred sorts of beasts, to what use do three hundred of them serve? Consider this; consider how little we know of even the present designs of God; and then you will not wonder that we know still less of what he designs to do in the new heavens and the new earth.⁴²

The thousands of species of Wesley's day have been expanded to the tens of millions today.⁴³ We also have a better answer for what use such diversity is today: they exist because of the great evolutionary project. However, Wesley makes a useful admonition that we should not be too quick to evaluate a creature's worth to God by reference to its use to us. The new life will be

⁴¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), 132. The one exception to this might be creatures with significant moral freewill, such as humans and, possibly, demons. The nature of love demands significant freedom, and therefore if one were to knowingly, intentionally, persistently reject the gift of life, I believe that God would respect that choice. However, it may be that the gentle, creative, loving, and enduring call of God may eventually convince all to receive the gift of life freely.

⁴² John Wesley, "The General Deliverance: Sermon 60" available online at <http://new.gbgbm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/60/>, accessed 18 October 2013.

⁴³ The tens of millions of species alive today only represent about 1-2% of all species that ever lived, meaning an estimate of billions of species throughout all history.

theocentric, not anthropocentric, and so our imagination should be shaped by the abundance of God's love and the (already evident) surprising scope of God's creativity. Nor (to meet another common objection), in a world without death or decay, can there be a lack of space or resources for these numberless creatures. There is no reason to think that all should have to co-exist within the present terrestrial boundaries, nor that the present laws of physics which cause those boundaries will apply.⁴⁴

One cautionary note is whether or not the new life offered to creatures is given as compensation for suffering experienced here. Southgate implies that, to some extent, it is to be thought of as compensation, since it is meant to answer the question of the goodness of God in light of a suffering world.⁴⁵ Further evidence is that he suggests redemption is most important in the lives of those creatures who experienced little or no flourishing, and leaves it an open question as to whether or not such creatures might fade away after a period of heavenly flourishing, "if the new life is only a compensation for previous lack of fulfillment."⁴⁶ McDaniel also holds that the new life is offered so "that they [unfulfilled creatures] live until they enjoy a fulfillment of their needs as creatures."⁴⁷ Yet, biblically at least, redemption (whether earthly or heavenly) is always seen as a gift of grace, not as compensation. To suggest that God owes a certain quality of life, and then has to make up for what was not received (as the concept of "compensation" implies) is to mistake the gift of being for an

⁴⁴ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 85.

⁴⁵ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 82-85.

⁴⁶ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 85. Southgate actually makes a critique of conceiving future life as compensation in 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 Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 82-84.

⁴⁷ McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 46.

entitlement. In contrast, to see redemption as the free gift of God is to avoid that mistake while still answering the objection about the goodness of God. Redemption is far more than compensation, and we could say that one who receives redemption will be more than compensated for their sufferings. But it would be a grave mistake to see redemption as a mere balancing of the scales of justice. That would be to turn gift into transaction; love into economics.

I have explored four models of redemption: immanent, ecological, objective, and classical. Many of the proposals that have been described do not belong entirely to one sort or another. We saw how both Rolston and Haught speculated about the possibility of classical redemption. Denis Edwards, who writes movingly on redemption, also combines several different views. His model, which he calls “inscription in the life-giving Spirit of God” (in contrast to Conradie’s material inscription) has five points:

1. *The future of creation remains obscure and shrouded in mystery.* The promise does not give a clear view of the future.⁴⁸
2. *Individual creatures are inscribed in the eternal divine life through the Holy Spirit.* The Spirit’s current embrace of all creatures is the promise and the means of their inclusion in the divine life.⁴⁹
3. *Individual Creatures find Healing and Fulfillment in Christ.* The judgment of Christ assures us that no good thing will be lost, but all will be redeemed in Christ. The scope is universal.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Denis Edwards, “Every Sparrow that Falls to the Ground: The Cost of Evolution and the Christ-Event,” *Ecotheology*, 11:1 (2006), 117.

⁴⁹ Edwards, “Every Sparrow that Falls,” 118.

⁵⁰ Edwards, “Every Sparrow that Falls,” 118. Capitalisation in the title of this section is original to Edwards.

4. *Redemption in Christ will be specific to each kind of creature.* With McDaniel and Southgate, Edwards affirms that in redemption “God relates to each creature on its own terms.”⁵¹

5. *Some individual creatures may find redemption in the living memory and the eternal life of the Trinity and the Communion of Saints.* Some creatures may share in physical resurrection, while others may be simply remembered by God and the Communion of Saints and find a sort of resurrection in that way.⁵²

Edwards combines elements of immanent redemption (the present embrace of the Spirit), with objective immortality (being held in the memory, or inscribed into the divine life), and also classical redemption (that some may be physically resurrected). These models are not mutually exclusive, and can be pieced together—nested—into resonant images of the profound mystery of redemption. The next section will explore my own proposal for how various models of redemption can form a compound whole.

The Fractal Mosaic of Redemption

I want to suggest a picture of how we might think of three of these different models of redemption working together to give a richer picture of God’s final work. Immanent, ecological, and classical resurrection models can be combined in the image of a fractal mosaic.⁵³ Most people are familiar with photo mosaics: those computer-generated images where each pixel of the larger pictures is actually another whole photograph. Together, hundreds or

⁵¹ Edwards, “Every Sparrow that Falls,” 119.

⁵² Edwards, “Every Sparrow that Falls,” 119.

⁵³ The concept of fractal narratives is explored in Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010), 219-26, 466-67. She explores how a fractal narrative of redemption works out in various biblical narratives, particularly in the book of Job.

thousands of pictures combine into a greater picture, which may or may not be related to the component parts. The photo mosaic preserves meaning on different levels, and one level is not diminished by being part of another.

Figure 1⁵⁴



Compare the fractal mosaic to the classic tapestry analogy: all events and all people are like threads in a giant tapestry God is weaving, and while everything is a mess of knots now, God will one day flip over the carpet and reveal the fabulous design that was being woven the whole time.⁵⁵ The problem is that a thread is not worth very much, nor is one thread very different from another. In the photo mosaic, each pixel is a whole in itself, and has a unique meaning, composition, subject, and so on. Each is a valuable whole in itself. Still, it contributes to part of a greater whole once it has been suitably

⁵⁴ Image created by Bethany Sollereeder through www.picartia.com.

⁵⁵ This imagery is found in Markus Mühling-Schlapkohl, "Why Does the Risen Christ Have Scars? Why God did not immediately create the Eschaton: Goodness, Truth and Beauty," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 6:2 (April 2004): 185-193.

arranged. Another advantage is that the photo mosaic is not limited to two levels. Each pixel could itself be a mosaic, or the larger picture could also form a pixel of a yet greater mosaic. Numerous levels of meaning all operate at once.

All creatures, during their lives, are creating a picture, from the greatest human to the humblest bacterium. This is the first level, Page's level, of immanent redemption: each creature standing in relationship with others, making overlapping narratives that touch one another. Zoom out far enough, and one begins to see Rolston's level of ecological redemption emerge from the complex interaction of these first relationships. The individual life of each creature contributes to the beauty and wholeness of the ecological system and the process of evolutionary development itself. At the end of time, these mosaics are disassembled. Yet, out of these former identities—these former pictures—God resurrects all creatures and assembles them into a final picture of harmonious life: the peaceable kingdom of eternity. This is the level of classical resurrection. Each creature who died will have a new, personally-experienced life restored to it in a new body, in community with a whole new creation. This is the general resurrection on a cosmic scale.

How will creatures live in this new community? Will the lion lay down with the lamb? Or will there be, as Southgate suggests, an eternal ecosystem “involving an experience for the redeemed prey-animal that delights in the beauty and flourishing of the predator, and vice versa?”⁵⁶ We can only speculate at an answer. My guess would be that the identities of creatures, the “pictures of being,” worked out at this top level will contain all the essential elements of identity that made the creature what it was at the bottom levels of

⁵⁶ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 89.

the mosaic. The lion will still pursue the gazelle. Yet, as Southgate suggests, the hunt will not involve terror or pain. Or, perhaps the lion will stalk and pounce, but without the use of claws, so that the lethal hunt becomes a game of play. Perhaps the gazelle, equally redeemed, will be perfectly able to avoid the lion, and so the hunt and flight will simply go on forever.

Whatever picture of the future life we use, it must incorporate (if my analogy is to hold) some elements of the levels below. The individual living creature once formed one picture. Its relationship to its ecosystem provided an arrangement of relationships that provided another picture one level higher. That ecosystem influenced surrounding ecosystems in both time and space, which had an effect on the creatures living in them, changing the dynamic of their life pictures. In the final resurrection, God resurrects every identity found at the bottom level of individual lives—starts over with those pictures—and can arrange them in any fashion, using any of the resources of meaning held in the higher levels to create a final mosaic.

Throughout earthly history, God's ongoing work of redemption is to arrange each higher level out of the components of the lower levels in such a way that each higher level also shows a picture of redemption. In this fashion, each upward level carries the self-similar signature of God's redemptive purposes, and the whole image becomes a fractal of grace. At the end of history, the level of eschatological new creation is made, and it takes apart and remakes the mosaic entirely. So, everything is old: it is still composed of the same pictures that have been forming meaning all the way along, and incorporates the higher-level images that were themselves mosaics during history. Yet, everything is new: every picture, every creature, every ecosystem, every relationship, is placed in a new arrangement that faithfully captures,

redeems, and completes their experience. This redemption, this participation in the peaceable kingdom, is fully experienced by each creature.

The fractal mosaic image helps answer questions about how each life is related to the models of its own redemption. Whereas for an objective immortality model of redemption, the future existence is completely discontinuous from the present life, the picture mosaic shows how the classical redemption incorporates the present reality, as the “picture” of the creature’s life is now used to create the new creation. In objective immortality, the creature does not retain a body or have any centre of self any longer. There is no continuity between the creature and its redemptive form. Similarly, an ecological approach to redemption cuts ties between the present self-conscious experience of a creature and the redemption that they find in ecological harmonies in later evolutionary development. Those later harmonies may share some genetic material with the creature who died, or molecules of their body, but no experiential link is maintained. Therefore, although the life is not wasted in an ecological model, there is no experience of redemption for the individual itself.

The picture mosaic shows that each life, past and present, is actually a primary building block of ecological harmonies and of the new life to come. God could not have simply created the larger mosaics without all the previous compositions. So the suffering of all creatures contributes directly to those redemptive outcomes, and each life has a greater meaning than is apparent from seeing the life in isolation. A creature’s death has more meaning when we understand it in the context of evolutionary development. The process contextualises the suffering so that we see that seemingly-senseless loss is not, after all, wasted. Likewise, the new creation is formed out of all the resurrected

identities of each creature. It is a picture of glory directly related to what came before.

Because each greater level of meaning is directly dependent on the levels below, the glories of the whole are reflected back, are directly attributable, to each component piece as well. Every hurt, every broken life, every life cut short by a predator or a natural disaster will be used to create this new kingdom. I think that the loving attention of God to each individual in the resurrected life will communicate something of the part they played in that kingdom building back to them, in whatever capacity is appropriate to each. Each creature will directly and experientially participate in the new picture of the peaceable kingdom that they themselves helped to create.

The image of a photo mosaic may also be conceived in dynamic terms, as a video mosaic.⁵⁷ Each creature's life is a video that, combined with others, makes a large-scale video. Of course, in real life, these are not carefully acted and scripted pieces, but rather (consistent with God's temporal existence) dynamic real-time improvisations. They are narratives that are being built, not simply pictures taken at one point in time. The course of each individual video, as well as the large-scale videos, are created as each of the actors explores his or her own freedom and response to divine lure in his or her own capacity. God works with the texture and reality of each of these individual narratives and works them into the larger-scale ecosystem video which is influenced (but not determined) by each pixel of its makeup, and so on, up through history and the various levels of meaning we can imagine. God interacts at each level of the

⁵⁷ There are computer programmers working on developing video mosaics. One example is the video mosaic developed by Allison Klein, Tyler Grant, Adam Finkelstein, and Michael F. Cohen, "Video Mosaics," *NPAR 2002: Second International Symposium on Non Photorealistic Rendering* (June, 2002): 21-28. An example of a video mosaic they produced by the method described in the paper can be viewed online at: <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/um/people/cohen/npar2002.m1v>. Accessed 16 May 2014.

mosaic,⁵⁸ luring and creating relationships between disparate narratives to bring about God's purposes at every level in redemptive form.

The picture of redemption as a dynamic video mosaic allows us to see, in part, how small stories could build up into a meta-narrative without sacrificing the individual uniqueness and worth of each story. It allows us to see how this-worldly and other-worldly models of redemption can be held together. A single creature's narrative—a centre of worth in itself—contributes up into an ecological narrative. That ecological narrative is one smaller part of the world history narrative, which forms its own mosaic. Each of these levels contributes to God's ultimate composition of the new creation.⁵⁹

Ernst Conradie recognises the ongoing and interactive nature of our life narratives:

My own life story is not completed with my death. My story continues as long as my life is still honored in the memory of subsequent generations and as long as the material impact of my work is still evident... However, even then the story has not reached its narrative conclusion. My story forms part of the larger (hi)story of the particular genealogy, culture, species, planet, and galaxy in which I participate. My history will in this sense be completed only when the history of the cosmos comes to an end.⁶⁰

Conradie points out that individual stories are not complete on their own.

Instead, stories can gain new meaning with the occurrence of new events.

Stories of suffering are transformed by subsequent stories into narratives of God's love and power. The example of the cross is central here: the innocent suffering of Jesus on the cross is tragic. Yet within the context of salvation history and the resurrection, the event of the cross becomes the focal point of heavenly worship:

⁵⁸ In all the multiple ways explored in chapter 5, p. 238-266.

⁵⁹ God's final narrative may include the history of other worlds, other universes, and other non-physical beings (such as angels and demons).

⁶⁰ Conradie, "Resurrection, Finitude, and Ecology," 283-284.

‘You [Jesus] are worthy to take the scroll
 and to open its seals,
 for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God
 saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;
 you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,
 and they will reign on earth.’...
 ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
 to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
 and honour and glory and blessing!’⁶¹

If, as Rolston says, the creation is “cruciform,”⁶² then it is cruciform in this sense: the stories of the innocent suffering of creatures will be transfigured into narratives of glory, and these narratives will be reflected back on the individual by being honoured through God’s love, attention, and communication, just as Jesus’ suffering was transfigured in the resurrection and honoured by the Father’s glorification of the Son. We could, to use poetic imagination, say that God will tell the redemptive narrative of creation to each creature in light of its life, thus honouring it and bringing it glory.

The result of this type of perspective is that the individual and the “greater whole” are not set against each other competitively, as is so often the case in reasoning about suffering and redemption. The suffering of the individual is not brushed aside in light of the “greater good” or justified by merely pointing to some eschatological order that will make sense of it all. Some good is found directly in the life of the creature itself: its participation in life and in surrounding relationships. The individual pixel—that is, the narrative of the here and now of each creature—is kept in sharp focus as a centre of worth. All its complexity and meaning is maintained. At the same time, a view of ongoing, ever-building, mosaic narratives allows us a glimpse into the possibilities of

⁶¹ Revelation 5:9-10, 12, NRSV.

⁶² Holmes Rolston III, “Kenosis and Nature,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 58-61.

what impact a life might have ontologically, as its actions ripple through the course of history.

The question of the relationship of the present earthly existence to the future new creation existence is one of continuity. We are physical now, we shall be physical then. We exist in relationship now, we shall exist in relationship then. The new creation reality is precisely the present reality extended and transformed into that future reality in such a way that a different reality is created. In chapter 5, I explained that one way of understanding God's participation in the world is through the shaping of meaning. The new creation mosaic is the final outworking of God's shaping of meaning. God brings new and different meaning to events by placing them within the context of other events. By arranging the pixels of individual creaturely narratives into a larger picture with other narratives, a whole new meaning is created that is not inherent in the lower level of photos. It is because of God's work at various levels that the new meanings that emerge are ones of heavenly glory rather than of hellish despair.

As each narrative joins other narratives, the composite meaning of what is seen can change. In a photo mosaic, one pixel may be a picture of a cat. Yet, in the larger scale picture, it forms part of a human finger. In yet another larger scale, the human finger forms part of an icon of the Trinity. Each level forms a whole that contains its own meaning. The meaning of the arrangement, colour, and shade of each image changes depending on the scale. Similarly, God takes the multi-levelled world narratives of tragedy and triumph and arranges them into ever-redemptive forms, changing their meaning. No suffering, then, is left unredeemed, and each individual's experience in the larger whole becomes an experience of redemption. These upper levels of

meaning are not automatically generated from the lower levels: they are carefully constructed by God's ongoing work. One could use the same set of photographs to create a mosaic of Raphael's "The Transfiguration" or one of Heironymous Bosch's disturbing images of hell. It is God's work that creates one instead of the other.

An Example

Let us take a look at a more concrete historical example to help flesh out concepts that are opaque in the abstract. Some 65 million years ago, dinosaurs were the dominant species on earth. Each creature had its relationships; its narratives of flourishing or suffering. At Page's level, each creature made its own contribution to the makeup of the earth. At the end of the Cretaceous period, a meteorite hit the Yucatan peninsula causing climate change and widespread environmental disruption.⁶³ Dinosaurs could not survive the changes and were wiped out, while mammals, who until that time had been minor players in earth's history, suddenly flourished in the new environments without the competition of the dinosaurs. When dinosaurs no longer created new pictures or videos (their own narratives), their extinction caused gaping holes in the ecological level of the mosaic. These holes would be filled by others, and the ecological narrative would continue through the narratives of mammals and birds, building into Rolston's level of redemption.

The meteorite was a major plot turn in the ongoing narratives. The plot of the second-level ecological mosaic took a turn toward the diversification of mammals, which eventually ended up in the emergence of *Homo sapiens* and, centrally, in the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. In one sense,

⁶³ New research continues to confirm this theory. See Paul R. Renne, et. al., "Time Scales of Critical Events Around the Cretaceous-Paleogene Boundary," *Science* 339 (February 2013): 684-687.

then, the event of Christ taking on human flesh is attributable in part to the extinction of the dinosaurs which allowed for the emergence of mammals—an attribution that it is only possible to make in retrospect.

The essential point to grasp is that the meaning of an individual dinosaur's life was not fixed when it died. All that finished was the composition of its own small narrative pixel. How that pixel would then contribute to other levels of meaning is something under ongoing development. Its life holds new meaning with every passing day. As our stories continue its story, there is an added providential twist, because in each act of divine lure in the present—and in the choices that are made today—the open possibilities of new meaning in the life of a now long-dead dinosaur are either realised or closed. The wonder of human architecture, the transcendence of music, or the capacity of human love are all bound up with the meaning of the death of past creatures we never knew.

We could also express this concept by counterfactual: had the dinosaurs not gone extinct, Bach might never have been born. The world would never have experienced his transcendent music. Instead, because of the extinction of the dinosaurs creating the foundation for contemporary stories (the birth of Bach), our present stories expand upon and enrich the outcomes of the dinosaurs's stories (they lived in a world that eventually produced Bach's music). Each story serves the others, and while we benefit now from their contributions, our contributions will be experienced by them in the new life. By merit of the dinosaurs' extinction we are here, and our retrospective vision allows us to interpret their deaths as having been meaningful in a way that (if we can imagine) an intelligent observer at that time could not have foreseen.

Other equally meaningful and fruitful possibilities of redemption along the road of time were, no doubt, *not* explored in order that our road might be.

God's work of redemption is to continually interact with the world in order to see that good is realised. As a moment occurs, the narrative lines leading up to it converge and are either enriched with new meaning or diminished by tragedy in the passing event. God's present action is constantly working to redeem the lives of the past by leading creation toward ends that will reflect back greater glory on the individuals now passed away; a glory that they will experience (in whatever way is most appropriate to them) in the new creation.

This concept of mosaic redemption can meaningfully be extended to all living creatures. It is possible to see the ongoing history of evolution, comprising as it does of ever increased complexity and interrelations, as one way that God's redemptive work is being carried out in a this-worldly sense. The death (both individually and corporately) of the dinosaurs is a loss, and yet the flourishing of the mammals ends up contributing to the meaning of the dinosaurs' extinction. A further redemption in an other-worldly sense will build upon and extend the redemptions already crafted by God.

An analogy to this ongoing sense of redemption may be drawn from the end of Hebrews 11. After the long line of heroes of the faith is listed, the author states the following: "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect."⁶⁴ The passage goes straight on from this statement into the paraenetic portion of the epistle, beginning with: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us..." followed by instructions on how to live.⁶⁵ The saints of the

⁶⁴ Hebrews 11:39-40, NRSV.

⁶⁵ Hebrews 12:1a, NRSV.

Hebrew Bible recounted in the chapter had lived and died long before, but the author of Hebrews seems to think that they cannot be made perfect without the actions and faith of current believers. Although the saints are long since dead, part of the promise of their lives is realised in the present; a possibility of fulfilment that would not come to fruition if present believers chose not to “lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely...”⁶⁶

Another example might be how the legacy of Abraham is enriched by the later reality of Christ. We do not consider Abraham as a simple means to an end, but rather as a man who had an important part to play in the ongoing story of God’s relationship with the world. Abraham’s obedient actions (as well as his numerous disobedient actions) are wrapped into the narrative of salvation, and his life is given a greater glory, a greater meaning, because of the subsequent history that followed in Christ. We can imagine that the resurrected Abraham would be joyful at this, thus sharing in some sense in the glory of Christ.

For a human, it is at least plausible that conscious involvement in the large-scale narratives of redemption could indeed be a personal experience of redemption as well. Is it plausible for the non-human animal creation? In attempting an answer to such a question, one must first acknowledge the vast amounts of speculation involved. If we accept the already fuzzy notion of non-human redemption, we must also accept that the form that the fulfilment of redemption takes for other creatures will probably not be fully understandable to humans. If, for humans, conscious recognition is what is needed, then that is presumably what they will receive. It may be, for other creatures, that redemption looks entirely different. Jay McDaniel insists upon this point:

Let us be clear about this hope. The hope is not that all creatures share in the same kind of fulfillment beyond death. Rather it is that all

⁶⁶ Hebrews 12:1b, NRSV.

creatures share in that kind of fulfillment appropriate to their own interests and needs. What a pelican chick might know as a fulfillment of needs would have its own kind of harmony and intensity, one quite different from what we humans might know. If there is a pelican heaven, it is a *pelican* heaven.⁶⁷

Add to the complication of our speculation that a pelican with a new resurrected body might have quite different needs from the needs it has now in a this-worldly body (as 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 strongly implies), and we are left with very little clue as to what the needs of the pelican chick might be. Nor do we know what the new capacities of the chick might be. If they do have new capacities post mortem, the proposal I have given above—that recognition of one's place in the greater narrative is itself a form of personal redemption—would by no means be absurd.

Excursus: Can the dead be benefitted?

There is a long philosophical discussion that is of some interest at this juncture. While not forming a crucial part of the argument (it can be included or excluded with little difference), it offers an interesting parallel to my concerns. The discussion is about whether the dead can be benefitted or harmed. Beginning with Aristotle and continuing through to contemporary thinkers, many philosophers have affirmed that the dead can be harmed and benefitted by the living.⁶⁸ One example is that the dead can be harmed by defamation, as Michael Ridge explains:

The idea that one can wrong the dead by defaming them... has an impressive legal and philosophical pedigree. Kant, for example, argues that spreading falsehoods about someone after the person's death is morally dubious. The idea is even legally recognized in some contexts.

⁶⁷ McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 45. The point is also insisted upon by Edwards, "Every Sparrow that Falls," 119.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, I.10-11, trans by David Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Michael Ridge, "Giving the Dead Their Due," *Ethics* 114:1 (October 2003): 38-59; Robert C. Solomon, "Is There Happiness after Death?" *Philosophy* 51:196 (April 1976): 189-193.

In Germany, Holocaust denial is criminal because it involves the 'defamation of the memory of the dead.'⁶⁹

The idea that the dead can be harmed even extends to those who think that death constitutes the complete end of being for the individual.⁷⁰ Some of these are certainly stretched: George Pitcher, for example, argues that it is only the ante-mortem self of the dead person (the description of the dead person before their death) that can be harmed and not the post-mortem self (the mouldering dust that remains).⁷¹ However, if—as I have argued—there is a subjective other-worldly experience of life for creatures, then the idea that the dead can be harmed or benefited is much more plausible, as there continues to be a living self that continues after death.

Robert Solomon advances the idea that there are two different kinds of desires which affect our happiness or determine our harm before and after death. There are "*personal* desires, whose satisfaction depends upon my being alive, and *transcendent* desires, whose satisfaction does not depend upon my being alive."⁷² Solomon gives the following illustrations for personal desires: to see a new movie, or to taste a certain dish. One can only do these things when alive. If a person dies before they are accomplished, there is no chance that the desire could ever be fulfilled. A transcendent desire might be to have one's child live long in prosperity and wealth. It is a desire that very well may only find fulfilment after one's own death. When applied to the non-human world, the

⁶⁹ Ridge, "Giving the Dead Their Due," 43. While Holocaust denial also harms the living, it is significant that the law points to the memory of the dead, rather than the effect on the living, as the reason for making it criminal.

⁷⁰ Joel Feinberg, "The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations," in *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis*, ed. William Blackstone (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974): 43-68; Joel Feinberg, "Harm and Self-Interest," in *Law, Morality and Society: Essays in Honour of H. L. A. Hart*, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and J. Raz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977): 284-308; George Pitcher, "The Misfortunes of the Dead," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21:2 (April 1984): 183-188.

⁷¹ Pitcher, "Misfortunes," 184.

⁷² Solomon, "Is There Happiness After Death?," 193. Italics original.

personal desires are evident: the desire to survive, to reproduce, to find and keep food and shelter, to avoid pain and pursue pleasure. For more social animals, it may also be to hold a certain standing in the group hierarchy or to perform certain tasks within the group. Non-human animals can also have transcendent desires. A sentinel vervet monkey, for example, may desire the safety of its group from predators such as lions and eagles. These sentinels will stand at the edges of the foraging group, keeping watch for predators while at the same time placing themselves in greater danger. If a monkey makes a call, but is caught themselves by a predator, they may die before their desire to see the rest of their group safe is realised.⁷³

More interestingly, Scripture holds several references to the desires of the non-human creation. The most important is in Romans 8:19-23:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.⁷⁴

“The creation waits with eager longing... in hope that the creation itself will be set free...” This desire of the creation is what Solomon would call a transcendent desire. It is a desire for the full potential of both humanity and of the non-human creation to be realised, for decay to be no more. Because of Christ’s work reconciling “to himself all things” (Colossians 1:20), all things are also drawn into peaceable relationship with one another and with God. The

⁷³ We could also perhaps infer transcendent desire for long life in one’s offspring in elephants, who will return to the spot where a young elephant died and perform mourning rituals years after the event. Yet, I think we must be cautious, since the attributing of desires can easily become overly anthropomorphic.

⁷⁴ Romans 8:19-23, NRSV.

heavenly vision in Revelation 5:13 vividly pictures this unity as centred around God's praise:

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,
 "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!"⁷⁵

The realisation of the creation's desire and longing is the praise and worship of God.⁷⁶ The desire to experience this eschatological community of praise, then, is also a transcendent desire, and one that can be satisfied in the individual long after their earthly death. The satisfaction of that desire is another way we might think of the final redemption of the individual, of the glory of the whole reflected back on the individual. Redemption becomes more than the simple satisfaction of personal biological needs. Many members of that final community will only exist because of the actions of some other member, so each one exists as a tribute to the life of the other. The complex and webbed nature of history guarantees that the implications of every life are felt far afield. The reward of the new life will be to have all those relationships recognised and transformed into ones of perfect harmony.

The fractal mosaic idea of redemption, while being a highly speculative and highly imaginative account, contributes to a compound evolutionary theodicy as it helps one to see how the necessary harms of the evolutionary process can be redeemed in both a this-worldly and an other-worldly sense,

⁷⁵ Revelation 5:13, NRSV.

⁷⁶ Richard Bauckham imagines that this praise is found in creature's being themselves, therefore their simple being is in fact the form of praise. Richard Bauckham, *Living With Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2012), 148. There are many critiques of his view. See for example David Horrell's argument that while the creation is called to praise God, there is no clear indication that creation in fact responds to the call. David G. Horrell, *The Bible and Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010), 55. Mark Harris wonders whether all human actions of being one's self also count, such as sipping coffee, or engaging in a (natural) act of selfishness. Mark Harris, "Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy' (Ps.98:8): Is joy the theological and emotional shaper of the inanimate world?" Paper presented at the 2014 meeting of the European Society of the Study of Science and Theology (ESSSAT). Also available online at: <https://edinburgh.academia.edu/MarkHarris>.

without the loss of meaning in either place. It is important to note that the meaning is not immediately present after a disvalue has occurred. Indeed, if what I have said about God creating new meaning in far distant events is true, some disvalues will be utterly gratuitous and unredeemed for a long time after they happen, since the conditions for their redemption have not yet been made. Once again, the temporal nature of God's experience of time is a necessary component for this image. God creates the redemption out of the past and present, rather than a Moltmannian-type model where the already-existing eschatological future breaks into the present.

Why Not Create Heaven First?

All this talk of redemption necessarily raises the question of why God did not simply create the new world first? If there is no suffering there, yet it still retains embodiment and relationships, God would seem at fault for not creating that world first. Wesley J. Wildman, in particular, claims that to articulate a "coherent eschatology would only be theological disaster" since "God would be flagrantly morally inconsistent" in creating this world when that idealised world was possible all along.⁷⁷ Southgate meets this challenge by claiming that just as he argues that the evolutionary process is the "only way" to "give rise to creaturely selves" in this world, it is perhaps also the only way to create selves which could populate heaven. He writes: "Our guess must be that though heaven can eternally preserve those selves, subsisting in suffering-free relationship, it could not give rise to them in the first place."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Wesley J. Wildman, "Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty, Disconcerting Truth: Ultimate Reality and Suffering in Nature," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger S.J. (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 292.

⁷⁸ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 90.

If, by “creaturely selves,” Southgate means “physically embodied creaturely selves,” I would agree with him. However, Christianity has had a long tradition of affirming the existence of non-embodied creaturely selves, angels and demons, who populated heaven before there were embodied creatures. Therefore, we cannot say that the evolutionary process is the only way to give rise to creaturely selves, unless we add the caveat “physically embodied” to the creaturely selves under discussion.

In addition, I would add to Southgate’s response that there are certain values that are present in this world that no one ever imagines will be part of the new world. Southgate, who creatively explores possibilities of the new life, speculates that there may still be hunting and predator/prey relations, though stripped of their pain, terror, and destruction.⁷⁹ Yet he does not include, nor does anyone else include, reproduction as a possible activity of the new creation. If God simply populated the new creation with fully-formed selves, the chance to participate with God in forming new life by giving birth would be removed.

We also often assume that efficiency and the perfection of the final outcome are the primary considerations in God’s work. Yet, approached from the motivations of love, it is often the participation of the other that makes the work worthwhile. No one who has created an art project or done baking with a young child would say that their work was more efficient or more perfect because of the partnership. Yet many would say that the sloppy lines in the painting and the lopsided cupcakes that emerged were more worthwhile than the perfect efficiency that they might have achieved on their own. In the same way, my guess would be that while there may have been another less painful

⁷⁹ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 87-90.

way to produce embodied creaturely selves, there was no way apart from evolution to produce them in partnership with the creatures themselves.

What other values would be lost, or never be expressed, in the new creation? It is hard to know, but values like courageous self-sacrifice are hard to imagine there. Like the sentinel vervet monkeys described above, or mother birds, many creatures voluntarily place themselves in harm's way in order to protect others. It is precisely because they do this in the face of fear and danger that the action has value. While the new creation may in fact involve one unending act of self-giving on the part of its creatures, they will not surrender with the fear of consequent pain.

I do not mean to say that the expression of values like self-sacrificial courage fully justify the suffering world God has created. If they did, we would have no use for a future world without their existence. These values are temporary values (that is, they won't necessarily be exercised in a world without fear and suffering), but perhaps they add one more small reason why God did not simply create the ideal new creation first. If God is creating a great mosaic, these temporary values may add some colours, textures, and shades that will deepen and enrich that future existence.

The Place of the Christ Event

What place does the Christ event have in the development of our image?

Robert Russell, reflecting on the importance of Christ's resurrection for non-human theodicy, writes:

Hence I propose that the only possibility for an adequate response to natural theodicy is to relocate the problem of sin and evil beyond a theology of creation into a theology of redemption—the kenotic suffering of God with the world together with the eschatological transformation of

the universe in the new creation beginning proleptically with God's new act at Easter in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.⁸⁰

Russell points out that the suffering of Jesus on the cross and the event of the resurrection are turning points in our understanding of evil and of eschatology.

Vernon White, in *Atonement and Incarnation*, struggles with the seeming impossibility of understanding the traditional belief of atonement: that a particular historical event affected the whole of universal history.⁸¹ Trends in theology, he argues, move towards either a total historical particularisation of Christ's work on the cross, such as in the moral exemplar theory where it provides little more than one revelation of a good example of a human life, or toward an individualisation where salvation is only effected for individual souls.⁸² Instead, Vernon White argues for an atonement model that embraces both the necessity of the particularity of Christ's work on the cross as well as its universal significance. He writes:

God in Christ takes into his own divine experience that which qualifies him to reconcile, redeem, and sanctify in his relationship with all people everywhere. To adapt one of Fiddes' pictures: it is something like a mountain guide who first crosses a difficult terrain himself, in order to equip himself to take across all who will follow him.⁸³

White acknowledges, along with Paul Fiddes,⁸⁴ that for the atonement to be a historical event with universal significance, the cross and resurrection must allow for some sort of change in God: God is able to do something which God was unable to do before.⁸⁵ In White's argument, it is that now Christ can lead

⁸⁰ Robert John Russell, "Natural Theodicy in Evolutionary Context: The Need for an Eschatology of New Creation," in *Theodicy and Eschatology*, eds. Bruce Barber & David Neville (Hindmarsh, Australia: ATF, 2005):121-152, 152.

⁸¹ Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁸² White, *Atonement and Incarnation*, 2-3.

⁸³ White, *Atonement and Incarnation*, 53.

⁸⁴ Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1989), 110.

⁸⁵ White, *Atonement and Incarnation*, 53.

people through the path of salvation, as an explorer can become a guide once he has crossed the unknown terrain himself.

Can the fractal mosaic image of redemption I proposed earlier fit this same set of criteria, affirming both the necessity of the historical Christ event and its universal consequences of salvation? I believe it can. In the mosaic image, we must imagine the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as the central pixel, the mosaic's organising point at the lowest level of personal narrative. It is the event around which all other events are arranged, like a cornerstone or foundation stone from which the greater image is built.⁸⁶ The Christ event also acts as the algorithm that arranges and aligns the pixels with one another: the same upside-down Kingdom power and logic that brought Jesus to the cross and leads him out the other side of death is the power and logic that places each creature in redemptive relation to all others.

The Christ event is both the starting point and the organising principle of the photo mosaic. To borrow the language of Colossians 1:20, "through [Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things." In Christ, and because of Christ, all other events coordinate to create the upper-levels of redemptive imagery. The Christ event is not only revelation in the sense of showing that evil can be defeated by enduring in sacrificial love beyond it; it is also the revelation that shows us in microcosm the type of redemption that God will ultimately effect in macrocosm. Christ is the "firstborn" from the dead, the cornerstone of the new creation.

There results, with this mosaic image, almost a pun on both the Hebrew and Greek conceptions of sin as something that has "missed the mark." In the

⁸⁶ The cornerstone, or foundation stone, was the first stone laid down in ancient stone architecture. Every other stone would, therefore, be set in reference to this first stone. Every other stone derived its place in the building because of the positioning of the cornerstone, and the entire structure was positioned in reference to this first stone.

redemption picture I offer, the re-alignment of personal narratives around the narrative of Christ represents a true reconciliation of sin, since the narratives of fallen humans are now aligned in right relationship to Christ, other people, and all of creation. The broken relationships caused by sin are now healed and rebuilt. In the uppermost level of the new creation, all of creation will be transformed. For the non-human world, transformation will involve a rearrangement of narratives into a larger redemptive image. This is “justification.” For humans, transformation will involve both justification and sanctification. To push the analogy, human pixels alone will need, in addition to reordering, the restoration of their true colour and essence—like a digital remastering.

It is in the stage of sanctification that the other human atonement theories—propitiation, vicarious substitution, ransom, etc.—can be invoked. I am perhaps pushing the boundaries of imagery, but I find that this picture of alignment illustrates how Christ had to come for the whole cosmos since every narrative pattern requires a central focus and pattern around which to form. We do not, therefore, have to follow David Clough in his assumption that because Christ came to reconcile the entire cosmos, that the non-human world is somehow subject to sin.⁸⁷ We can give an account of non-human eschatological justification that does not require redemption from sin, although it may indeed involve redemption from the secondary and tertiary effects of human sin.

Moreover, the idea of Christ’s narrative forming the central pixel ensures that we hold to the importance of the particularity of Christ’s historical life. Since the lower level mosaics are formed of earthly events, we need something like

⁸⁷ David Clough, *On Animals*, Vol.1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012), 125.

the Incarnation in order for God to be able to have a foundation in history from which to start building. Without the Incarnation, without God's true presence in history, God could not be part of the mosaic. God could only be the organising architect, rather than a participant. Without the Incarnation, the whole narrative structure of history would lose its central organising feature, its cornerstone and foundation stone.

Gregory of Nazianzus famously claimed that "only what is assumed by the Word in the Incarnation can be redeemed."⁸⁸ Niels Gregersen's concept of "deep incarnation" has brought to light that, in Elizabeth Johnson's words, there was a "radical divine reach through human flesh all the way down into the very tissue of biological existence with its growth and decay."⁸⁹ Building upon this concept, Johnson suggests that the idea of "deep resurrection" similarly affiliates all of creation with Christ's resurrection. Christ is the firstborn from amongst the dead, and all of creation will form part of that final resurrection.

Johnson writes:

The reasoning runs like this. This person, Jesus of Nazareth, was composed of star stuff and earth stuff; his life formed a genuine part of the historical and biological community of Earth; his body existed in a network of relationships drawing from and extending to the whole physical universe. If in death this 'piece of this world, real to the core,' as Rahner phrases it, surrendered his life in love and is now forever with God in glory, then this signals embryonically the final beginning of redemptive glorification not just for other human beings but for all flesh, all material beings, every creature that passes through death. The evolving world of life, all of matter in its endless permutations, will not be left behind but will likewise be transfigured by the resurrection of the Creator Spirit.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 48.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 196. Gregersen coined the phrase in Niels H. Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *dialog* 40:3 (Fall 2001): 192-207.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 209.

The act of the Incarnation makes God part of the material mosaic. The algorithm informing the organisation of the mosaic, however, was not created in the Christ event, but existed before in the attitude God held toward creation. Thus the universal scope of the Christ event (the organising algorithm) finds its first expression and historical anchor in the particularity of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The picture of Christ as the central position of creation's mosaic and the "organising algorithm" of redemption is reminiscent—a small echo—of the great scene in Revelation 5. John stands in the midst of the throne-room of heaven, looking for the one who is worthy to open the scroll and bring history to its final conclusion. No one in all of creation is found worthy. John weeps amidst the praise of heaven until he is told by one of the elders, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."⁹¹ John turns to behold this great Lion, and sees instead "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered...He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne."⁹²

John imagines that at the centre of heaven stands the Lamb, who had been slaughtered, holding the scroll with the instructions for the final judgment of history. I imagine the central pixel of creation's mosaic as the crucified and risen Christ, and he is the algorithm of reconciliation. Both images emphasise the centrality of the Christ event in the whole scheme of world history. Both images recognise that the suffering taken into the heart of God at the cross is the central organising principle for the outworking of eschatological fulfilment. The creatures who once suffered are drawn into the work of the cross, and aligned with all other creatures into a dynamic mosaic of praise. All hurts are

⁹¹ Revelation 5:5, NRSV.

⁹² Revelation 5:6-7, NRSV.

healed, all relationships mended, and all creatures—whether by direct expression, or by simply being what they are⁹³—live out the praise of God.

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,

‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!’

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,

‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!’⁹⁴

Conclusion

Redemption as the transformation of evil, harm, and disvalue into the love, harmony, and diversity of the kingdom of God remains one of the most important elements of an evolutionary theodicy. I began this chapter with an exploration of four different models of redemption: immanent, ecological, objective, and classical. I then introduced how a fractal mosaic image could help us picture the interrelations between the first two redemption models and the classical model. Each individual narrative holds meaning in itself (immanent), but also contributes to a greater picture in world history (ecological). Both of these together constitute the building blocks of God’s eschatological redemption in Christ (classical). The glory of the overall narrative is returned upon the good of the individual through the care and attention of God. Finally, I explored the place of the Christ event in the picture of redemption, showing how Jesus’ narrative constitutes the central organising

⁹³ See the possibilities of creaturely praise in Mark Harris, “The Floods Clap Their Hands.”

⁹⁴ Revelation 5:11-13, NRSV.

focal point for the whole structure of redemption. In so far as the world is redeemed, it is redeemed in, through, and around Christ.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions

“In the ominous light of suffering, all theology is a kind of agonized writhing”
- Wesley J. Wildman¹

The process of evolution has both created the potential for and caused vast amounts of suffering, pain, and untimely deaths for countless non-human sentient beings. The traditional Christian solutions for suffering cannot be applied in these cases: these creatures could not be benefited morally by this suffering, nor can we blame their suffering on the corruption of the natural order by humanity, Satan, or any other kind of primordial defect or evil. Yet we wish to affirm with the Christian tradition that the world is the creation of a good, loving, and powerful God. Furthermore, the evidence from the natural sciences insists that it is particularly these harms—the suffering and death of individuals—that drives the development of skill, complexity, and new forms of life.

Previous attempts to solve this problem were explored in chapter 2. Philosophical approaches are usually developed along the lines of either a developmental or property-consequence Good-Harm Analysis (GHA). These arguments are most effective at the level of ecological systems or species as a whole: they show that the possibility of suffering of the individual often contributes to or makes possible the whole scheme of life. Package deals, logical constraints, and “only way” type arguments provided the first major plank in my compound evolutionary theodicy:

- 1) God was limited by the logical constraints imposed by creating a physical world. There was no way to create a physical world and advanced sentient beings inhabiting that creation without the possibility of suffering.

¹ Wesley J. Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty, Disconcerting Truth: Ultimate Reality and Suffering in Nature,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 267-294, 267.

The rest of the project did not stem from trying to provide a GHA in direct relation to creaturely suffering. Instead, it asked “What kind of world does a God of love create, and how does God act in that world on behalf of those who suffer?” It is, in a sense, a property-consequence argument derived from the nature of God’s love.

The philosophical exploration of the nature of love found that the most satisfying account of love came from Eleonore Stump’s appropriation of the Thomist definition: that love is the outcome of the desire for the good of the beloved and the desire for union with the beloved. Incorporating the historical aspect of Kolodny’s argument produced the results that love was individually suited to the capabilities of the beloved, unable to be substituted for another, faithful in light of change, and vulnerable to the actions of the beloved. In addition, the actions of love would be patient, freedom-giving, and devoted to the good of the other.

In fact, the freedom-giving aspect would be so important that it would involve a non-deterministic world and significant creaturely freedom. For God to be able to bestow this sort of freedom would involve the voluntary kenosis of certain divine qualities, such as omnipotence, simple eternity, omniscience, and causal status. The giving up of these attributes would provide freedom for the creation to explore its own “selving” process, but would also allow the occurrence of gratuitous harms and disvalues. This creates the second plank of my theodicy:

2) While there is no opposing force acting against God’s purposes in creation, the nature of God’s love involves kenotic self-limitation and granting possibility for creaturely autonomy, resulting in a creation that does not always reflect God’s own loving character. The paths of evolutionary

development were open to creaturely innovation which, as in the case of parasitism, may capitalise on disvalues.

The freedom of creation to explore its own paths of development, its own means of survival, opens the possibility of experiencing gratuitous suffering. This world is not the “best of all possible worlds” in a philosophical sense, where everything is carefully balanced, and only those ills occur which are calculated to lead directly to greater goods, or to directly prevent greater harms. Rather, it is a world created by the gift of love. W. H. Vanstone describes love’s work this way:

Love may be ‘frustrated’: its most earnest aspirations may ‘come to nothing’: the greatness of what is offered in love may be wholly disproportionate to the smallness of that, if anything, which is received. Herein lies the poignancy of love, and its potential tragedy. The activity of love contains no assurance or certainty of completion: much may be expended and little achieved. The progress of love must always be by tentative and precarious steps: and each step that is taken, whether it ‘succeeds’ or ‘fails’, becomes the basis for the next, and equally precarious, step which must follow.²

In creating a world out of love, God made a world with its own creative potential, a world where love and altruism would be an eventual, desired result of the chaotic and tumultuous process of evolution. That the world did not initially develop by cooperation and love is not a sign that things went wrong in God’s plan, but simply shows that love was not something that could be fashioned *de novo*. It had to emerge out of the refining and transforming of passions, themselves developed through the competition and strife of evolution.³

Violence and competition in the non-human realm are not evil, just as earthquakes and tsunamis are not evil, though both result in sometimes gratuitous suffering for creatures. The possibility of gratuitous evil is closely tied

² W. H. Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 46.

³ See discussion of Elphinstone in chapter 4, p. 209-211.

to the concept of temporal experience for God. If God did not have a temporal reference, either nothing could be understood as gratuitous (for God would already know how it would be resolved), or gratuitous evil would stand eternally unresolved. God's voluntary revoking of the vantage point of simple eternity allows the third plank of my theodicy:

3) The work of God does not leave suffering unaccompanied or unredeemed, but continues to make gratuitous suffering not gratuitous after all.

How does God accompany and redeem suffering? Why does God not simply eliminate all evil, or constrain life towards only desired ends? The fourth plank of my theodicy explains:

4) The nature of God's love means there are only limited ways in which the unlimited divine power can be exercised, which prevents God's unilateral annihilation of evil and disvalue.

God cannot simply eliminate evil or the possibility of disvalue. It does not mean, however, that God is unable to *respond* to disvalues and suffering. In the fifth chapter I explored how God can act, in light of God's love, in the world. I argued for four main avenues of special divine action: the gift of being, co-presence, divine lure, and participation. Of these four, the last three are the most important in relation to the suffering of creatures. Co-presence is the compassionate attention given to each creature, so that no creature suffers or dies alone. The divine lure draws creatures towards the good, and towards God. It is the invitation to self-transcendence that draws creatures toward evolutionary innovation, and in humans, towards love and self-sacrifice. The divine lure is the force that persuades creation into redemptive forms, creating value out of disvalue, and good out of suffering. Finally, participation as embodiment allows God to fully experience the suffering of creation as a

creature, and to interact with creation directly. Sometimes this may involve alleviating suffering, as it did in the Incarnation. God's participation is not only physical, though, as it is also present in shaping the meaning of events.

I have proposed that the final, ontological meaning of events is not determined at the time they take place. Instead, meaning can change in light of new events. God's special divine action in the world, particularly in the realms of divine lure and embodied participation, allows God to change the meaning of what was once gratuitous suffering. Thus, the fifth plank of my theodicy:

5) The meaning, and therefore the value, of a life is only determined eschatologically. What value we ascribe to a life is an intrinsic part of the venture of theodicy, since great suffering *with* great value is usually considered reasonable for God to allow. Therefore, God works to redeem every life in such a way that its life is considered worthwhile even in light of the suffering the creature has undergone.

The "butterfly effect" is one of the classic examples used to show how a very small event can be transformed through chaotic systems into titanic effects. A butterfly flaps its wings, thus determining a hurricane's path on the other side of the world. Similarly, every creature has, I propose, numberless effects on the course of earth history. God uses these effects to promote redemption, both in this life and the life beyond, leading to my last theodical plank:

6) Redemption for creatures, in the ongoing outworking of history and in new life after death, is a key component of what makes suffering comprehensible. Various models of redemption can be held together in the image of redemption as a fractal mosaic, composed of nested layers of redemptive meaning.

Redemption for non-human creatures is multi-faceted. It involves the redemption of meaning when there has been little observable value. It involves contribution to the ongoing evolutionary development of life. It involves personal transformation and fulfilment in the new creation. I have suggested that this redemption is completely universal because of the particularity of divine love. I have also suggested that the redemption of meaning that is offered to all creatures will be visited back upon the individual in such a way that they benefit from it. Such a reality may involve an increase in non-human capacities so that they can receive such a gift, or it may simply exist on a pre-conscious level in the form of experienced peace, joy, and love.

There seems to be a problem, though, with contending that the evolutionary process is both part of God's very good creation, unfallen and uncorrupted by sin, and still affirming that it needs to be redeemed.⁴ Though violence and competition in the natural world are not evil, I affirm with the biblical tradition, that in the new creation violence will either not exist or will be so transformed that it will hold none of the disvalues it holds here.⁵ I suggest that there is a helpful parallel in the now-and-*not*-then between violence in the non-human realm and our current physical embodiment. Christian orthodoxy has long affirmed that our physical embodiment is good, not evil. It is good that we have (or, perhaps better, *are*) bodies. Apart from a few theological outliers, such as Origen, it is usually assumed that our embodied physical state is part of God's good intention. Yet, it has also affirmed that in the new creation, our bodies will be changed dramatically, and that the transformation will also be

⁴ Readers will recall that the redemption of creation was David Clough's reason for believing that something like sin could be extended to the non-human animal world. See chapter 2, p. 70.

⁵ Christopher Southgate affirms this too, speculating that there may be hunting in heaven (for what would a lion be without its instinct to hunt?) but that it will be stripped of all its terror and suffering for the prey. Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 88-90.

good.⁶ Affirming the present state of affairs as God's good creation does not mean that it is perfect, or that it is the desired end. Nor is affirming the future state as good a quiet admission that God couldn't quite get things right the first time around.

Evolution is God's process for creating, and it is full of suffering, extinction, untimely death, and disvalue. In addressing the theological problems associated with the above problem, I have tried to show that there are multiple helpful approaches, both in terms of setting up the problem and in solving it. I have argued for a compound theodicy, which holds several lines of argument at once, and even within that, I have argued that various models of divine action and redemption can be held at once without self-contradiction. I have tried to do all this in the form of what Thomas Tracy calls a "thick defense" which "attempts to weave a narrative that explains how suffering is consistent with beliefs held about God."⁷ I have woven a narrative of a God of love who creates, sustains, suffers with, and redeems a most beloved creation.

The major contributions of this work include the exegetical work in Genesis 1-9 as applied to the question of the fallenness of the non-human world, the development and application of a Thomist definition of God's love for the non-human living world, a multi-faceted approach to divine action in response to the suffering of creatures, a fractal mosaic picture of redemption, and the particular combination of my compound theodicy.

Christopher Southgate has written that all theodicies "arise out of protest and end in mystery."⁸ The journey we have taken in this work began on a dark

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 is a particularly strong articulation of this theme.

⁷ Thomas F. Tracy, "The Lawfulness of Nature and the Problem of Evil," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Robert Russell, and William Stoeger (Vatican/Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory/CTNS, 2007), 152.

⁸ Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, 132.

night in the Rocky Mountains, troubled by the cries of a suffering fellow creature. We then waded through the marshlands of philosophical and theological positions, saw the biblical panorama of an unfallen world, climbed the lofty peaks of love, and crossed the open plains of creaturely freedom. We hiked through the mixed forests of divine action and enjoyed the other-worldly beauty of redemptive landscapes. And now, finally, we find ourselves on the shores of the ocean of mystery, still with questions, but questions reframed if not resolved. I trust that the reader will not be disappointed with such a final destination (some, after all, seek only Mt. Resolution or the Glaciers of Certainty). Though we have not come to a place of complete satisfaction in regard to a suffering world, I hope—at least—that our journey will have been considered worthwhile.

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