

Problems of Evil

A certain Peanuts cartoon shows Lucy bent over and saying to Linus “Look at this tiny little bug. It’s appalling how little he knows... He’s not like us ... He doesn’t know anything about voting, or disease, or earthquakes, or love, or Monday Mornings.” To which Linus responds, “Who’s better off?”

Soon after World War 2, Albert Camus crafted a specter of suffering and evil in *The Plague*¹ in which the land is darkened seemingly without cause. While the night watchman took it as fate, seeing the rats scurrying as from a sinking ship, a metaphor for modern man, Dr. Rieux puts no stock in such fatalism. Jesuit Father Paneloux, espousing a just world, called the town to self-examination before the imagery of God’s judgment striking down townspeople with a plague of Exodus proportions. While the magistrate was swept up into the absolute nature of the issues, Dr. Rieux could not see how innocent children could have earned a sentence of death. In his attempts to heal, the doctor found himself fighting what the priest called the will of God. For the priest the belief was complete or nothing, one either joins Christ in love of God through this suffering or he is damned in isolation of this imprisonment of quarantine to hell. The doctor mirrors Camus’ view that suffering occurs in this life therefore we should try to revolt against it by trying to do good. Dr. Rieux’s attempt to remedy the problem put him outside the priest’s parameters of salvation and thus, fighting God. Yet when the priest died the doctor continued to live. Many lost themselves

¹ Albert Camus, *The Plague*. translated by Stuart Gilbert, (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1972).

in the collective destiny of sleepwalking through the plague, but for a few there were moments of revolt as when Grand wept in fantasies, nose pressed to the toy shop window. From the human side, Camus views suffering as futile and horrible. The only noble response is to try to do good in its midst.

Unfortunately, often the opponents in such theodicy discussions talk past each other by not even defining basic concepts of good and evil in the same way. If the definitions are not the same then the responses will not be addressing the other's felt problem. So we need to begin by giving four basic definitions so that we may actually identify which of the problems of evil are being addressed.

1) For some, especially those who approach this through Platonism, good can be metaphysically defined as *being*, and evil then is *metaphysical privation in being*. For example, my new car is made of good solid metal while my older car lacks metal as it is rusting through in several places. In these instances rust is not a thing but rather the lack of good metal; likewise evil is not a thing—it is the lack of good. 2) Good emerges from the realm of morality as *God's will or virtue*. This makes evil to be *vice or violation of God's will*. Under this category truthful statements are good and especially when they underscore a character trait of truthfulness. 3) Another definition often used by existentialists is that good is existential benefit or pleasure. To balance this evil would be defined existentially as detriment or pain. 4) A final definition of good would be one of teleology whereby that which is designed or purposeful is the good. In contrast, evil would be that which is purposeless or excess, such as in excess pain.

Terrence Tilley extends Boethius by claiming that doing theodicy is itself an evil.² However, this is not what Boethius writes about when in *The Consolation of Philosophy* he is contemplating his impending execution. The problem as he says is like offering sweet medicine of comfort by providing reasons for suffering without dealing with the disease or situation underlying the

² Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1991), pp. 141-58.

suffering.³ This does not seem to be a reaction against theodicy but rather a positive underscoring of the need to call down unrighteousness wherever it is found, especially when this evil is still moving forward and crushing people. It means evil cannot be merely handled as an impassioned academic treatise, but must also address suffering in passionate ways that try to heal real problems as well. There must be a call to orthopraxis. This means that any discussion about evil needs to be taken as a whole rather than isolating a response here or there to see if evil is not in fact called down throughout in different ways.

For Johannes Metz⁴ there is an irreducible horror of suffering to which an argument is inappropriate. For example, the holocaust is an assassination attempt on Israel and everything holy. In such a setting as this we cannot justify such behavior. Metz follows this with an appeal that there is a necessary need to mystically protest and plead with God in prayer after the pattern of Job, the Hebrew laments, and the prophets (refusing to be comforted). Certainly by sheer volume the individual laments encourage us to follow their pattern prayers in calling for divine aid in the midst of our suffering. So I write these explanations and arguments not just to try to make sense of God when there is evil experienced, but also to foster prayer, which is always appropriate, but especially in suffering.

However, several lament psalms (and certainly Job) bring the themes of God's sovereignty together with that of prayer which leaves Job with the need to simply submit to the sovereign's will. The answer given from the sovereign God to Job is essentially that I (God) am sovereign, there is no other like me and I can do this suffering to you because in my sovereignty I get to do that which I have done. This is a harsh answer but I think it captures the essence of what is being said in Job 38–41. As I developed in the chapter on sovereignty and free will,

³ Anicius Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983), Bk 1, prose paragraph 1.

⁴ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical Political Dimension of Christianity or Pasion de dios la existencia de ordenes religiosas hoy* (Barcelona: Herder, 1992).

God's determination of sin and evil does not make God Himself evil for occasionally God explains His rationale to be of good purposes which evidence that God is good. The supreme example of this kind of explanation is the prologue to the book of Job which identifies that Job's suffering takes place as a demonstration to Satan. Satan uses the retribution principle by accusing God that He buys off those who serve Him by blessing them. This view is shown to be wrong as demonstrated by Job's life. Job serves and worships God without requiring God to reward him (Job 1:9-12; 2:2-6). There is however no evidence that Job actually knew that His suffering happened for such a lofty purpose as this. The other side of the retribution principle is expressed through the counsel of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who articulate that God causes sinners to suffer and good to prosper. God outright declares that their view is wrong in Job 42:7. Job needs to pray for these counselors' recovery. However, in the midst of the counsel Job is incensed by what they say, softening their claims that some sufferers are sinners and some prosperous people are good. This means that in his insistence of his innocence he claims God to be unjust. However, he repents of these demands when confronted by the awesome sovereign God, departing from this view as wrong in Job 42:2-6. Elihu reminds Job that some suffering comes to turn back rebellion, claiming that Job is sinning in his claims for innocence. There may be some truth to this counsel but in Job's state of mind it further motivates him to demand his innocence. God's answer to this whole row is not really an answer at all. God instead hit Job with questions which left Job humbled with the sovereignty and omniscience of God when compared to his own smallness. God did not tell Job why he was suffering, Job must simply submit to Him. In contemplating the sovereignly caused suffering, we do not have enough knowledge to judge God and neither are we in the place to judge Him, so we must live with a certain tension of seemingly incongruous, unexplained things which (Rom. 9:14, 19-22). The active exclusion of Esau and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart are the work of the Potter over the clay and God as potter gets to do these

things without our judgment. In such situations as these submitting to the sovereign God and faithfulness to Him are the only options we have. The following arguments do not remove this need to submit to the sovereign God.

To complement this sovereign side, a range of theodicies try to make some sense of evil from the free will side. Since I argued for a compatible sovereignty and free will, both sides should be developed to give the full answer.

Early in his Christian writing career, Augustine writes a response to evil especially showing the deficiency of a dualistic Manichaeism when compared to a rather Platonic Christian view. That is, instead of viewing evil as a rival thing, evil is seen as a lack or a privation of a good thing.⁵ As previously stated, rust is not an actual thing metaphysically, it is the lack of good metal. Such a view does not make sense of all definitions of evil but when the subject of evil is approached metaphysically it is a helpful way to keep God as creator and His creation process pure of taint. An Augustinian theodicy can be briefly stated as follows:

1. God created everything good.
2. Evil is not a thing; it is a privation in a good thing.
3. All evil is either sin⁶ or the punishment of sin.⁷
4. Evil only harms that which is mutable in nature (i.e. creation and not God).⁸
5. The moral agent that committed the sin is responsible for its evil, therefore in such cases God is not to be faulted.⁹
6. The punishment of sinning moral agents is just and good¹⁰ for the world at large both in limiting evil committed and inclining any moral agents who are not punished to appreciate their good state perpetually. Furthermore,

⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 7.17-18; *Confessions* 5.20.

⁶ Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3.17.48; *City of God*, 12.7-8

⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 5.9; 19.15

⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, 12.3

⁹ Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3.17.48; *City of God*, 12.7-8

those who reject salvation are condemned to hell (reclaiming God's honor).¹¹ These damned are still party to the best world because it is better to live with one's own free choice to do evil than to be forced to do good against one's will.

This argument reflects Platonic metaphysical concerns in premise two. However, these may also be Christian and Biblical concerns as well since in the Genesis 1 creation account, the things created by God repeatedly are pronounced as good. That is, God does not create any evil thing and nothing is essentially evil. Therefore any evil that has encroached into the creation has unfortunately done so as an expression of rebellion from God's original design. So for Augustine beings remain essentially good but in rebellion they corrupt themselves and become morally evil. So in the Genesis 3 fall of humankind there emerges a corrupt twist to our moral nature. It is as if we are all Gollum, from Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*. In the fall we become a grotesque pathetic creature twisted by our passions as we whisper after our precious ring of sin. Every time we do the sin we twist ourselves further and also press deeply into our soul the desire to sin all that much more.

Augustine's answer to such rebellion is judgment. In fact, at rare instances he even seems to float the concept of evil on another level as existential experience so that when God judges a sinner or a nation of rebels, God's judgment is a kind of evil for these rebels as they experience His judgment. This mirrors the specific statement by Isaiah 45:7 that Yahweh brings upon the Babylonians the evil of divine judgment (*ra*'). When God does this kind of judgment, He does not somehow become evil Himself because His purposes of the judgment are good. Therefore, good and evil is seen somewhat aesthetically. If one is immersed in the darker hues of rebellion then judgment will crush these individuals but from a full view of the picture as a whole these darker hues have

¹⁰ Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3.24-26; *City of God*, 11.16-18; *Confessions* 7.13

divine purposefulness, thus ultimately being good. For so it was that Christ's death as an evil put to flight and disoriented Jesus disciples but it fits within the overarching purposes of God as a significant salvific good. Part of these broader aesthetic purposes include things such as limiting the sin committed and cultivating the free will response of the creature. Valuing the free will can be seen as inclining any moral agents who are not punished to appreciate their good state perpetually. Furthermore, those who reject salvation and are condemned to hell are still party to the best world because, as stated earlier, it is better to live with one's own free choice to do evil than to be forced to do good against one's will. Some may find such a justification of hell distasteful, but remember in this perspective it has purposefulness and thus is experienced by God as a good because it fits into His design. An additional aspect of this design is the reordering of God's honor in its proper place by judging appropriately those who have dishonored Him.

Alvin Plantinga draws this free will defense back to a more modest expression.¹² In running a modest free will defense, he admits more ambiguity, somewhat after the pattern of Job without trying to solve all sides of the theodicy problem; only solving just enough for believers to rest within our basic beliefs.

7. In order for God to create moral agents, God must have created them with the possibility of committing moral evil.
8. If finite moral agents have the possibility of doing moral evil, then probably some will commit moral evil.
9. Some moral agents commit moral evil.
10. Therefore, moral evil can be blamed on the moral agent and not God.
11. If natural evil is a result of moral evil (human sins, satanic or demonic activity) then natural evil can be blamed on the moral agent and not God.
12. Natural evil is probably the result of moral evil.

¹²Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3.26.

13. Therefore, natural evil is probably to be blamed on a moral agent and not God.

The move to affirm that natural evil is probably the result of moral evil is built on the baseline of the fall in which with the initial rebellion features of corruption, like weeds, come into the creation order. Perhaps also the book of Job, with the orchestrations of Satan tries to destroy Job's loyalty to God by having Job's children killed and his wealth taken. The reader sees that the sufferer, Job, does not cause his family's suffering but that quite a bit of his suffering is caused by an angelic being. Some of this suffering is natural, as with a wind. Quite a bit of this suffering is also an expression of abuse, as with the foreign powers robbing his fields of the livestock that happen to be there. The moral choices that we humans make that unfortunately end up abusing others are our doing and we are the blameworthy party for them; the fault should not be leveled at God's feet.

John Hick popularized a view, which as a minority report, he titled the Irenaean theodicy. This approach focuses on developing virtue in this life or the salvific process of "soul-making."¹³ For Hick, "the good that outshines all ill is not a paradise long since lost but a kingdom which is yet to come in its full glory and permanence."¹⁴ This model can be constructed as follows:¹⁵

¹² Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 12-49.

¹³ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (N. Y.: Harper and Row, 1966) chapter 13 'The Starting Point,' also developed in Hick's *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970).

¹⁴ John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 521.

¹⁵ If this kind of argument is run on a microscopic level it can set up a process theodicy, however there are major flaws in such process argumentation. A process theodicy would see each occasion as partially self-created and partially created by previous actual occasions. In the process model, God's power over each occasion, and in directing the stream of occasions as a whole is necessarily limited to offering the best possibility and the persuasion of a creative thrust. In this model, evil is an aesthetic measure of the extent to which God's will is thwarted (discord verses harmony, triviality verses intensity). Since a process God is finite in power, He is not to be faulted for evil in the world but instead He is to be credited whenever the evolutionary development of good occurs. However this sort of process model has some major flaws. First, a process God provides no guarantee that He will overcome evil. He is merely doing the best He can and that is better than anyone else can do. Secondly, a process God does not ultimately overcome evil because God's relationship with the created order is an everlasting relationship of making creation better, but never arriving at perfection. Furthermore, ultimate evil is the perishing of the occasions

14. Moral agent's goodness that has come about through the making of free and responsible moral choices in situations of real difficulty and temptation, is intrinsically more valuable than goodness created ready made, without the free participation of the human agent.

Perhaps this premise has implied assumptions like the following. A world with higher moral virtues is a morally better world. A world where humans are permitted to sin as a precondition to a better world is better than one where they are not.¹⁶ For example, certain virtues such as courage, fortitude, mercy, and forgiveness are attainable only in a world where sin occurs. Additionally many virtues, such as love and kindness, are heightened by the presence of evil. Furthermore, the appreciation of something is enhanced by the threat of its loss. Likewise, trust is also heightened with a complex world in which we cannot easily figure it out but we remember that the word from God is a clear beacon within these stormy seas. For these kinds of conditional virtues, it is impossible to create or coerce directly on optionally free beings because such action would abuse their freedom. It is then best to persuade conditional virtues by good, allowing for growth in virtues, which provides one with increased knowledge, experience and commitment in these virtues. These virtues and appreciations increase with the increase in overcoming of different and diverse evil. There is no place within Christianity for finally *wasted* suffering and goodness.¹⁷

and that is never overcome. Thirdly, a process God is inherently evil, as well as good because the consequent nature of god contains all the record of past occasions (as the actuality of god), then all the evil that has ever occurred characterizes the actuality of God, such that God is limited with regard to his actual goodness. Additionally since all possibilities are within the primordial nature thus God's primordial nature would contain infinite evil possibilities amid the infinite good possibilities. Finally, there is no metaphysical everlasting life in a process God, only being remembered by God in His' consequent nature.

¹⁶ These points are developed at some length by Norman Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 354-77.

¹⁷ Hick attributes this thought to D. D. Raphael, *The Paradox of Tragedy*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960), pp. 43-44.

15. In order for moral agents to have genuine freedom they must be created at an epistemic distance from God.
16. Therefore, God created the universe such that real difficulties and temptations exist to foster the moral agent's development.
17. Finally, with such a great amount of evil in the world designed to foster good, a supremely great ultimate good state (i.e. blessed everlasting life) is necessary to compensate for all that has happened on the way to it.
18. Such an ultimately good state will occur.
19. Therefore, God remains good as he involves potential and actual evil in his plan, all to produce the greatest good.

This soul-making argument helps to complement the creation-focused free will arguments, for here there is a focus on the way to the everlasting goal. This argument helps to make sense of the struggle of this life as meaningful in accomplishing that glorifying goal. Any Christian salvation and life strategy that does not retain this growing-in-Christian-virtues emphasis opens itself up to a vulnerable aimless ramble in this life. However, most Christian salvation strategies include a glorification of the saved after death in which the virtues that individuals lacked in this life would be made up in glory as they are transfixed by the glory of God. Does God violate an individual's free will by creating in glory the faith for wavering believers, that they lacked in this life? Is there a problem in this theodicy with being able to finally be at the blessed goal without further development of virtues or must the quest for virtues extend through the afterlife as well? Does God violate the elect angels' free will by creating in them a will or an inclination so that they will not choose to go awry? Are these elect angels hindered in their development of virtues by not being able to violate these virtues or do they learn of these things by proxy (watching us grow)? Could the world be better if God created us all so that we would not sin and would be excellent in virtue (as we will in fact be in the bliss of glorification)? Could we somehow

have a condition similar to the elect angels whereby we would learn by proxy (from someone else's struggle) or perhaps in a simulated condition that would not actually mar us along the way?

These providential, free will and soul-making theodicies do not have to be mutually exclusive, for Thomas Aquinas combines them for a full orb ed approach to evil. Like Augustine, evil is not a thing, nor has an essence of its own, since it is a corruption in a good thing, which good thing is created by God.¹⁸ Every agent acts freely for good but sometimes the unintentional or deformed inadvertently brings about evil.¹⁹ God indirectly causes evil through defect in the instrumental cause (as a genetic deformity passed from parent to child) and the very action of causation brings about a defect (God destroys some things in the process of making others).²⁰ So as in Augustine, evil is seen as sin of a creature or punishment for that sin.²¹ Thomas cites Isaiah 45:5, 7 and Amos 3:6 in declaring that God causes evil of penalty but not of cause of sin. The present existence is not the perfect world²² but God is in the process of making the perfect world, which will exclude all evil.²³ Until God's design is achieved fully no court should be convened to judge God. When God's design is achieved God will be vindicated from any possible charge. God is perfect in goodness essentially and thus any expression of evil ultimately fits aesthetically within God's ultimate good plan.²⁴ God's perfect knowledge of evil is through the good, and thus God's knowledge consists only of good.²⁵ All created things are good through

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 48, A. 3; Q. 49, A. 3; *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.7 and 11.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 48, A. 1, Q. 83, A. 1; *Summa contra Gentiles*, ch.3, 7-9; *Disputed Questions Concerning Evil*, Q. 1, A. 1.

²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 49, A. 2.

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 19, A. 9; Q. 48, A. 5; Q. 49, A. 2; Bk I-II, Q. 79, A. 1-2; *Disputed Questions Concerning Evil*, Q. 1, A. 4.

²² Gottfried Leibniz, *Monadology: and Other Philosophical Essays*, (Translated by Paul and Anne Schrecker. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1965), pp. 53-55.

²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 2, A. 3 Reply 1 (following Augustine, *Enchiridion* 2); Bk. I, Q. 22, A. 2, Reply Obj. 2; and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ch 2-22.

²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 4, A. 1-3, and Q. 6, A. 1-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Bk. I, Q. 14, A. 10; Q. 15, A. 13; Q. 18, A. 4.

participating in and being supported by the goodness of God.²⁶ With everything by nature striving for good, the end of everything is a good.²⁷ Ultimately everything is directed toward the good end by the providence of God.²⁸ God does not permit evil to occur in His works unless He is powerful and good enough to produce good from this evil. Ultimately the end of all the creatures is to know God and to be like Him to the extent that their level of being will permit.²⁹ Thomas cites Revelation 22:13 in claiming that God as Omega is the last end of all.

While I largely follow this Thomistic hybrid theodicy with providential, free will and soul-making components, I wish to distance myself from the overly optimistic natural law feature which Aristotle has given to Aquinas. Instead of describing man as inclining toward good it is better to affirm that while man is essentially good (metaphysically) as a creation of God, man has corrupted himself horribly. A brief reminder of a few Biblical texts shows the depth of our sin problem. For example, Genesis 6:5 reminds us that “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” From the wisdom perspective of Ecclesiastes 9:3, “The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.” In the looming condition of the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah 17:9 bemoans that, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” In the same captivity context Isaiah confesses “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). These damning judgments are summed up in Paul’s catena of quotes applying the Psalms’ description of the wicked and violent man to all of us, “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside,

²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 5, A. 3-4; Q. 7, *Truth*, Q. 21, A. 4-5.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, ch. 16.

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Bk. I, Q. 22, P 2, Reply Obj. 2; an example is God permitting demons to assault men Q. 114, A 1.

together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom. 3:10-12). Such descriptions of total depravity make it clear that the fallen human condition excludes this Thomistic natural inclination toward good.

Norman Geisler reworks this Thomistic model with the appreciation of our sinful human condition. Geisler states that his theodicy is more explicitly the best way to the best world. As with Aquinas the eschatological goal is the arena in which we should evaluate this best world. It is in this bliss that God demonstrates Himself to be supremely good and gracious in providing His salvation for us.

20. It is morally better for God to create the morally best world possible (to do less than his best is evil for God).
21. This best way to the best world is the worst world, possibly containing the most evil possible that God can turn to the greatest good (God's character limits evil so none is excessive).
22. There seems to be pointless evil.
23. Therefore, there are reasons for God's allowing evil which we do not or maybe cannot know.
24. Since the greatest good is obtained in the eschatologically perfect world, this present world is the best way to the best world.

This hybrid strategy seems to be on target in handling the metaphysical, moral, and design aspects of good and evil. It also has the distinct advantage of culling together the strengths of the various arguments, whether they are providential, free will, or soul-making. It also does justice to the depth of human sin and grandeur of God. It also emphasizes the salvific strategy which is the Biblical emphasis in resolving the problem of evil. Sins are incorporated in God's plan as ultimately greater good. For example, the sin of selling off their brother Joseph in

²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, ch. 17-21, 25, 37, and in chapters 26-36 Thomas itemizes what this happiness is not.

Genesis 37:12-35 is orchestrated by God as a good; "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good" (Gen. 45:4-8; 50:19). However, more needs to be developed on the practical problem of pain and the existential condition of evil within which we live.

C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*³⁰ explores a practical slant on the problem of evil in which he emphasizes predictability to develop the lessons for soul-making.

25. If God was to have a world in which there would be genuine moral choices along with genuine punishment for disobedience the evil behavior is possible and there would be warning signs of sufficient intensity to cause us to alter behavior
26. God provided the world with appropriate levels of pain as warning signs to deter greater evil from occurring.
27. The good warning signs of pain can result in considerable evil under certain circumstances.
28. For intelligent planning to occur the world needs to be predictable so God could not have created a world where evil results would not occur (e.g. a solid hammer for driving nails does not become a sponge as it hits a person.
29. Therefore, God has created only good, but this good can be perverted into evil when we misuse it or something goes awry with the creation.

Unfortunately we live in a day in which horrendous evils ensue. Marilyn Adams defines "horrendous evils" as evil that a person participates in which calls into question that her life could be good. "Such reasonable doubt arises because it is so humanly difficult to conceive how such evils could be overcome."³¹ A

³⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (N. Y.: Macmillan, 1957).

³¹ Marilyn Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" in *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, edited by Marilyn and Robert Adams), p. 211.

prime example of such horrendous evils is what Fyodor Dostoevsky has Ivan Karamazov³² say:

By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow told me about the crimes committed by the Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, rape women and children, they nail their prisoners to the fences by the ears, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beast; a bear can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother's eyes. Doing it before the mother's eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion; they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it?

Such horrendous evils are not merely kept in literature but lived out by those ethnic groups that continue to experience ethnic cleansing, which still goes on in the twenty first century. Who learns from such situations? How many lives or limbs need to be lost until no one learns any more in such situation? It often does not look like people learn much from being in such atrocities. If we in the easy chairs reading about these horrendous evils are the ones who learn from them, then why do these atrocities keep repeating? We could all learn what there is to learn by proxy by metaphors rather than broken bones and smashed lives. Are

³² Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamozov* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952).

virtues developed in the wake of such contexts? Or are spirits and lives crushed, with vengeance kindled so that we only need wait until the situation has turned around and the blood feud will go the other way the next time? Are these atrocities sufficiently justified by the few who forgive and learn in the midst of the pain? Remember, with Geisler's theodicy we should expect hugely revolting horrendous evils in the midst of our world and our life. How can it all be turned to good?

We don't have to go to the big and dramatic to face the same problem; it surfaces on the personal level as well. As a seminary student finishing up my Masters degree and heading into my doctorate, my wife and I decided that we would like to have kids. When kids didn't come we prayer and consulted doctors. There were three problems; we fixed every one and kids still did not come. In our evangelical context we affirmed family, took vacations with families to help them enjoy the mountains and trails we had come to enjoy, but kids didn't come. The first couple of years we learned some lessons but then we began to feel dented and contorted. We did not like part of what we were becoming, feeling like damaged goods. We felt that God had turned His face from us. We endured some other sufferings as well during this time, some of them exquisitely painful. As the suffering continued this pounding rendered us into feeling that we were "grotesques."³³ We didn't want to be this way but we were becoming this way with a flinch every time a certain kind of situation arose. In the midst of this, our faithful dog McGreggor blew out his knees so that he could no longer get up, laying part of the day in his own feces because he could not take care of himself any longer. What did McGreggor or we learn from this? We got to a point where we didn't learn anything more from these situations, we just got further dented. As our life was tumbling down to what we felt was the dark side of God I cried out with psalm 42-43, which verses became a personal guide in prayer. "As the

³³ This is a metaphor from Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood* (N.Y.: Noonday Press, 1962) which speaks of oddly misshapen people like a "blind" evangelist who gets in his own way but God can still use him.

deer pants for water, so I pant for You, O God. I thirst for God, for the living God; when shall I appear before God's face? My tears have been my food day and night, while others say 'Where is your God?'" (Ps. 42:1-3). What is the answer to this pain? The psalmist doesn't really give an answer except a repeated refrain of commitment. "Why are you in despair O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I will again praise You, for the help for my presence is God's presence" (Ps. 42:5, 11; 43:5 conflated). The suffering did not deepen my allegiance to God but rather it revealed an already deep allegiance to Him. Years later as I look back many of the dents are deeply there, a few not as deep, but some deeper. I don't like that. God has been gracious: I have a great marriage, a good job, two wonderful kids. Even so, I have always been one who longs for kingdom and I long for kingdom now.

In such horrendous or personal experiences of evil Jürgen Moltmann takes consolation that the triune God suffers with us.³⁴ God as Father grieves as the Son dies and other children suffer. From this grief, the Father woos the earth toward His kingdom. In addition, the Son as God suffers personally on behalf of and with others as their redeemer leading them through suffering toward kingdom. By extension, the Spirit as God suffers with and within His children prompting them to resist suffering and to do good toward His kingdom (fostering such activism as liberation theology). Do we join Moltmann in these sentiments? Is God heartless or does He suffer? We all know that Jesus weeps and suffers to heal our wounds (Isa. 53:4; Jn. 11:35). Perhaps God's presentation of Himself as Husband and Father to His straying people shows his emotion as well (Isa. 54:8-10; 63:7-9). The Spirit prompts us to intimate prayers as we suffer with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17).

Elie Wiesel approaches the subject with the assumption that we are existentially free to make our life meaningful. As we have seen this is difficult to

³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), *The Crucified God* (Wilmore: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1992), *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1985).

do, for we can pull very few of life's strings. In each of his novels he tells an autobiographical composite of different facets of the problem of evil. In *Night*³⁵ he recounts of how he survived as a living dead victim of holocaust suffering and insists on being heard as a way of working out the pain for himself and calling the world to accountability so that it will never happen again. In *Dawn*,³⁶ evil is a real threat, with victims becoming self-reliant freedom fighters to selflessly raise up Israel, hating their enemies. In *Accident*³⁷ as memories of holocaust haunt, suicide is a meaningful existential choice and there is real shame to fail in a suicide attempt, missing the train to death. In *Twilight*³⁸ (25 years later), the older generation force the young to join the legacy of being a witness to remember the dead and proclaim their death so it has meaning; in this context suicide is treason.

I know a few things in this life. One of them is that my wife and God know my pain, care for me and will do what they can to remedy my pain. I believe that God will do the same for others as well. This God is supremely good. This God has no limits except Himself. This God will be victorious and bring in the kingdom. The hurts will be healed. And it boggles my mind how He can accomplish this that I believe of Him, because there are a staggering number of crushed and bruised people to be healed. I am one of them, and I long for the healing.

³⁵ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1982).

³⁶ Elie Wiesel, *Dawn* (N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1961).

³⁷ Elie Wiesel, *Accident* (N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1990).

³⁸ Elie Wiesel, *Twilight* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1988).