Critical and creative ways to teach Religion and Philosophy

Dialogue Australasia

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Evil and Suffering

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Contents

Cover Image:
Aleks Danko, *Songs of Australia Volume 16 – Shh, Go Back to Sleep (an un-Australian dob-in mix)* 2004
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Editorial Policy:

Dialogue Australasia Journal is a twice-yearly publication committed to fostering and promoting critical and creative approaches to teaching Religion and Philosophy in Australasia. It is intended that articles for the journal should:

- Be broadly representative of the 'Five Strands' and consistent with the aims and purposes of DAN
- Contain material that is academically rigorous, has contemporary relevance and can be *applied* in the classroom
- Be non-confessional and non-denominational
- Focus on secondary teachers with scope for primary focused articles
- Stimulate readers and equip them with practical teaching resources

From The Editor:

In this specially themed 34th Issue of *Dialogue Australasia* Journal (Chaired by Jeremy Hall) – dedicated to the problem of the nature of evil, suffering and pain, we read some of the most innovative and adventurous explorations of these themes yet. They leave behind them what the theologian Gustavo Gutierrez calls the 'exhausted mine' – there the only thing that changes, he notes, is that the interlocutors of Job become steadily more hostile and intolerant. All of our contributors come to the theme with a great deal of humility, knowing that these things can be only be deeply understood by those who have suffered themselves.

Perhaps it is more the meaninglessness of suffering not suffering itself, that is the curse which stretches over humanity, opined Nietzsche,[1] and I suspect this is what Simone Weil describes as 'affliction.' It exposes the sort of extreme suffering that compromises one's sense of humanity, leaves you gutted and questioning your very identity. Sarah Bachelard's scholarly treatment of the ancient, familiar and yet often misunderstood story of the suffering of Job, suggests that the locus of a more fruitful discussion lies *beyond ourselves* – that perhaps the 'why' question has kept us locked in to the smallness, self-obsession and drama of the ego for far too long.

Brendan Sweetman and Phillip Carey guide us through well-chartered theoretical terrain, but help us to see the issues arising through new eyes. Stephen Law, for example, takes us to an imaginary planet where we are invited to scan all of the familiar arguments as if we were tourists in a foreign land. He concludes with this provocation:

> Of course, theists consider belief in an all-evil God to be downright silly. And rightly so: there's clearly far too much good in the world. So why is it that they consistently fail to recognize that the sheer quantity of suffering in the world renders their belief in an all-good God also pretty silly? Surely, even if the universe does have a designer/creator, isn't it patently obvious that this being is neither all-evil, nor all-good?

Mary Litch and Nicky Hansell reveal through personal stories our deep fragility when a person or animal dies. Here Hansell offers a provocation of her own:

> Engulfing, hideous; evil remains so – but it withers if we survive our own deaths. It withers if we are returned to the state we enjoyed before we knew life; a state beyond any evil.

This is a theme taken up by Venerable Robina Courtin, who shares a fascinating interpretation of Buddhist teaching on 'evil,' making for an interesting counterpoint to Rabbi Sacks' re-take on the Moses story, which spotlights justice, and includes Albert Einstein thanking his lucky stars for the 'almost fanatical love of justice' of his Jewish tradition, which *contends* with evil rather than merely endures it.

We conclude with Kylie Bourne's chilling account of the bystander mentality, and the sobering, distilled conclusion that "without the spectators, mob violence would probably have stopped short of murder in many cases." And finally my own contribution – based on the moral responsive approach to ethics – takes us back into the classroom experience, and shows how complex theoretical issues can be translated through film: in this case with the unlikely combination of *The Dark Knight Trilogy* and *Dead Man Walking*. The moral responsive approach, first suggested to me by Sarah Bachelard's book *Resurrection and Moral Imagination* (2014), has revolutionised the way I teach Ethics, and has opened up a whole new landscape for my students and me to explore in a very practical and experiential way. I hope it will prove to be so for you.

Nikolai Blaskow, Editor

1 Cited by Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes in "Niezsche's Illusion", *Nietzsche On Art and Life,* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 104.

God and The Problem of Evil

Brendan Sweetman

All of us are exposed in different ways to the experience of evil in our daily lives; these experiences are difficult to live through, and sometimes it is almost impossible to find sense or meaning in them. The existence of evil in the world often greatly troubles religious believers, in particular. This is because evil is difficult to reconcile with a religious view of the world which holds that the universe and all life were created by an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing God. Priests and ministers often report that dealing with people whose lives have been touched by evil is one of the most difficult aspects of their ministries, and that for some people evil can become an obstacle to believing in God. Many atheists, of course, also appeal to the fact of evil to deny that God exists. For this reason, the existence of evil becomes a central issue when considering the question of whether God exists, and the general question of which is more reasonable to believe: the religious or atheistic view of the world.

Moral and Natural Evil, and the Evidential Problem

Philosophers usually distinguish between two different types of evil, both of which describe bad events or happenings, events or happenings which usually (but not always) involve human suffering. Natural evil refers to evil events that occur naturally in the world such as earthquakes, floods, famines, and disease. It is thought that these events should not occur in a perfect world, and obviously their occurrence can cause terrible suffering for human beings, e.g., the influenza pandemic of 1918 that killed upwards of 100 million worldwide, or the tsunami in Asia in 2005 that killed more than 200,000. Moral evil refers to the evil that occurs because of the actions of human beings, such as murder, robbery, torture, etc., including evil events on a large scale like many wars, the holocaust, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Theistic philosophers (i.e., philosophers who believe in God) need to be able to show how both kinds of evil can be compatible with an all-good, all-knowing and all-powerful God.

Some philosophers, like J. L. Mackie, argue that if God exists, then evil cannot exist, because the existence of evil is *logically* incompatible with the existence of God (sometimes called the logical problem of evil).[1] But since evil obviously does exist, then Mackie argues that God does not exist. Mackie thinks this is a good argument because God is supposed to be all-good, and so it seems to follow that whatever God makes must be all-good as well, and so the world should be perfect. But Mackie's claim seems to be too strong, because many theist's point out that surely could God exist, and have some reason for evil. The contradiction that Mackie is claiming is not very obvious to many, and just because we might not know the reason for evil does not mean that God has no reason. It is hard to see the *logical* incompatibility Mackie is defending.

Some philosophers, like J.L. Mackie, argue that if God exists, then evil cannot exist, because the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God.

In response, other atheistic philosophers have modified this argument to hold, not that the existence of evil makes it logically impossible that God should exist, but that it makes it *unlikely* or *improbable* that there is a God. This position is defended by William Rowe, with an argument that appeals to what is sometimes called "the evidential problem of evil." Rowe's argument is very straightforward. It is based on two premises that he holds are very reasonable to believe, even by the theist. The first is that an omnipotent (all-powerful) God *could* prevent evil without losing some greater good, or without permitting some evil equally bad or worse. The second is that an omnibenevolent (all-good) God *would* prevent evil unless he could not do so without losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. The first premise refers to God's all-powerful nature, and the second refers to God's all-good nature.

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Rowe's version of the argument is influential because of the insightful way he defends the first premise. He believes that the second premise is uncontroversial because even most religious believers will agree that God's nature is such that, if he could, he *would* want to prevent evil from occurring. Rowe turns to some powerful cases of evil to illustrate what he means by the first premise. He focuses on natural evil, which he believes creates a special problem for the religious view.

He concentrates on pain and suffering in the animal kingdom. He uses the well-known illustration of a fawn, who is trapped in a forest fire, and who suffers horribly for several days, before eventually dying. Could an omnipotent God have prevented

the suffering of the fawn? The answer seems to be yes. Could God have prevented the suffering of the fawn without losing some greater good, or without allowing some worse evil to happen? Yes, Rowe argues, because God could bring about the greater good, or prevent the worse evil from occurring, *without* needing the suffering of the fawn to occur. For example, suppose a man walking through the forest hears the fawn crying out, alerts the local people, and saves the town from burning down. This would be a case of a greater good coming out of evil, but Rowe argues that God could have saved the town in some other way that did not require the fawn's suffering. Similarly, God could have prevented the fawn's suffering without allowing some greater evil to happen instead, again because he has the power to do so. After all, God is omnipotent; but if he is omnipotent, why does he not prevent the evil? This argument, Rowe concludes, makes it rational to look at the case of the fawn suffering in the forest, and the many similar cases, and to come to the conclusion that there is very likely no God.

The Free Will Defence

How might the theist reply to various arguments for atheism based on the problem of evil, especially Rowe's? One of the best known replies is called the "free will defence." Proponents of this argument, including St. Augustine (354–430), and, more recently, Alvin Plantinga and Michael Peterson, argue that the highest gift that God can give to his creatures is free will. But the gift of free will comes with a price; human beings can do whatever they choose to do, including evil actions and rejecting God. Supporters of the free will defence hold that one of the things an omnipotent being *logically cannot* do, is create beings who are really free and yet who are always guaranteed to make the right moral choices; the only way God could guarantee this outcome is to manipulate our choices so

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that we always choose the right option from among the range of alternatives. But then we would be automata or puppets, not free beings.[2] So because God wanted a world in which genuinely free beings exist, he might well have created a world in which evil could exist as a result of free human actions. The argument is founded on the reasonable belief that in God's eyes (and in ours), a world in which human beings have no free will would not be as desirable as a world in which we have free will.

The free will defence seems to be a good response to the *logical* problem of evil, because it would show that the existence of an all-good God would be compatible with the existence of evil, once human freewill is factored into the argument. It would also be an effective response to the *evidential* problem of evil if the evil being discussed is as a result of free human actions, i.e., moral evil. If we are talking about moral evil, then the free will response shows that an all-powerful, all-good God might still create a world in which (moral) evil is possible. This is because creating human beings with free will is better than creating human beings without free will, and better than not creating human beings at all. Yet the free will defence does not seem to be quite as good a response to the existence of natural evil. Why do we have a world which has earthquakes, natural disasters, and disease in it? This is why Rowe and others focus more on natural evil than on moral evil in their arguments. What is the response of the theistic philosopher to the problem of natural evil?

John Hick and Theodicy

Theistic philosophers have proposed various explanations over the centuries to explain why God allows evil to occur, especially natural evil. These explanations are called theodicies. A theodicy is a theory that attempts to explain why God allows evil; it goes further than the free will defence which says only that God must have a reason for (moral) evil, but does not make any attempt to speculate about what this reason is. Some of the best-known theodicies have been offered historically by St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus (c.141-c.202), and more recently by C.S. Lewis, Richard Swinburne and John Hick. Let us consider some of these views.

We turn first to a brief overview of St. Augustine's argument.[3] Augustine wants to explain the existence of evil without making

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God *directly* responsible for it; otherwise, he thinks that we have not really addressed the question of why evil exists, and have not gotten God off the hook. He argued famously for the view that evil is best understood as a *privation*. A privation is a *flaw* or a *lack* or a *deficiency* in something that was originally good. Augustine held that everything was originally good because it came from God. In proposing this view, he therefore rejected the Manichaean view, popular in his own time, that evil exists as an independent reality, which somehow exists alongside the good in the world. Augustine held that evil does not have an independent existence of its own, but is a deficiency or a corruption that creeps into creation, which was originally perfect. In this way, Augustine argued that God only creates things that are good in themselves, but because the world ended up in a fallen state, some of these things that were originally good became open to corruption, decay, and death. And this is the basis of evil in our world.

Augustine's view also relies on the truth of the theological doctrines of the Fall of man from an original ideal state, and of original sin. The Fall of man occurred because of

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human free will turning away from God, which is also an instance of evil as privation, because it involves a deficiency creeping into human beings who were originally perfectly good. He argues that the notion of free will can become the basis for an explanation for all kinds of evil, both natural and moral. It explains moral evil because human beings are free and sometimes choose the bad, as we have noted. But it explains natural evil too, because Augustine argued that natural evil is the work of fallen angels who are free beings, such as the devil and other evil spirits. These are beings who have continued their rebellion against God even in the afterlife. (Alvin Plantinga has offered a contemporary version of this argument, and also links it to the free will defence.[4]) Augustine also believed that some natural evil is God's punishment for sin.

Augustine's views have generated much discussion in the contemporary literature among religious philosophers. Philosophers have grappled with the question as to whether human beings might have some freedom beyond death to still act in immoral ways, and in ways that could affect us here on earth. Most no longer think this is plausible, mainly because, leaving all theological considerations aside, there seems little independent philosophical evidence to support this claim, and many reject it as implausible in the twenty first century. Many also find the view that evil is punishment for sin far-fetched. This view has been a popular theory in the history of western theology, but it seems less credible today because there seems to be so many clear cases of people suffering which have nothing to do with sin. This is especially true of evil events that occur on a large scale, thus affecting a great range of people, such as the recent tsunami in Asia.

John Hick has proposed one of the most interesting and much discussed modern theodices. In *Evil and the God of Love,* Hick presents what is now called his "soul-making" theodicy, or Irenaean theodicy. He has been influenced by the writings of St. Irenaeus, and develops his view as an alternative to St. Augustine's, which he thinks is not very compatible with the modern mind. Hick accepts the free will defence as a way of explaining the existence of moral evil. But he offers a bold suggestion to explain why God allows natural evil. He suggests that God had three choices where contemplating creation: to create human beings with a perfect moral

nature and place them in a paradisiacal environment; to not create at all; or to create our world with all of its sufferings, hardships and challenges. God intentionally chose the latter alternative, Hick argues, because one of the main purposes of this vale of tears (or of soul-making) is to enable us to become morally and spiritually mature in order to prepare us for salvation. For that reason, the world is full of spiritual and moral challenges, and natural evil plays a key role in these challenges. "A world without problems, difficulties, perils, and hardships would be morally static," Hick argues, "For moral and spiritual growth comes through response to challenges; and in a paradise there would be no challenges."[5] Underlying Hick's approach is his fundamental claim that it is somehow more valuable for us to earn our moral development than to be just given it by God:

> A moral goodness which exists as the agent's initial given nature, without ever having been chosen by him in the face of temptations to the contrary, is intrinsically less valuable than a moral goodness which has been built up through the agent's own responsible choices through time in the face of alternative possibilities.[6]

In this way, the structure of our world helps us to move from a self-centered existence to a more God-centered existence. In the end, according to Hick, everyone is saved, because it is "Only if [salvation] includes the entire human race can it justify the sins and sufferings of the entire human race throughout all history."[7] However, Hick realizes that many people do not appear to be in a state of moral or spiritual health when leaving this present life, so he is forced to speculate that perhaps the soul-making process continues after death, and he even suggests that people may be reincarnated in future lives so that "soul-making" can continue, and be completed.

Despite the fact that Hick's view is bold and intriguing, it faces a number of serious criticisms. First, philosophically and theologically it is a very speculative view, which requires many controversial assumptions to make it work: that everyone is saved, that reincarnation is a real possibility, that God created evil intentionally (a conclusion St. Augustine and others were loathe to accept). Second, the scattershot nature of evil in the world does not seem to support Hick's view that evil is intentionally built into the world to aid in our moral development. There are far too many cases where some suffer little or no evil, while others suffer a great deal; there are also many cases where evil appears to be mainly destructive rather than constructive – it serves only to corrupt people, not reform or strengthen their moral characters. Third, Hick is proposing a radical new way of looking at evil, one which would be hard to put into practice. He is asking us to consider certain evils as goods – because they exist in order to bring about a greater good. On this view, one could argue that we should regard crime as a good because it provides all of those who are affected by the crime – both the victim and the perpetrator – an opportunity to build character, the former by making them stronger (through the challenge of dealing with the crime), and the latter by making them repent. In this way, many people affected by crime become closer to God in the soul-making process, develop their moral characters over time, and gradually mature into a state of grace, becoming ready for salvation. But this view of crime seems very counter-intuitive, to put it mildly!

While disagreeing with Hick's overall approach, Richard Swinburne agrees that God may have intentionally created natural evil.[8] Swinburne has argued that the major natural evils on earth contribute to goods in the sense that the goods could not be realised without the actual or possible occurrence of the evils.

His argument is a sophisticated version of the view that some evil is (logically) necessary for good to occur, an argument that was held by many western thinkers, including St. Thomas Aquinas. Swinburne argues that if we are to improve our knowledge of the evil that will result from our free actions, the laws of nature must operate with consistency and regularity; yet a consequence of this is that there will be evil and suffering in the world. This is why God does not miraculously intervene every time the naturally operating laws of the universe are about to cause human suffering.

While acknowledging that this approach is unfashionable today, Swinburne develops an intriguing argument that if God wants to create creatures sensitive to all that is good, God will allow them to have desires that are often, and sometimes permanently frustrated. This logically requires temporary evils along the way. A world without these evils, Swinburne argues, would not be as good as a world with them. He tries to defend both natural and moral evil in this way. Swinburne believes this line of reasoning shows that it is very plausible to hold that an all-good God could have a sufficient (i.e., justifiable) reason for allowing evil, and so Rowe's argument would be mistaken. He points out that one of our problems today is that we have a very narrow conception of good and evil, seeing the only goods as being sensory pleasures and the only evils as sensory pains. And we think that an all-good, all-powerful God should be able to ensure the pleasures without the pains. But Swinburne believes that this conception of good and evil is completely inadequate for human beings. Indeed, as the Greek philosophers (especially Plato and Aristotle) convincingly argued, this conception is not worthy of human beings, and fails to take into account our higher qualities and faculties. Some philosophers, including Eleonore Stump,[9] have developed this view to argue that the problem of evil looks very different today to our pampered generation than it did to people in past history who were much more accepting of evil than we are.

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In general, theistic philosophers argue that the existence of evil is not sufficient to make the existence of God unlikely, and, despite the fact that it involves very difficult personal experiences rather than just theoretical worries, evil does not generally make people turn to atheism. It must also be kept in mind that God's non-existence would still not explain *why* evil exists in the world. Even if there is no God, we would still have the fact of evil, and this would still require an explanation. It is within this context that the theist argues that the existence of God is the best overall explanatory hypothesis for the nature of the universe. Given the overall plausibility of natural theology (including the first cause, design and moral arguments), theism is the only worldview within which the fact of evil has any possibility of making sense, and this is another argument in its favor when compared with atheism.

For discussion

1. ***Why is the fact of evil thought to be a problem for the religious believer?***
2. ***Explain the evidential argument from evil? Is it a good argument, in your view?***
3. ***Explain what you think is meant by saying that, in Hick's view, St. Augustine's theodicy is "not very compatible with the modern mind."***
4. ***Are you convinced by John Hick's theodicy? Explain why or why not.***
5. ***The end of the article suggests that the fact of evil might also be a problem for the atheist? Is this true?***
6. ***If we understand evil "as a departure from the way things ought to be," might the atheist have a problem in defining any natural event or human action as evil?***

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Glossary

Moral Evil: evil that occurs because of the actions of human beings

Natural Evil: evil that occurs naturally in the world

Logical Problem of Evil: the view that evil and God are logically incompatible

Evidential Problem of Evil: the view that evil is good evidence against the existence of God

Free Will Defence: the view that God is logically unable to prevent evil that occurs because of human free will

Theodicy: a theory to explain why God allows evil

Privation: the view that evil represents a lack or deficiency in something that was originally good

Soul-making Theodicy: the view that evil exists in order to develop our moral and spiritual character

Theism: a general term used by philosophers to describe someone who believes in God

Natural Theology: the attempt to develop arguments for the existence of God based on evidence found in the physical universe (including from the study of life)

Endnotes

1 See J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), ch.9.

2 See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), Part 1; see also Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), p.103. For other excellent studies of the general problem of evil, see Michael Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues* (Boulder, Co: Westview, 1988); James Petrik, *Evil Beyond Belief* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

3 See St. Augustine, *City of God*, xii, sections 6-7; see also his *Enchiridion*, section 8.

4 See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1974), pp.191ff.

5 John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p.361.

6 John Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), p.44.

7 Ibid., p.52.

8 See Richard Swinburne, "Some major strands of theodicy," in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., 1996). pp.30-48.

9 Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas on the sufferings of Job," in Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp.49-68.

Augustine on Evil

Phillip Carey

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was both a heretic and a saint – first one and then the other. He grew up in the late Roman empire, which was officially Catholic, but joined an alternative religion called Manicheanism when he was a teenager. He returned to the Catholic church in his 30s, and a decade later he became bishop of the town of Hippo in North Africa. In the second half of his life he wrote some of the most brilliant and influential books in the Christian tradition, which were of great importance for both Catholicism and Protestantism. The Catholic church has long honoured him as a saint, but regards Manicheanism as a heresy.

Evil as non-being

Augustine's view of evil, which is based on a profound blend of Christian faith and Platonist philosophy, resulted from his efforts to think his way out of Manicheanism. The Manicheans were deeply concerned with the question: "Where does evil come from?" Since they were unwilling to say God created evil, they concluded it must always have existed. So evil, on their view, is just as real and eternal as God – and just as powerful. Their heresy, as Augustine later saw it, was a kind of *dualism*, because it made God and evil into two equal principles at the foundation of all existence.

Augustine's alternative is to see evil as a kind of non-being. This may sound strange, but it follows from a fundamental conviction of the Christian faith, which is shared by Platonism: that all being is fundamentally good, for it comes from the supreme Good, which is God. The Christian way to put it is: God created everything, and everything he created is good (see Genesis 1:31). So Augustine thinks the Manicheans were right to say that God couldn't have created evil, but he has a different explanation of why: God didn't create evil because evil is not a being at all, and therefore is not a being that can be created.

Of course, this means Augustine must explain how evil can be real and present in our world

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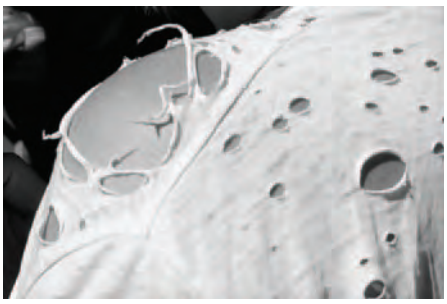
if it has no being. To understand how he does this, it helps to start with an image (this is not an image Augustine himself uses; we'll get to some of those in a minute). Think of a rip or hole in a shirt. It has no being or substance of its own, but it's really there, and it's bad for the shirt. Augustine could call it an evil in the shirt because in Latin, the language in which he wrote, the word for "evil" is also the word for "bad" (*malum*). A shirt with a hole in it is a bad shirt, and that shows us what evil is like: it's really there and it messes things up, even though it has no true being.



Evil messes things up because it's a form of *disorder.* This is an important point, because not every hole is an evil. Some holes belong where they are, like the holes in the sleeves of your shirt that you put your arms through. It's only holes in the wrong place that are bad for the shirt. So the idea is: when you have nothing where there ought to be something (a hole where there ought to be fabric), then you have something bad. Thus badness or evil is not just any non-being; it's what happens when something is deprived of some being or goodness that properly belongs to it, like a torn shirt.

Notice how good and bad are related here: the shirt is a good thing, but the hole is bad for it and makes it a bad shirt. So for Augustine every being is good, but it can be spoiled, messed up, or disordered when it is deprived of something good it ought to have. Because this notion of deprivation is central to his thinking, Augustine's doctrine has often been called the *privative* view of evil. Augustine's own favourite term for this, however, is *corruption*, which comes from a Latin word meaning "rot" or any process that causes harm, destruction or loss of goodness. A rotten tree, a torn shirt, a ruined house, a diseased animal, and a wicked soul are all examples of corruption, of good things gone bad because they are deprived of what is good for them.

Evil in a Good Creation

So how can things go bad if God created everything good? Augustine gives a general answer to this question in the seventh book of the *Confessions*, his spiritual autobiography, where he explains how he thought his way out of Manicheanism. His key point is a subtle one that needs careful explaining: God created everything good, but all the good things he created are corruptible. The subtle point is that *corruptible* is different from *corrupted*. These two terms are related the way possibility is related to actuality: something corruptible *can* go bad but might not, whereas something corrupted *is* actually evil. To say God created corruptible good things is thus to say he made nothing evil, but that everything he made could become evil.

So why would God create corruptible things? The short answer is that there's no other way to create things. Everything other than God is corruptible, because everything other

Evil messes things up because it's a form of *disorder*.

than God is created, and to be created is to be changeable – and to be changeable is to be corruptible. If you can change, Augustine thinks, then you can change for the worse. Only God is incapable of going bad, because only God is eternally, unchangeably, incorruptibly Good. Everything else is corruptible because it is changeable.

This is a thought that takes some getting used to. When Augustine speaks of changeability (or *mutability*, as the word is often translated), he has in mind a kind of weakness, a vulnerability to corruption and non-being, which is inherent in anything that comes into being. Whatever comes into being inhabits the world of time and change where things cannot only be born but grow old, get ruined and die. Since only God never came into being (for he has always possessed eternal being in himself), it follows that only God is free from all possibility of corruption.

When Augustine says all created things are corruptible, therefore, he is not saying they're evil. On the contrary, he insists that everything God creates is corruptible *because* it is good. It is good but it is not God, so it is not incorruptibly good. And it is corruptible precisely because it has goodness to lose. So the very fact that things can go bad, Augustine argues, shows that they are fundamentally good. God, being perfectly good, couldn't have created them any other way.

It is worth noting here that Augustine doesn't think it limits God to talk about what God *can't* do. God can't be stupid or blind, for example, and this is not a limitation but a perfection of God. It also fits Augustine's view of evil as corruption and privation. What God can't do is to have his own goodness limited and undermined by any kind of non-being, corruption or failure. He is like light: wherever he is, there can be no darkness.

Darkness and light, in fact, are favourite metaphors in Augustine. It is important not to confuse them, however, with the kind of thinking that is black and white. Black is a real colour, just like white, and therefore in an Augustinian view, it's just as good. It's the Manicheans, not Augustine, who are black-and-white thinkers, believing (to speak metaphorically) that some of the real colours of the world are evil. Augustine, by contrast, thinks in terms of darkness and light, which is different from black and white because darkness has no real being of its own. Darkness is not a form of light but simply the absence of light. It is a form of non-being, and thus a good metaphor for evil, as Augustine understands it.

Darkness is not a form of light but simply the absence of light. It is a form of non-being, and thus a good metaphor for evil.

Evil and Free Will

So far we have been talking about evil in a very general way. In technical terms, we have been discussing the *ontology* of evil, which is to say its place in a *theory of being*. Things get more complicated when we move from badness in general to specifically moral evil. Nonetheless, the general structure remains: moral evil is a specific form of corruption, a deprivation of goodness in a specific place – the will.

Augustine is one of the first great philosophers of free will. He thinks deeply about the will and its freedom precisely because he wants to understand its corruptibility, the way it can go bad. Much of what is wrong in the world happens because people use their free will to make bad choices.

One way this is often said is: we use our free will to choose evil. But it turns out this is a misleading way to put it. For you might think: in order to give us the freedom to choose evil, doesn't God have to create something evil for us to choose? Yet as we have seen, Augustine insists that God does not create evil. Indeed, in one sense we never choose anything evil, for every real being that's there to be chosen is good. That's why it's better, if you want to understand Augustine's view, to speak of evil choices rather than choosing evil. Evil is not a thing you choose, it's a *way* you choose. For moral evil is not some thing that God created, but a corruption in our will.

Evil is not a thing you choose, it's a *way* you choose.

This leads to another subtle point. Free will is a good thing that God created in us, but Augustine thinks it is the source of moral evil. How can a good thing be the source of evil? This is another case of the difference between being corruptible and being corrupted. Free will, like every one of the good things God created, can go bad. Hence we can say: when God created free will, he made moral evil possible. We could even go so far as to say, he created the *possibility* of moral evil, but not that he created actual evil. He created the possibility of moral evil precisely by creating a good thing, our free will. It is parallel to the way God created the possibility of blindness by creating our eyes. Whenever he creates – making something good but corruptible – he makes some sort of evil possible.

But one might still wonder how evil choices are possible, if everything that has being is good. The answer, once again, is that evil is a form of *disorder*. Moral evil arises when we choose good things, but choose them in the wrong order. If you betray your friend for thirty pieces of silver, the silver in and of itself is a good thing. But by choosing the silver over the good of your friend, you have committed a great evil. The evil is not in the silver but in you, in your soul and specifically in your will, which is morally disordered because it is more devoted to money than to your friend. There's nothing inherently wrong with wanting money, but there's something deeply wrong with wanting money more than the welfare of your friend.

This kind of disorder in the will is what Augustine has in mind when he speaks of the evil will as twisted or perverted. The will is always aimed at something, choosing or desiring or loving it, and when you turn your will in the wrong direction, aiming at things in the wrong order, it becomes evil. It becomes a good thing gone bad, like an eye that turns away from the light and starts to go blind.

Augustine frequently compares the soul to the eye in order to make a key point. Because it was created good, the soul with its free will is inherently oriented toward what is good, just as the eye is inherently oriented to seeing the light. And just as God did not give us eyes *so that* we could go blind, he did not give us freedom of will *so that* we could make evil choices. Hence for Augustine, freedom of will

does not mean a kind of neutrality between good and evil. Our free will is the power to make good choices – freely to love God and neighbour – which are also the kind of choices that lead to ultimate happiness and union with God. Of course when we have free will, we also have the possibility of making evil choices, which go in the opposite direction. But it is misleading, in Augustine's view, to call this possibility "freedom," just as it would be misleading to speak of the eye's "freedom" to go blind. It's a real possibility, but it is the possibility of failure, loss and corruption, not freedom.

The Origin of Moral Evil

The disordered love that lies at the heart of moral evil for Augustine means in essence choosing lower things over higher things. Augustine thinks of the universe as a kind of hierarchy where some things are superior to others. It is important to see that for Augustine, unlike the Manicheans, to be inferior is not to be evil. Inferior things are good things, but not as good as superior things – the way a stone is not as good a thing as a human being, and a human being is not as good as God. Thus from top to bottom of the hierarchy of being, everything is good; yet evil results when we use our free will to choose lower things like silver over higher things like our friends.

With this hierarchy of being in mind, we are in a position to grasp Augustine's full answer to the question, "Where did evil come from?"

The disordered love that lies at the heart of moral evil for Augustine means in essence choosing lower things over higher things.

Evil does have a specific point of origin in the history of creation. Interestingly, it begins before Adam and Eve. As you may recall, there was already a serpent in the garden of Eden, tempting them to make the wrong choice (Genesis 3). Augustine belongs to a long tradition of Christian thinkers who identify that serpent as the devil in disguise. However, Augustine is very intent on not letting people blame human sin on the devil. One of the main reasons he upholds our free will is so that he can insist that the evil in us is our own fault.

The devil himself is the key illustration of this point. According to Christian tradition the devil is not pure evil, as in the Manichean view. On the contrary, Satan was one of the very best things God created, existing before Adam and Eve as one of the highest of angels, but he fell from heaven because of his own evil. Thus Augustine insists he was created wholly good, but like all the angels he had to make a choice: would he love God above all other things and thus be eternally united to his incorruptible goodness? Or would he prefer himself to God, trying to exalt himself over the highest Good and become the basis of his own being? The blessed angels are those who choose the first way, while Satan and his angels became devils because they chose the other way.

Augustine's thinking about the devil thus presents a kind of thought experiment about how evil can originate in a wholly good creation, where there are no talking serpents or temptations of any kind except the goodness of your own being. For what Satan did, using his own free will, was to chose a good thing – himself, created good by God – but he chose to prefer this inferior good over the highest Good, which is God. You could say he loved himself more than God, except that it was a very foolish sort of self-love because it meant turning away from the source of eternal happiness and plunging into misery and darkness. But at any rate it shows how evil can originate in a good creation where there is no evil thing to choose.

The Remedy for Evil

As Augustine portrays it, the fundamental sin from which all moral evil originates is not something as external as taking a bite out of an apple. Adam did sin when he disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3, but the root of his sin is the same as Satan's: an inward perversion of the will which puts itself above God. The name for this perversion is "pride," which for Augustine is always a word for evil, a form of self-destructive arrogance. (The notion of a healthy or "proper" pride comes much later in Western history).

God's fundamental response to devilish pride is divine humility. As Satan tried to raise himself above God (and failed), God lowers himself to our level and succeeds in redeeming humanity. He does this by taking up our humanity and making it his own in Christ, who is God in the flesh (or in equivalent terms, God *incarnate*). Augustine describes the incarnation of Christ as "the humility of God" – the Latin term could even be translated, the *humiliation* of God – because it is a great "come down" for God, who belongs at the very top of the hierarchy of being, to take on human flesh, suffering and death. But because of his great love for us, he is willing to descend to our level in order to bring us up to his level. He does not lose his unchangeable goodness by sharing the evils of our life, but rather frees us from them so that we may share his eternal life. Thus Jesus Christ, who is God among us, is the fundamental answer to the problem of evil.

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Not a Modern Approach

Because Augustine's approach to the problem of evil has roots in ancient philosophy as well as Christian faith, it cuts against many common modern conceptions. Philosophically, it requires a fundamental rejection of any attempt to separate fact from value or "is" from "ought;" for in Augustine's view, as in ancient Platonism, being itself is not value-neutral but is inherently good. Some modern thinkers find this hard to swallow; others find it an attractive liberation from modern prejudices. In Augustinian thought, for example, light is not merely a physical object; it is also by its very nature an image of divine glory. To think of light this way is religiously powerful but not very modern.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of Augustine's approach to the problem of evil is that it says much more about sin than about suffering. In Augustine's view suffering, like death, is certainly an evil from which God aims to redeem us. But there is no place in Augustine's thinking for the cry of the biblical Job against the mystery of undeserved suffering. All the suffering in the world, in Augustine's view, is allowed by an omnipotent God as the just punishment for human sin, which is our own fault. In Augustine's doctrine of original sin, even infants are participants in Adam's sin, guilty and deserving of eternal damnation apart from the redemption that is in Christ. So Augustine's powerful response to the problem of evil does not look like an adequate response to the more specific problem of suffering, which is the great preoccupation of modern theodicy. A better response to that problem requires further development of his thoughts on the vulnerabilities of corruptible flesh and the redemptive meaning of the humility of God.

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For Further Reading

Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. F.J. Sheed, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007) is one of the best of the many translations of Augustine's spiritual autobiography, which contains his extensive interactions with Manichean views of evil in books 3, 5 and 7.

------, *City of God,* trans. H. Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984) is a massive work containing some of Augustine's most sophisticated philosophical thinking, including his thought experiments about the origin of evil in books 11 through 14.

------, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, ed. T. Hibbs (Chicago: Gateway, 1996) is a little work ("enchiridion" means handbook) containing a concise and rigorous discussion of evil in chapters 10-16 and 24-29.

Brown, Peter, *Augustine of Hippo*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), one of the great biographies of all time, is the first place to go for an understanding of Augustine's life in historical context.

Fitzgerald, Alan, ed. *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) is the first place to go for guidance in studying particular topics in Augustine's thought.

Is God Evil?

Stephen Law

Most people who believe in God take their belief to be pretty reasonable. "Perhaps God's existence can't be conclusively proved," they'll say, "but it's a fairly sensible thing to believe – far more sensible than, say, belief in fairies or Santa Claus." But are they right?

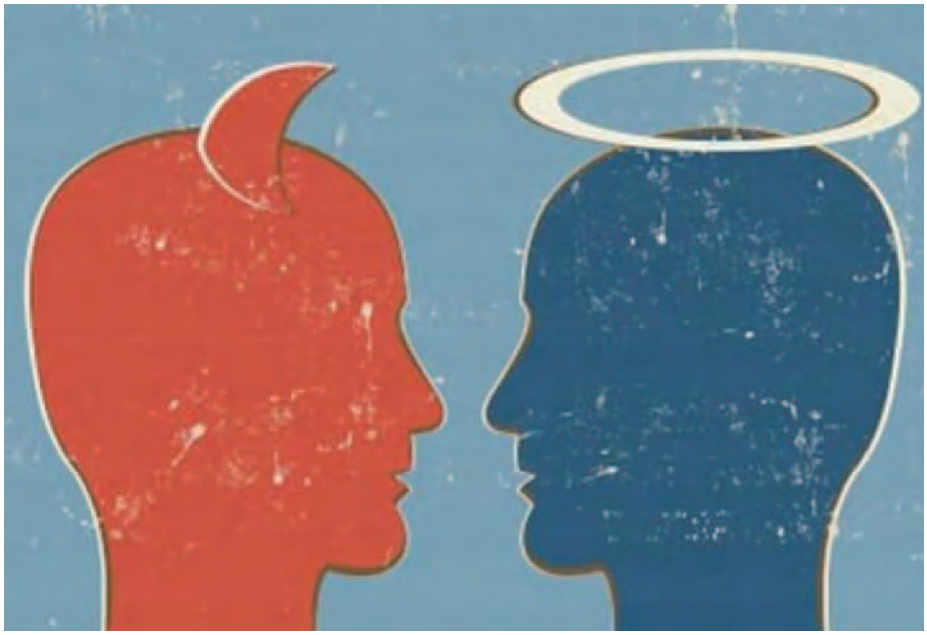
Christians, Muslims and Jews all believe that God is both all-powerful and all-good. Indeed, God is often characterised as an infinitely loving father. Yet most of the popular arguments for the existence of God allow us to deduce little, if anything about his moral character. Take the argument from design, for example. Even if we can show that the universe does show signs of design, what's the evidence that this creator is all-good?

There is also a well-known argument that, even if the universe was created by an all-powerful being, that being is not all-good. The argument is called the problem of evil, and runs roughly as follows: if God is both all-powerful and all-good, why is there so much suffering in the world? Why does God inflict earthquakes, floods, famines and the Black Death upon us? Why does he give small children cancer? Why does he make life so grindingly miserable for so many? Why does he arrange for millions of us to end our lives horrendously scarred – in many cases both physically and psychologically crippled – by the world he created for us? This hardly sounds like the behaviour of a supremely compassionate and loving father-figure, does it? Surely there's overwhelming evidence that the universe is not under the control of a limitlessly powerful and benevolent character?

Many find this argument compelling. But of course there are plenty who believe the problem of evil can be dealt with. How? Religious thinkers have, over the centuries, developed a number of ingenious solutions. Here are some popular examples.

The free will solution

God gave us free will. We are not blind automatons, but free agents capable of



making our own choices and acting on them. As a result of God having given us free will, we sometimes choose to do wrong. We start wars, steal, and so on. So some suffering results from our possessing free will. However, it is still better that we have free will. Free will is a very great good that more than compensates for the suffering it can bring.

The "character-building" solution

We know that a bad experience can sometimes make us stronger. We can learn and be enriched through suffering. For example, people who have suffered a terrible disease sometimes say they gained greatly from it. Similarly, by causing us pain and suffering, God allows us to grow and develop both morally and spiritually. It is only through our experiencing this suffering that we can ultimately become the noble souls God wants us to be.

Some goods require evils

Theists often point out that God inevitably had to include quite a bit of suffering in his creation in order that certain important goods could exist. Take, for example, charity and sympathy. Charity is a great virtue. Yet you can only be charitable if there exist others who are needy. Similarly, you can only sympathise with someone whom you perceive to be suffering. Charity and sympathy are so-called "second order" goods that require "first order" evils like neediness and suffering (or at least the appearance of such evils) to exist. It's argued that these second order goods outweigh the first order evils, which is why God allows the evils to occur.

Play the mystery card

Some theists point out that God works in mysterious ways. It's arrogant of us to suppose that we can understand the mind of an infinitely powerful and wise being. The evil God inflicts upon us is, actually, all for the best. It's just that we, being mere humans, can't see how.

Many believe these and other similar moves largely take the sting out of the problem of evil. Some think they deal with the problem altogether. I find them utterly inadequate. The following dialogue is my attempt to convey why…

The God of Eth

Welcome to Eth, a modestly-proportioned planet on the far side of our Galaxy. Here, beneath the great marble spires of Eth's finest university, the debate of the age is taking place. Arrayed on either side of the University's Great Chamber are Eth's finest scholars and thinkers. They are here to decide the most controversial and emotive issue dividing the inhabitants of Eth – does God exist? To the right of the Great Chamber are arrayed the believers. To the left sit the skeptics. The public galleries are near to bursting with those waiting to hear the proceedings. At the end of the debate, the audience will vote.

Booblefrip – the bird-like Professor of Origin – and Gizimoth – the portly Arch-logos-Inquisitor – lead the debate.

GIZIMOTH: Here, on Eth, many of us believe in God, do we not?

BOOBLEFRIP: Certainly.

GIZIMOTH: So what is God like?

BOOBLEFRIP: Well, God is all-powerful, of course. God can do anything. He created the entire universe, including every last one of us. God's awesome power knows no bounds!

A whisper of approval ripples across the believers on the right side of the Great Chamber.

GIZIMOTH: Let's agree about that, then. God, if he exists, is omnipotent. But here on Eth, those who believe in God also attribute another property to him, don't they?

BOOBLEFRIP: Yes. As you know, we also believe that God is all-evil.

GIZIMOTH: Can you explain what you mean by that?

BOOBLEFRIP: Not only does God's power know no bounds, neither does his depravity. His cruelty is infinite. His malice is without end.

Booblefrip casts a cool look across the right side of the chamber.

GIZIMOTH: I see. All powerful. And all-evil. Now Professor Booblefrip, do you think you could briefly explain why you think it's *reasonable* to believe in such a being? What grounds can you provide to justify belief in this evil God?

The universe must have come from somewhere

BOOBLEFRIP: Well, I don't say I can conclusively *prove* beyond doubt that God exists. But it seems to me that there are at least two rather good reasons for believing in God. First, it seems obvious to me, as it does to many, that the universe must have come from *somewhere*. Don't you agree?

GIZIMOTH: Of course. The scientists assembled here will tell you that there is a perfectly good scientific explanation for the existence of the universe – the Big Bang. About 14 billion years ago an unimaginably violent explosion occurred in which all matter and energy came into existence, and in which space and even time itself began.

BOOBLEFRIP: We're all familiar with the Big Bang theory, Professor Gizimoth. But of course, the Big Bang really only *postpones* the mystery of why there is anything at all, doesn't it? For now we need to explain *why there was a Big Bang*. *Why* did the Big bang happen? Science can't explain *that*, can it? There's a real *mystery* here, isn't there?

GIZIMOTH: Hmm. Perhaps.

BOOBLEFRIP: The only satisfactory explanation we have for why the universe came into existence in the first place is that God created. So there's my *first* reason to believe in God.

Gizimoth frowns: he's clearly not buying Booblefrip's argument. But he encourages Booblefrip to continue.

Evidence of design

GIZIMOTH: And your second reason?

BOOBLEFRIP: Take a look around you, at the wonders of universe. Life. Conscious beings like ourselves. Do you suppose that all this appeared just by *chance*? Surely not. The universe shows clear signs of design. And where there's design, there's a designer!

GIZIMOTH: But science *can* explain life. What about the theory of natural selection? That explains how over millions of years, life forms evolved and developed. It explains how complex life-forms can gradually evolve from even the simplest of bacteria. Science can perfectly well explain life without introducing your supernatural designer.

BOOBLEFRIP: Natural selection can't explain everything. For example, it can't explain why the universe was set up to allow natural selection to take place in the first place, can it?

GIZIMOTH: Hmm. Well no, it can't explain that.

BOOBLEFRIP: Did you know that, if the laws governing the universe had been only *very slightly* different, the universe would not have survived more than a second or two? Either that, or it would have quickly dissipated into a thin sterile soup incapable of producing life. For life to emerge and evolve, you need *very specific* conditions. The universe must be set up in an extremely precise fashion. And of course we know that it *was* set up in just this way, don't we!

GIZIMOTH: I guess so.

BOOBLEFRIP: Now that it should *just happen* to be set up in just this way by chance is too much to swallow. That would be a fluke of cosmic proportions. It's much more sensible, surely, to suppose that someone deliberately designed the universe this way, so as to produce life, and ultimately ourselves. That someone is God!

Another warm ripple of approval arose from the right side of the Great Chamber. The assembled academics felt that, so far at least, Booblefrip was getting the better of the argument. But Gizimoth was perplexed.

GIZIMOTH: Very well, let's suppose the universe *does* show clear signs of having been designed by an intelligent being.

BOOBLEFRIP: Ah. A convert!

GIZIMOTH: Not at all. I'm supposing this only *for the sake of argument*. You still haven't given me much reason to suppose that this designer is all-evil, have you?

BOOBLEFRIP: But God is, *by definition*, all-evil.

GIZIMOTH: But why define God that way? Why not suppose, instead, that God is *neither good nor evil*? Or why not suppose he is *all-good*?

Booblefrip thinks Gizimoth has gone too far.

BOOBLEFRIP: What a bizarre suggestion. It's obvious our creator is *very clearly* evil! Take a look around you! Witness the horrendous suffering he inflicts upon us. The floods. The earthquakes. Cancer. The vile, rotting stench of God's creation is overwhelming!

The problem of good

GIZIMOTH: Yes, our creator may do *some* evil. But it's not clear he's *all*-evil, is it? It's certainly not obvious that his wickedness is infinite, that his malice and cruelty know no bounds. You're deliberately ignoring a famous argument against the existence of God – the *problem of good*.

BOOBLEFRIP: I'm familiar with the problem of good – we theologians of Eth have been debating it for centuries. But it's not fatal to belief in God.

GIZIMOTH: Really? Let's see. The problem of good, as you know, is essentially very simple. If the universe was designed by an all-powerful, all-evil God, then *why is there so much good in the world*?

BOOBLEFRIP: That's the supposed problem, yes.

GIZIMOTH: Why, for example, does God allow at least some people to live out happy, contented and fulfilled lives? Why doesn't he torture them instead? If God is all-powerful, he certainly *could* torture them, couldn't he?

BOOBLEFRIP: Well, yes, he could.

GIZIMOTH: In fact he *could* make their lives utterly miserable. And we know that, as he is also supremely evil, he must want them suffer. Yet he gives some people every care and attention. Why? It makes no sense, does it?

BOOBLEFRIP: Perhaps not at *first* sight, no.

GIZIMOTH: Here's another example. Why does God allow us to do good deeds, to help our fellow Ethians? He even allows us to lay down our lives for each other. These selfless actions improve the quality of our lives no end. So why does God allow them. Why doesn't he *force* us to be nasty and do evil, just like him?

BOOBLEFRIP: I grant you that God's allowing so much noble and selfless behaviour might *seem* like very good evidence that he is not all-evil. But appearances are deceptive.

GIZIMOTH: Also, if God's is absolutely evil, why did he put so much beauty in the world for us to enjoy? Why did he create such sublime sunsets?

BOOBLEFRIP: Good question.

GIZIMOTH: And why does God give us children, which bring us immeasurable happiness? You see? There are countless ways in which our lives are enriched by God's creation.

BOOBLEFRIP: But there's also evil!

GIZIMOTH: True, there's evil in the world. But there's an awful lot of good. Far too much good, in fact, for anyone to reasonably conclude that the universe was created by an all-evil God. Belief in a supremely wicked creator is palpably absurd.

There is much quiet nodding to the left of the Great Chamber. Gizimoth's argument has struck a chord with the unbelievers. But Booblefrip thinks Gizimoth's argument is far from conclusive.

BOOBLEFRIP: Look, I admit that the amount of good in the world might *seem* to undermine belief in an all-powerful, all-evil god. But actually, we believers *can* explain why a supremely evil God would allow all these good things to happen.

GIZIMOTH: By all means try.

The free-will solution

BOOBLEFRIP: Surely you are familiar with the free-will defence?

GIZIMOTH: Perhaps you would care to explain it.

BOOBLEFRIP: Very well. God's malevolence *is* without end. True, he let's us do good. He allows us to act selflessly for the betterment of others, for example. But there's a reason for that.

GIZIMOTH: What reason?

BOOBLEFRIP: God gave us free will.

GIZIMOTH: Free will?

BOOBLEFRIP: Yes. God *could* have made us mere automata that always did the wrong thing. But he didn't do that. He gave us the freedom to choose how we act.

GIZIMOTH: Why?

BOOBLEFRIP: By giving us free will God actually increased the amount of suffering there is in the world. He made the world far more terrible than it would otherwise have been!

GIZIMOTH: How?

BOOBLEFRIP: Think about it. By giving us free-will, God can be sure we will *agonise endlessly* about what we should do. For free will brings with it the exquisite torture of *temptation*. And then, when we succumb to temptation, we feel guilty. Knowing that, being free, we could have done otherwise, we feel awful about what we have done. We end up torturing *ourselves*. The exquisitely evil irony of it all!

GIZIMOTH: Hmm.

BOOBLEFRIP: By giving us free-will, God allowed for far more intense and subtle forms of suffering than would otherwise be possible. Special, psychological forms of suffering.

GIZIMOTH: But what about the good people sometimes do?

BOOBLEFRIP: It's true that people do sometimes choose to act selflessly and nobly, and that this can produce good. But this good is far outweighed by the additional suffering free-will brings. Just take a look at the world, for goodness sake! It's a world full of people who not only behave despicably, but also agonize endlessly about what they have done!

The problem of natural goods

GIZIMOTH: But this is ridiculous!

BOOBLEFRIP: Why?

GIZIMOTH: Well, for a start, this only explains the good that *we* bring about by acting freely. It doesn't explain the existence of *naturally occurring* goods.

BOOBLEFRIP: Such as?

GIZIMOTH: Well, what about the glories of nature: sublime sunsets, stunning landscapes, the splendour of the heavens? We're not responsible for these things, are we?

BOOBLEFRIP: No. God is.

GIZIMOTH: But why would an all-evil God create something that gives us pleasure? Also, why does he give us beautiful children to love? And why does he choose to give some people extraordinary good fortune – health, wealth and happiness in abundance? Surely the existence of these things provides us with overwhelming evidence that, even if the universe has a creator, he's not *all* bad?

The "character-destroying" solution

BOOBLEFRIP: You're mistaken, Gizimoth. Such things are *exactly* what we should expect if God is supremely evil.

GIZIMOTH: But why?

BOOBLEFRIP: *Some* natural beauty is certainly to be expected. If everything was uniformly ugly, we wouldn't be tormented by the ugliness half as much as if it were laced with *some* beauty. To *truly* appreciate the ghastliness of the environment most of us inhabit – a urine stained, concrete and asphalt wasteland peppered with advertising hoardings, drug addicts and dog dirt – we need to be reminded every now and then that things *could* have been different. God put some natural beauty into the world to make our appreciation of the ugliness and dreariness of day-to-day life all the more acute.

GIZIMOTH: Hmm. But why would a supremely wicked God give us beautiful children to love?

BOOBLEFRIP: Because he knows we'll spend our entire lives worrying about them. Only a parent can know the depth of torture a child brings.

GIZIMOTH: Why does he give us healthy young bodies?

BOOBLEFRIP: He makes sure both our, and their vitality and health is short-lived. You see, by giving us something, and then snatching it away, our evil creator can make us suffer even more than if we had never had it.

GIZIMOTH: But then why does God allow *some* people live out such contented lives?

BOOBLEFRIP: *Of course* an evil God is going to bestow upon a *few* people lavish lifestyles, good health and immense success. Their happiness is designed to make the suffering of the rest of us even more acute! We'll be wracked by feelings of envy, jealousy and failure! Who can be content while *they* have so much more!

GIZIMOTH: Oh honestly.

BOOBLEFRIP: Don't you see? The world clearly was designed to produce life, to produce conscious beings like ourselves. Why? So that it's designer can torture us. The world is designed to physically and psychologically *crush* us, so that we are ultimately overwhelmed by life's futility and bow out in despair.

Gizimoth is becoming frustrated. Every time he comes up with another piece of evidence that the universe wasn't designed by a supremely evil deity, Booblefrip turns out to have yet another ingenious explanation up his sleeve. And yet, thinks Gizimoth, the evidence against the existence of an utterly evil God is overwhelming.

Some goods require evils

GIZIMOTH: This is ridiculous. You have an answer for everything!

BOOBLEFRIP: Yes, I *do* have an answer to all your arguments. So far, you've given me not the slightest reason to suppose that the world was *not* created by a supremely evil being. But if you're unhappy with my answers, let me try a rather different approach. There are some evils that require goods in order to exist, aren't there?

GIZIMOTH: Such as?

BOOBLEFRIP: Take the evil of jealousy. Jealousy requires there be something to be being jealous of. God gave good things to *some* people so that others would feel jealous. Or take lying. Lying requires that people often tell the truth – otherwise there would be no point in lying because no one would believe you. The evil of dishonesty requires that there be a *certain amount* of honesty.

GIZIMOTH: And you think these evils outweigh the goods they depend on?

BOOBLEFRIP: Exactly. God allows *some* good things into his creation. It's the price he has to pay for these greater evils.

Play The Mystery Card

GIZIMOTH: These tricksy replies of yours are patently absurd. You can't *seriously* maintain that the world you see around you – a world full of natural beauty and laughing children – is *really* the handiwork of an infinitely evil God?

BOOBLEFRIP: I do maintain that, yes. True, I may not be able to account for every last drop of good in the world. But remember that we are dealing here with *the mind of God*. Who are you to suppose you can understand the mind of an infinitely intelligent and knowledgeable being? Isn't it arrogant of you to suppose that you can figure out God's master plan?

GIZIMOTH: I'm arrogant?

There's some subtle nodding from the believers on the right.

BOOBLEFRIP: Yes. Arrogant. Evil God works in mysterious ways. Ultimately, everything really is all for the worst. It's just that, being mere humans, we can't always figure out how.

GIZIMOTH: Oh, really. This is…

BOOBLEFRIP: I think it's *arrogant* of you to suppose otherwise – to suppose that *you* must be able to figure it all out.

The verdict

At the end of the debate, the audience vote. After the deliberation, a spokesperson steps forward with their verdict.

The verdict: It seems to us that Booblefrip has made a powerful case for supposing the world *was* created by God. In addition, Booblefrip has provided a compelling defence of belief in this evil being. He has successfully explained why even an evil God would allow a great deal of good. And so the motion is carried – we are persuaded that Evil God exists.

Are you persuaded by Booblefrip's defence of belief in a supremely evil God? Of course not. His explanations are clearly feeble. Surely, despite Booblefrip's convoluted manoeuvrings, belief in a supremely evil God remains palpably absurd.

But of course, Booblefrip's defence merely flips round the standard explanations that theists offer in defence of belief in a good God. His attempts to explain what good there is in the world mirror the theist's attempts to explain the evil. If Booblefrip's explanations are deeply inadequate, why aren't the theist's explanations? That's the question the theist needs to answer.

Of course, theists consider belief in an all-evil God to be downright silly. And rightly so: there's clearly far too much good in the world. So why is it that they consistently fail to recognize that the sheer quantity of suffering in the world renders their belief in an all-good God also pretty silly? Surely, even if the universe does have a designer/creator, isn't it *patently obvious* that this being is neither all-evil, nor all-good?

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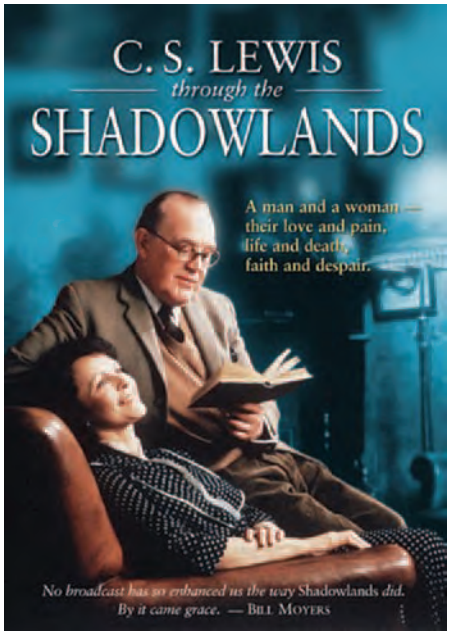
The Problem of Evil in *Shadowlands*

Mary Litch

If you love someone, you don't want them to suffer. You can't bear it. You want to take their suffering onto yourself. Even I feel that. Why doesn't God?

C. S. Lewis in *Shadowlands*



Many readers may be familiar with C. S. Lewis as the author of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the first of a series of seven children's books known collectively as *The Chronicles of Narnia.* Many readers may not know that Lewis was a professor of literature, first at Oxford and later at Cambridge University. He was also a devout Christian, who wrote and lectured extensively on topics within Christianity and religion more broadly. Now, over forty years after his death, the religious topic with which he is most closely associated is the problem of evil – the problem of reconciling the existence of an all-powerful, all-loving God with pain and suffering in the world. His way of addressing the problem of evil may have remained of interest only to theologians and philosophers of religion were it not for the movie *Shadowlands*. This movie, released in 1993 and starring Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger, received a wide theatrical release and garnered many positive reviews. It illustrates both Lewis's answer to the problem of evil, as well as some of the shortcomings of that answer using a series of events from Lewis's own life.

An Overview of the Movie *Shadowlands*

Ideally, the reader will take this opportunity to watch *Shadowlands*, as much of the rest of this article will be discussing the problem of evil by referring to various events depicted in the movie. For those who opt not to watch the movie, this section offers a plot overview and enough detail to make the remainder of the article intelligible.

Shadowlands is a true story and begins its narrative in the year 1952. By this time in his life, the movie's main character, C. S. (Clive Staples) Lewis, is a tutor in English Language and Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford. In addition to his duties as a university scholar, he is well-established on the popular lecture circuit as a speaker on topics related to religion. Still a bachelor, he lives with his brother, Warnie, in a comfortable home in Oxford, enjoying a pleasant and uneventful life.

Lewis receives many letters from admirers from around the English-speaking world. Among these admirers is an American named Joy Gresham, who writes that she will be in Oxford for a brief visit and would like to meet Lewis. Lewis offers an invitation, more out of courtesy than an actual desire to meet her. At their first meeting, Lewis is impressed by her knowledge of his writings and her decided lack of 'good manners' – she is almost a caricature of the brash American. They meet several more times over the next few months.

Several years later, Joy and Lewis meet again, and Joy tells him about some of her problems. Her alcoholic and neglectful husband in America has divorced her, so she and her 9-year-old son, Douglas, have moved permanently to the UK in the hope of making a new start. Unfortunately, the British government wants to deport them. The only way that she will be able to stay is if she marries a British citizen. Lewis, by now her friend (and perhaps also a little bit smitten with her) offers to marry her, but makes clear that it will only be a 'civil' marriage. Both of them will carry on afterwards as if nothing had changed.

Shortly after their civil marriage, Joy learns that she has a very serious case of cancer. Lewis offers to care for her during her illness and to take responsibility for Douglas after her death, which, everyone assumes, is imminent. It soon becomes clear that Lewis has fallen in love with Joy, so her illness and impending death affect him that much more deeply than it would have otherwise. Contrary to the doctors' predictions, however, Joy's cancer goes into remission, giving Joy and Lewis four years together before she finally dies.

At the beginning of *Shadowlands*, we see Lewis lecturing to an audience, offering his explanation of why God allows people to suffer so. The presentation is well-rehearsed, and we get the impression that his explanation is based more on abstract reasoning than on personal experience of growth through suffering. By the end of the movie, after Lewis has watched Joy suffer through a very painful illness and death, and has experienced firsthand the intense loss of someone he loves, he is not so sure of himself. In conversation, he shows signs of wavering in his earlier claim that there is an easy answer to the problem of evil; personal experience has made his previous statements seem a little too pat – a little too dismissive of the depth of human suffering. In the end, we as viewers are unsure where Lewis has landed: Does he still believe that God exists? The narrative ends with this key question unanswered.

We, however, are free to consider the problem of evil in the context of this sort of suffering and ask the question for ourselves: *Does suffering show that God does not exist? What should Lewis's intellect have told him? What does our intellect tell us?*

The Problem of Evil

The quotation from *Shadowlands* that opens this article offers a good introduction to the problem of evil: If God loves us so much, why does God allow us to suffer? Does the suffering that we all experience at some time or other in our lives show that there is no God, or at least that the picture of God offered by contemporary Christianity is seriously off the mark? In this section, we will examine the problem of evil more closely.

The problem of evil is probably the most serious argument against the claim that God exists. However, in order for the problem of evil to make its case, several assumptions must be made about God's presumed attributes. Really, then, the problem of evil is an argument that no being exists that possesses these attributes. The first of these assumed attributes is that God is *omnipotent*. That means that God has the power to do anything, including intervening in the world and changing the course of events, even if that requires breaking the laws of nature. Indeed, since God is presumed to be the creator of the universe, God's omnipotence extends to having created the laws of nature themselves – God could have created a world with different laws of nature than the laws currently in force in our world. The second assumption that must be true in order for the problem of evil to have any bite is that God is *omniscient*. That means that God knows everything, about both what is currently happening in the world and what will happen if God chooses not to intervene, given the current state of affairs and the laws of nature. The third assumption about God's nature that is a prerequisite for the problem of evil to arise is that God is *wholly good*. This third assumption has rather a lot packed into it. For our purposes here, the most important implication of this assumption is that God possesses perfect love for all of creation, including us humans. Let's use the word *theism* to refer to the claim that God exists, and that God possesses all three attributes outlined above: God is omnipotent, God is omniscient, and God is wholly good.

Now, let's consider human pain and suffering. In formulating the problem of evil, we need to distinguish between two kinds of pain and suffering: that which is necessary (for the accomplishment of some greater good), and that which is unnecessary (because there is no greater good that arises because of it). Clearly, some suffering that humans endure is necessary. Consider the following example from the domestic sphere. Sometimes, small children dart out into traffic. A parent, recognising the harm that may come to the child because of this behaviour, tries to train the child not to do this by punishing the child whenever the child runs into traffic. From the child's point of view, the pain of punishment seems unnecessary; however, we, along with the parent, see the greater good that will result from the pain of punishment. So, this pain, while still pain, is *necessary* pain.

An instance of pain for which no such greater good exists through or because of that pain, would be *unnecessary* pain. As we remarked in the example involving the child, the person experiencing the pain may not be in a position to judge whether there is a greater good that results from the pain. Indeed, there may not be *any person* who can see this greater good; that is because, according to the theist, it is God who evaluates the relative (dis)value of pain and suffering on the one hand, and the relative value of the resulting good on the other to determine whether the good outweighs the pain and suffering.

With this bit of background in place, we can spell out the problem of evil in more detail. (1) If God is omnipotent, then God could get rid of all unnecessary human pain and suffering. (2) If God is omniscient, God would know of the existence of any unnecessary human pain and suffering. (3) If God is wholly good, God would want to get rid of all unnecessary human pain and suffering. Thus far, there is nothing that the theist would object to. The problem for the theist comes in the next statement: (4) There is unnecessary human pain and suffering in the world. Therefore, the problem of evil continues, (5) God (or, at least the picture of God put forward by theism, the God that is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good) does not exist.

In order for the problem of evil to make its case, several assumptions must be made about God's presumed attributes.

What is the theist to do? Obviously, the theist believes that the conclusion of this line of reasoning is false. In order to defend theism against the problem of evil, the theist must deny one of the statements in the preceding paragraph. Since the theist holds that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, and that these attributes imply that God would remove any unnecessary human pain and suffering, the theist cannot consistently deny any of the first three statements. That leaves only the fourth statement: in order to defend against the problem of evil, the theist must deny that there is any unnecessary human pain and suffering. Since it is clear that there is some human pain and suffering – even the theist admits this – the way out is to claim that all the pain and suffering is *necessary* for some greater good. As in the story with the child, the pain that we experience is required for some very important thing or property. The pain is, if you like, the means to achieving the greater good. It is this greater good that God wants; unfortunately, pain is the only way to get it. The individual experiencing the pain might not be able to see what that thing is, just as the child does not understand why she is being punished, still, claims the theists, the very important thing – that greater good – is there.

I noted above that, according to the theist, God is the ultimate judge of whether a good outweighs an instance of pain and suffering. If we humans can have no inkling of God's reasoning on such issues, the theists can simply state that there is always some greater good that compensates for pain, whether we have any idea of what it might be or not. This possible way of deflecting the problem of evil can be summarized in the oft-heard: 'God works in mysterious ways.' However, within rationalist theology, it is assumed that we humans, by the use of our intellect, can come to understand God's reasoning. We might lack the ability to identify the greater good brought about in an individual instance because we lack knowledge of things like long-term consequences, but God's general reasoning should, according to this tradition, be understandable to us. The rationalist tradition is the one in which C. S. Lewis

operates (at least until the end of the film), so we shall simply assume it here. The theist therefore owes us an explanation of what this greater good might be. There are too many instances of pain and suffering to go through each one individually; but, at least, the theist needs to offer a general schema that can be applied in individual cases to explain why this instance of suffering is necessary to produce some greater good.

What could this greater good be? *Shadowlands* offers us an answer in the words and life of C. S. Lewis.

Greater Good and Necessary Suffering

There are several scenes in *Shadowlands* that show C. S. Lewis giving a lecture on his answer to the problem of evil. On the first of these occasions, he begins by reminding his audience of a then-current event. (Remember, the movie is set in the 1950s.) The event involves an accident in which a bus driver kills 24 young people. Lewis continues:

> Where was God on that … night? Why didn't He stop it? Isn't God supposed to be good? Isn't He supposed to love us? Does God want us to suffer? What if the answer to that question is "yes"? Because I'm not sure that God particularly wants us to be happy? I think He wants us to love and be loved; He wants us to grow up. I suggest to you that it is because God loves us that He makes us the gift of suffering. … Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world. You see, we are like blocks of stone out of which the sculptor carves forms of men. Blows of his chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect .

Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Lewis is saying that the pain that we experience is necessary to change us in a way that makes us better. It is the existence of these improved humans that, according to Lewis, is the greater good that God values so highly. A little later in the movie, he describes this human improvement in greater detail: "Something must drive us out of the nursery and to the world of others, and that something is suffering."

Something must drive us out of the nursery and to the world of others, and that something is suffering.

These two quotations give us a clearer understanding of his answer to the problem of evil: it is only through suffering that we can truly relate to other people; otherwise, we would remain confined in our own little world. The cost of developing these relationships (the suffering we must endure to achieve them) is overshadowed by the goodness brought into the world by relationships and by the corresponding change in us. We have compassion for others and an intensity of love that would be missing from the world without any suffering in it. So, Lewis might continue, while it is within God's power to make a world without any suffering, such a world would be inferior to the one we inhabit – a world with some suffering, but with a richness of human life that can be achieved only through suffering.

The filmmakers responsible for creating *Shadowlands* try to show us the transforming power of suffering within the narrative of the film. Prior to Joy's illness, Lewis led a very comfortable life, both psychologically and materially. His relationship with his Oxford pals consisted mainly of clever repartee. His relationship with his brother, Warnie, was so familiar and comfortable that they didn't really even seem to take notice of one another. As Joy noted, he had arranged a life for himself where nothing could touch him.

Being in love with the gravely ill Joy turned everything upside down. His comfort level dropped way down, but his depth as a person increased. First, realising that he may lose Joy, then having her cancer go into remission, made him appreciate her in a way that was simply not possible if everything had been smooth sailing for both of them. This transformation is the sort of human development that Lewis is alluding to as the greater good that results from suffering.

Does this Greater Good Compensate for Suffering?

All of the above fits in nicely with Lewis's initial views on the problem of evil; however, the brutal teacher of experience causes him to question his views. Consider the conversation between Jack and his friend, the minister Harry, shortly after Joy's death:

> **Harry**: Only God knows why these things have to happen.
>
> **Lewis**: God knows, but does God care?
>
> **Harry**: Of course. We see so little here. We are not the Creator.
>
> **Lewis**: No, we're the creatures, aren't we? We are the rats in the cosmic laboratory. I've no doubt the experiment is for our own good. But, that still makes God the vivisectionist, doesn't it? … This is a bloody awful mess, and that is all there is to it.

What does it mean for suffering to be *necessary* for some greater good? First, the good must more than compensate for the suffering. If the suffering is immense and the good produced thereby is miniscule, then the suffering just wasn't worth it. Let's go back to our example involving the darting child. The greater good that I as the parent are aiming at, is keeping the child from being hit by a car. One way I could do this is by cutting the child's legs off. That way, the child would be certain not to dart anywhere, including in front of a moving car. However, this preventive measure is way out of line, given the good I am aiming at, so the suffering the child would experience in this case would not count as necessary.

A second requirement for suffering being *necessary* for some greater good is that the suffering is the minimum needed to achieve the good in question. Using the example of the child again, we can see what this means. Let's suppose that I have two means that both do an adequate job of teaching the child not to dart into the street. One involves saying 'No!' loudly whenever the child goes near the street, but does not involve any physical punishment. The other method involves spanking the child repeatedly. If both methods

achieve the greater good (and, for the sake of argument, let's suppose that they both do), then only the 'suffering' associated with the verbal reprimand would be necessary. If I used spanking instead, that suffering would be unnecessary, because there was a less painful way of achieving exactly the same goal.

Applying this lesson to the larger problem of evil, if God has available some *other*, less painful way of helping us develop into more 'perfect' creatures, then the suffering we experience is unnecessary; hence, the problem of evil stands. Similarly, if this increased 'perfection' is not worth the enormity of human suffering, the problem of evil stands. Prior to marrying Joy, Lewis could speak eloquently about the necessity of suffering. But, then, he had never really experienced it – it was like some abstract thing that played a role in a theory, but otherwise had no meaning for him. The loss he experienced at Joy's death, and the recognition of the extent to which she suffered, gave him a visceral feel for how very much humans can and do suffer.

Where Things Stand

The movie ends shortly after Joy's death, so we as viewers are not sure of Lewis's long-term response to her death. For our purposes, though, it is convenient that the movie does not wrap up this last detail, for it offers us a useful springboard for asking ourselves where we come down on the problem of evil. We have seen a depiction of fairly typical human suffering. Joy died in the end, but, then again, so will we. It is likely that the illnesses and accidents that will take our lives will cause us a lot of suffering. It is also likely that others will be left behind who feel great loss at our death. The characters in *Shadowlands* are not that much different than us in that regard.

Do you agree with Lewis that human social development is a greater good that arises out of suffering and more than compensates for it? If not, can you think of some other greater good that might succeed where his theory fails? What other responses are there to the problem of evil?

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Do you agree with Lewis that human social development is a greater good that arises out of suffering and more than compensates for it?

Note: *Shadowlands*, while accurate in its depiction of the events in C. S. Lewis's life involving his relationship with Joy Gresham, takes considerable liberties with his real life in other respects. For a brief chronology of Lewis's life, see http://www.cslewis.org/about/

Suggestions for Further Reading on the Problem of Evil

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (first published in 1777; many editions available). The complete work is also available online at many locations, including: http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/dnr.htm

John Perry, *Dialogue on Good, Evil and the Existence of God* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).

Michael Peterson, *God and Evil* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

Of what was Moses afraid?

Jonathan Sacks

This reflection owes its genesis to my teacher, Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch. One of the great Maimonidean scholars of our time, he taught us, his students, that Torah leadership demands the highest intellectual and moral courage. He did this in the best way possible: by personal example. The following thoughts, which are his, are a small indication of what I learned from him – not least that Torah is, among other things, a refusal to give easy answers to difficult questions .

It was, in its way, the most fateful encounter in Jewish history. Moses, a fugitive in Midian, is tending his flocks. It is the slow movement in the symphony of his life. His first taste of leadership was not a happy one. He had intervened to protect an Israelite slave from being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. The next day he tried to bring peace between two Israelites who were having a quarrel. Their reaction was indignant. "Who appointed you as a prince and leader over us?" He had not yet thought of becoming a leader, yet already his leadership was being challenged. It was a taste of things to come.

Realising that his intervention the previous day had already become known, Moses escapes from Egypt and finds refuge in Midian where his true identity is unknown. Jethro's daughters, whom he rescued from rough treatment at the hands of local shepherds, tell their father that "An Egyptian man saved us." Moses looks, speaks, and dresses like an Egyptian. He marries one of Jethro's daughters and settles down to the life of a shepherd, quiet, anonymous, and far from Pharaoh and the Israelites.

Torah is, among other things, a refusal to give easy answers to difficult questions.

Yet his memories do not leave him alone. They come into sudden focus as he is tending his sheep and his eye catches sight of a strange phenomenon:

> Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of G-d.
>
> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.
>
> Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight-why the bush does not burn up."
>
> When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, G-d called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."
>
> "Do not come any closer," G-d said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac and the G-d of Jacob."
>
> At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at G-d.

G-d tells him that the moment has come. He has heard the cries of the Israelites. In response both to their cries and to the promise he made with the patriarchs, He is about to bring them out of slavery and He calls on Moses to lead them. The drama of the exodus is about to begin.

One sentence in this passage intrigued the sages: "At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at G-d." They noticed a parallel between these words and a later passage, after the golden calf, when Moses comes down from the mountain having secured forgiveness for the people, and new tablets to replace those he had broken when he first saw the calf. The text reads:

> When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When

> Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.

On this, the sages commented:

> Rabbi Samuel ben Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Jonathan: in reward for three [pious acts], Moses was privileged to receive three [forms of reward]. In reward for "and Moses hid his face," he was given a radiant face. In reward for "he was afraid," he merited that "they were afraid to come near him." In reward for "to look upon G-d," he merited that "he sees the form of the Lord."

It is a lovely idea. Moses, who came closer to G-d than any other human being before or since, took on some of the characteristics of G-d himself – not that he became G-dlike (Moses, like every other figure in the Hebrew Bible, remains human, not divine) but that his face shone from the encounter.

One detail in the sages' commentary, however, is strange. The first two rewards are straightforward – a kind of measure for measure. Because he hid his face, his face became radiant. Because he was awestruck by the burning bush, he became awe-inspiring (the Israelites were "afraid to come near him"). But what about the third – because he was afraid to look at G-d, he was rewarded by seeing G-d? Either it is right or wrong to "look at G-d." If it is right, why was Moses afraid? And if it is wrong, why was he later rewarded with something that should not have happened?

One question, according to the sages, troubled Moses. "Why do the innocent suffer?" Why is there evil in the world? Moses burned with a sense of justice. When he saw a slave beaten, or two people fighting, or young women being roughly treated by shepherds, he intervened. Later, when his mission to Pharaoh initially made things worse for the Israelites, not better, he said to G-d: "O Lord, why have you brought trouble to this people . . . You have not rescued your people at all." Moses belonged to the tradition of Abraham who said to G-d, "Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice ?"

This is the question of questions for biblical faith. Paganism then, like secularism now, had no such doubt. Why should anyone expect justice in the world? The G-ds fought. They were indifferent to mankind. The universe was not moral. It was an arena of conflict. The strong win, the weak suffer, and the wise keep far from the fray. If there is no G-d or (what amounts to the same thing) many G-ds, there is no reason to expect justice. The question does not arise.

But for biblical faith, it does. G-d, the supreme power of powers, is just. Was this not why he chose Abraham in the first place, so that he would teach his children and his household to "keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just"? *Why then do the good suffer, while evil men prosper?* It is a question that reverberates through the centuries, in Jeremiah, the book of Job, ancient rabbinic midrash, the kinot ("laments") of the Middle Ages, and post-Holocaust literature. It was this question that stayed with Moses and gave him no rest. Why are the Israelites enslaved? What wrong did they do to warrant it? Why is the brutal regime of Egypt so strong? Where is the justice in the world?

Pain, harm, suffering are evils. Yet there are circumstances in which we make our peace

Why then do the good suffer, while evil men prosper?... Where is the justice in the world?

There are times when we must silence our most human instincts if we are to bring about good in the long run.

with them – when we know that they are necessary for some good. To be a parent is to be troubled by the cry of a child in distress, yet we willingly give a child medicine, and put up with its cries, when we know it will cure the illness from which the child is suffering. A surgeon must, at a certain point, treat the patient on the operating table as an object rather than a person, for were it otherwise he could not perform the surgery. A political leader may have to make a decision that will have a disastrous impact on some people – thrown out of work as a result of stringent economic policies, even killed on the battlefield as the consequence of a decision to go to war. One who shrinks from these choices because of a strong sense of compassion may be a good human being but a wholly inadequate leader, because the long term result of a failure to make tough choices may be far worse. There are times when we must silence our most human instincts if we are to bring about good in the long run.

It was just this – my teacher argued – of which Moses was afraid. If he could "look at the face of G-d," if he could understand history from the perspective of heaven, he would have to make his peace with the suffering of human beings. He would know why pain here was necessary for gain there; why bad now was essential to good later on. He would understand the ultimate justice of history.

That is what Moses refused to do, because the price of such knowledge is simply too high. He would have understood the course of history from the vantage point of G-d, but only at the cost of ceasing to be human. How could he still be moved by the cry of slaves, the anguish of the oppressed, if he understood its place in the scheme of things, if he knew that it was necessary in the long run? Such knowledge is divine, not human – and to have it means saying goodbye to our most human instincts: compassion, sympathy, identification with the plight of the innocent, the wronged, the afflicted and oppressed. If to "look at the face of G-d" is to understand why suffering is sometimes necessary, then Moses was afraid to look – afraid that it would rob him of the one thing he felt in his very bones, the thing that made him the leader he was: his anger at the sight of evil which drove him, time and again, to intervene in the name of justice.

Moses was afraid to "look at the face of G-d." But there are two primary names of G-d in the Bible: Elokim and Hashem (the so-called tetragrammaton, the four-letter name). Elokim, say the sages, refers to G-d's attribute of justice. Hashem refers to his compassion, his mercy, his kindness. At the burning bush, Moses was afraid to look at Elokim. His reward, years later, was that he saw "the form of Hashem." He understood G-d's compassion. He did not understand – he was afraid to understand – G-d's attribute of justice. He preferred to fight injustice as he saw it, than to accept it by seeing its role in the script of eternity. When it came to kindness and mercy, Moses was inspired by heaven. But when it came to justice, Moses preferred to be human than divine.

So it was throughout history. Jews, however deeply they believed in G-d and divine providence, never made their peace with what seemed to them to be injustice. Albert Einstein spoke of the "almost fanatical love of justice" that made him "thank his stars" that he belonged to the Jewish tradition.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the book of Job. Job protests the injustice of his fate. His comforters tell him he is wrong. G-d is just, therefore there is a reason for the tragedies that have befallen him. Throughout the long dialogue we sense that Job is on the brink of blasphemy, that it is his comforters who speak the truth. Yet at the conclusion of the book our expectations are suddenly overturned. G-d says to Eliphaz and his colleagues: "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken as you ought about me, as my servant Job has done."

It is an astonishing volte-face. Better the protests of Job than the acceptance of fate on the part of his friends. Yes, there is an ultimate justice in the affairs of mankind. But we may

G-d wants us to be human not divine. He seeks our protest against evil, our passion for justice.

G-d does not want us to understand the suffering of the innocent but to fight for a world in which the innocent no longer suffer.

not aspire to such knowledge – not because we cannot (because, being human, our minds are too limited, our horizons too short) but because we morally must not, for we would then accept evil and not fight against it. G-d wants us to be human not divine. He seeks our protest against evil, our passion for justice, our refusal to come to terms with a world in which the innocent suffer and the evil have power.

It is that refusal – born not out of a lack of faith but precisely the opposite, the conviction that G-d wants us to be active in pursuit of justice – that drove Abraham, Jeremiah and Job; that drove successive generations of those inspired by the Bible to fight slavery, tyranny, poverty and disease; that moves us to become G-d's partners in the work of redemption. Faced with the opportunity to understand the troubling aspects of history from the vantage-point of G-d, Moses was afraid to look. He was right, and for this he was rewarded. G-d does not want us to understand the suffering of the innocent but to fight for a world in which the innocent no longer suffer . To that, Moses dedicated his life. Can we, his disciples, do less?

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Contending with God: Suffering and Faith in the Story of Job[1]

Sarah Bachelard

The biblical story of Job opens with what looks like a cruel bet between God and Satan. God has boasted to Satan about his servant Job. 'Have you considered him?' 'There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil' (Job 1.8). Well, no wonder he's so pious, says Satan – he's got it all. You've blessed him and protected him. 'But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face' – I bet he will (1. 11). OK, says the Lord – I'll agree to let you test him out; 'all that he has is in your power' (1.12). It's a chilling permission which issues in devastation for Job. His flocks of sheep and camels, his donkeys and all his children are killed in a series of disasters, which he learns about as servant after servant comes to him bearing the news.

Job's story is an extraordinary meditation on suffering and innocence, on God, and the possibility of authentic faith in 'the ruthless furnace of this world'.[2] It has been deeply significant in Jewish and Muslim as well as Christian traditions, and is often referred to in discussions of the so-called 'problem' of suffering.

Background

The Book of Job forms part of the Hebrew Scriptures – specifically those books known as the Writings.[3] Other books in this genre include the psalms, proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the book of Ruth. These are neither law, nor prophecy, but wisdom literature. The story of Job isn't purporting to be history. It's a work of fiction that wrestles with the meaning of the human condition in the light of faith. Scholars don't agree on when the biblical book of Job took its final form, but stories like it are known in the epic literature of the ancient near east from as far back as 2000BC. This is a motif as ancient as writing itself. Why do the innocent suffer? What is God doing about it? How may we speak truthfully of God and of meaning in a world of incomprehensible and random pain?

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Suffering as Punishment?

There's an answer to this question, which has a certain logic. It's popular in some circles even today. Suffering is punishment for evil-doing. If you suffer you must have done something wrong. Conversely, righteousness guarantees God's favour, so if you want to prosper, make sure you're upright and blameless in the sight of the Lord. Yet from the very beginning, the book of Job problematizes this way of seeing things.

First of all, it insists emphatically on the unblemished character of Job. Twice in the first chapter, he is called 'blameless and upright'. The Hebrew word, '*tam*', can also be translated as 'a man of integrity'. It's a description, says liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'that emphasises the internal coherence of [Job's] personality'.[4] He really is who he seems to be. Indeed, the literary premise of the 'divine wager', which makes God look so bad, is part of how the author insists that Job himself is in no way responsible for what befalls him. His suffering is not punishment for wrong-doing.

Furthermore, the book of Job insists that faith based on the hope of reward and fear of punishment isn't true religion. Even the character of Satan in this story presumes that. He knows that if Job curses God when things fall apart, this will prove his much vaunted piety never amounted to much. The difference between Satan and God is not their understanding of faith, but their faith in Job. Satan, which in Hebrew means 'the accuser', doesn't think human beings are capable of disinterested faith – the kind that would love God for God's own sake. God, on the other hand, trusts that Job's faith really does go deeper than this utilitarian calculus.

So – already in its first chapter, the book of Job begins to subvert the attempt to account for suffering in terms of punishment. And the character of Job shows that his faith is indeed not dependent on his good fortune – at least not in any simplistic way. Despite the loss of his children and all his possessions, from the midst of terrible mourning, Job nevertheless responds to God (astonishingly) with worship (1.20). He says '"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord". In all this', the narrator tells us, 'Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing' (1.21-22).

The story, conceivably, could have stopped there – with pious, patient Job, who took whatever came his way without complaint and so proved the accuser, 'the Satan', wrong. But just here, a deeper question about the nature of faithfulness in the circumstances of human life begins to emerge. For there seems to be something just a bit problematic about Job's total and immediate acceptance of his lot. Yes, true religion must be disentangled from simplistic expectations of reward and prosperity. And yet, if nothing we suffer causes us to cry out to God in need and protest, what does our relationship with God really amount to? Is the book of Job really suggesting that faithfulness to God requires a kind of unfaithfulness to ourselves and the pain of our experience? It's part of the genius of the book of Job to press this point.

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Affliction

Chapter 2 opens with God once more boasting of Job's integrity. No wonder he's hung in there with you – nothing has affected him closely enough yet, says Satan. But let him be touched in his bone and his flesh; then I bet he'll curse you to your face (2.4-5). OK – says the Lord, give it your best shot, 'he's in your power'. So, Satan went out 'and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head' (2.7). In the Muslim tradition of this story, Job is said to have been 'struck with a filthy disease, his body being full of worms, and so offensive, that as he lay on the dunghill none could bear to come near him'.[5]

It's important to understand the story's context to feel the full force of this. In the world of the bible, skin disease of any kind, up to and including leprosy, was not only a painful and distressing physical ailment, but it rendered someone spiritually and morally unclean. Anyone suspected of being diseased had to go to a priest for examination (Leviticus 13. 2-3). If found to be infected, according to the book of Leviticus, the one 'who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean". He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp' (Leviticus 13. 45-46).

So the one diseased is, *by definition*, a sinner. He's considered a sinner because he's diseased. But since he's diseased, and therefore untouchable, he's forbidden to attend worship. He's unable to perform the rituals necessary to be cleansed of his sin, or put himself right with God. So it's the ultimate double-bind. The so-called 'sinner' is left without possibility of communal and religious belonging unless somehow the disease just goes away by itself, and is thus condemned to a kind of social and spiritual death. This is the kind of suffering that Simone Weil calls 'affliction'.[6] It compromises your very identity, your sense of being a human being among others.

At first, it seems as though Job might be able to accept even this. His wife (herself now doubtless sharing his status as outcast) incites him to curse God, yet still he refuses to 'sin with his lips'. 'Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?' he says (2.10). His friends come to console him and, appalled at his suffering which 'was very great', they are silenced. They sit with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights. But by the time Job speaks again it's no longer possible for him to contain what has befallen him. '[He] opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth' (3.1). His sense of his life and of God in his life has collapsed under the weight of his suffering.

The power of the book of Job is that it faces up to the possibility of this extremity of human experience. It is possible, Weil says, that a human being can be struck by a blow that leaves them 'struggling on the ground like a half-crushed worm', barely feeling human, cut off from all that once gave sense and purpose.[7] And this becomes the ultimate test for any talk of God, any conception of what authentic, non-falsifying faith might be. It's little wonder that Job is a primary resource for Jewish theology after the Holocaust.

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Integrity

This brings us to the raw heart of the story, the long poetic dialogue in which Job and his friends wrestle to understand the meaning of Job's affliction and seek an explanation. We've seen that the narrator has already put in question any understanding of Job's suffering in terms of punishment. Yet, as Job's suffering intensifies, this is an insight the human characters in the story struggle to hold onto.

In fact, his friends can read what has befallen Job in only one way. For 36 long chapters, they try to convince him that somehow his misfortune is his fault. 'Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?' (4.7) asks his friend Eliphaz. And for 36 long chapters, Job resists their interpretation of his plight. He cannot find peace in the account they offer, and he will not just say what they want him to say: 'I *will* give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me' (10.1-2).

This section of Job's story raises questions of integrity in two dimensions. First is the question of theological integrity. Gutierrez has said that at issue between Job and his friends are two ways of doing theology, two ways of practising faith. Job's friends have a ready-made doctrine – and all they want to do is squeeze Job's life into it. Job feels the tug of this approach. Up until this moment, it's what he would have done too: 'I also could talk as you do, if you were in my place; I could join words together against you, and shake my head at you …' (16. 4-5). But it doesn't fit anymore for him. He knows the right so-called 'answer', but the answer doesn't work. 'How forceful are honest words! But your reproof, what does it reprove?' (6. 25). Suddenly life doesn't fit the categories they're trying to apply.

Gutierrez points out that the words of Job's friends sound increasingly formulaic and repetitive. 'The author of the book' (he suggests) 'may be trying to tell us by this wearisome repetition (which contrasts with the development of Job's thinking) that their theology is an exhausted mine … The only thing that changes in their speeches is the tone, which becomes steadily more hostile and intolerant'.[8]

Job, on the other hand, is discovering that, in the spiritual life, truth must be living or it isn't truth. It can't be second hand but somehow must witness to, and express what we've come to know for ourselves, and are able to inhabit with our lives. Australian philosopher Raimond Gaita remarks that having something to say in the spiritual domain means being *present* in your words, speaking authentically and authoritatively in your own voice .[9] For Job, this means sticking with his experience – refusing to be dissuaded of it, even under intense pressure. 'As God lives, who has taken away my right … as long as my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood … Far be it from me to say that you are right … I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days' (27. 2-6).

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This insistence on the theological integrity of his speech is related to Job's deepening personal integrity. At the beginning of the story, his integrity is understood primarily in moral terms – he's blameless, upright. But as he grapples with his difficult reality, refusing to be untrue to his experience, the character of his integrity changes. It's no longer just moral righteousness, but a deeper kind of truthfulness which prefers to risk blasphemy than settle prematurely for a veneer of piety and religious respectability.

And this changes how faithfulness is understood. The book of Job is clear that being faithful to God is not about going along with well-worn platitudes, but being drawn – sometimes excruciatingly by way of suffering and doubt – into a new and deeper integrity. Being faithful to God is necessarily connected with being faithful to ourselves. Yet having said that, throughout this long dialogue section, the book's central question remains as yet unanswered. What *is* the explanation for, the justification for Job's suffering? What is the relationship between God and human misfortune?

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Divine Indifference

Into the interminable debate between Job and his friends, suddenly, out the whirlwind, God himself breaks in. He speaks, at last, directly to Job: 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?' You've been questioning me; well now I'm going to question you, and 'you shall declare to me' (38. 2-3). It's an extraordinary moment. What follows is a masterful divine refusal to engage with Job on the terms he has demanded. Instead of answering Job's question, God asks a series of apparently irrelevant counter-questions: 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?' God employs biting sarcasm to bring home the point. 'Who determined its measurements – surely you know!' And thus it goes, on and on, through some of the most extraordinary poetry in the bible (cf. 38. 12, 16, 31; 39. 1). God's long speech is an unsparing evocation of Job's insignificance in relation to the cosmic scale of life's generation and sustenance.

In other words, Job's question is not answered, but instead is spectacularly ignored. God's response is not an explanation. There *is* no answer forthcoming. And yet strangely, it's knowing *that* that finally brings Job peace. What heals his sense of affront and meaninglessness is precisely *not* being given an explanation for his suffering.

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The significance of this is hard to hold onto – and easily misunderstood. The fact that there's no explanation doesn't mean (according to the story), that Job was wrong to ask for one. Job's friends tried to silence him, to have him bypass his reality in favour of religious orthodoxy, but the narrator of the story doesn't endorse their response and nor does God. At the end of the book God says that his wrath is kindled against these friends because they have not 'spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has' (42. 7). So God, in this account, is not interested in their easy pieties, and doesn't seek from Job a pseudo-surrender. Job must lament and rage, must express his sense of injustice and abandonment. His experience, at one level, does demand an answer. But an answer doesn't come, and in the end Job is exhausted by his question. Finally he falls silent … as the text has it, 'The words of Job are ended' (31. 40).

And what does God say after all this agony and protest and search for meaning? God says (effectively): 'It's not about you'. God says: 'Get over yourself'. And *there* is Job's redemption. There, utterly paradoxically, he is said to encounter the peace of God which passes all understanding. Because although God won't address Job's *question* on the terms Job sets, God does address *him*. God is present to him, in relationship with him – and somehow his suffering can be borne in a different way. 'I have uttered what I did not understand', he says, 'things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, and I will speak: I will question you, and you declare to me. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you' (42. 3-5).

Conclusion

The Book of Job is an extraordinarily subtle theological reflection on human suffering in the light of faith. It insists that our suffering does matter, and that we refuse to protest our pain only at the cost of our integrity. Yet at the same time, it suggests, peace comes when we get to the end of our protest, when we cease the search for explanation, when we break through to a different sense of how we matter and of our place in the scheme of things. This is not an abstract 'justification for suffering' of the kind demanded by traditional debates in theodicy. It's a truth that can be known only in the living of it, and spoken only in the first person.

I think of it this way. The 'why' question keeps us locked in the smallness, self-obsession and drama of the ego. The Book of Job suggests that true faith is the invitation to know ourselves *not* at the centre of the universe. Suffering is simply given – a fact of the human condition. There is no explanation that will satisfy us. The difference faith makes is to open the possibility of being liberated from the way suffering turns us in upon ourselves, diminishes and defines us, becomes the limit of our sight . This is no 'bland acceptance', but a costly journey into a new kind of relationship with God, a more deeply integrated self. Like Etty Hillesum, who went to her death in Auschwitz able to say that 'God is in safe hands with us, despite everything',[10] if we come to peace, it's because we've been willing to go through, not around our pain and protest. Job's story is a treasure of the world's literature, which helps us entrust ourselves to that journey.

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Endnotes

1 This article is based on a series of reflections originally prepared for Benedictus Contemplative Church. All biblical references are to the New Revised Standard Version.

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3 Marvin H. Pope, *Job: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd edition (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1986), xlii.

4 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p.4.

5 Pope, *Job*, p.22.

6 Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), pp.117, 118.

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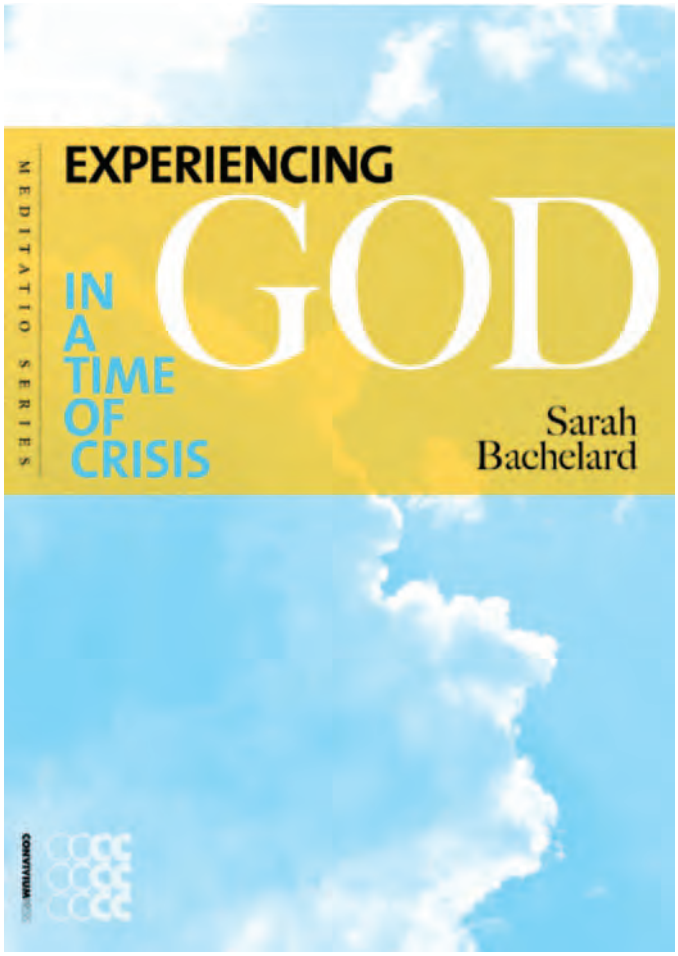
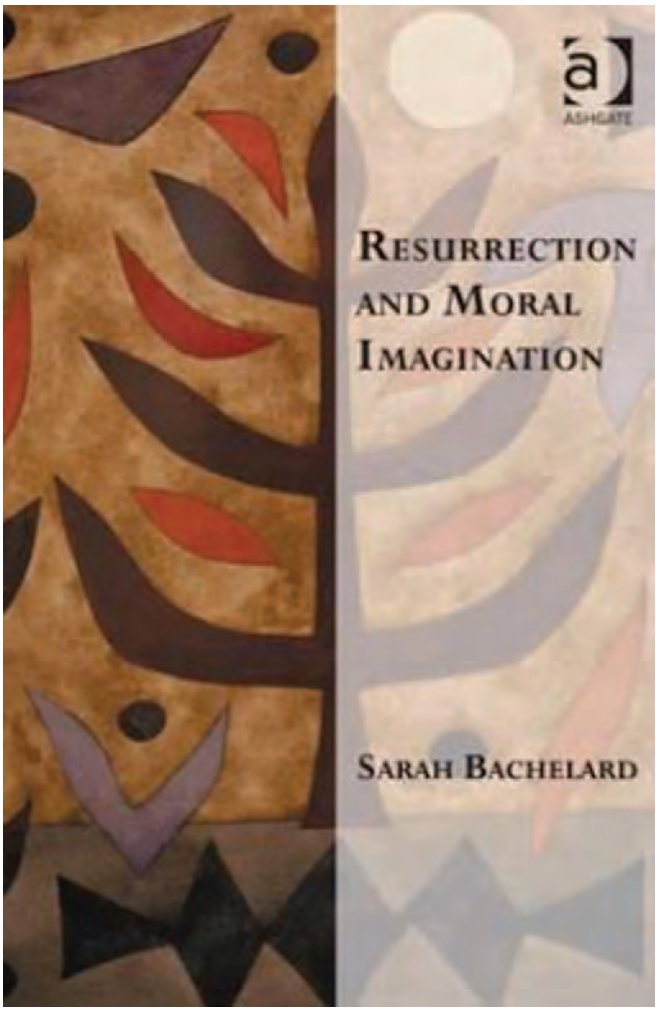
10 Etty Hillesum, *Letters from Westerbork*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (London: Grafton Books, 1988), p.144.





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A Dog called Boris

Nicky Hansell

Evil happened on our lawn – under the apple tree – two years ago in September. Or you could say that it happened nine years earlier when we bought a puppy, or three days before on the same lawn. Or you could say that none of it was evil; discounted by the joy with which the evil was interspersed.

When we chose Boris he was the fattest of the puppies. The breeder marked him with a dab of pink nail varnish but on collection six weeks later, the pink had turned to blue. 'That's not him!' we insisted. So the skulking puppy proffered was replaced by a boisterous white ball who bounded up, wagging his entire body as if he'd always known it had been him. Boris had arrived.

From the start he was trouble. He ate too much and guarded his food from the cats with a fierce sense of fair play. He was enormous, bossy and sure of his ground. The earliest of all our many arguments was when he first travelled in the car. When I removed him from the driver's seat, a tantrum ensued of gigantic proportions. Fizzing with rage, he bit and flailed about, squealing with fury and determined to have his own way. In the end, I took him home.

Boris was my son's dog and the bond between them was strong. They went beating on the grouse moors. 'What's *that*?' asked the locals with their immaculately trained retrievers as Boris stormed about in the heather. But he had more stamina than the best of them and could run for miles on his German Shepherd legs, with his ears attuned to Pete's whistle.

And then there was the incident of the pheasant. Peter was driving one day when he swerved to avoid a pheasant – and drove directly into another car. The impact was minimal and no one was hurt, but the police were summoned. 'Was anyone with you?' asked the policeman, notebook at the ready. Pete was distracted. 'No – just Boris' he said. 'And where's Boris?' asked the constable, sensing a runner. 'He's there' said Pete,

gesturing at the car where a white face glared from behind the wheel. 'You saying the dog was driving?' said the policeman. Things took a turn for the worse.

Boris was a handful – and we loved him. He was our glue. A fierce, loyal, enormous presence who would have ripped to shreds anyone who hurt us. The postman was terrified – not surprisingly as Boz had a vendetta against the mail and regularly shredded everything that arrived. A new passport was lost entirely, my daughter's exam results still bear the mark of his rage. And as for periodicals – they would be gone before anyone could read them. But Boz regarded it all as fair game. His chief delight was chasing the geese who come every year to the rich river marshes. Like a slow armoured tank, gaining momentum as he pounded; he never caught a single bird but never tired of trying. The geese would settle seconds after, honking their complaints to the sky.

And where's the evil in all this? Where exactly to locate it? My husband, David, has multiple sclerosis – an unhappy alignment of genetic material that made him susceptible and changed his life. By the time we first had Boris, David was in a wheel chair; by the time of the incident on the lawn he was much more affected. And yet he goes to work, every day, in a Professor Hawkings-like display of resistance and courage. Because of his illness, David has carers who come and go as they need – and they taxed Boris to the limit. Habitually the guard dog; their arrival was a daily battle. I knew he could not be trusted – not fully. He would lie inside the door and bar their exit. Or occasionally show thinly concealed dislike – all eight stone of him – with a display of sheer might. But no real harm had ever been done. And I was vigilant in keeping him with me.

And then on this particular Thursday, I took David to the workshop, leaving Boris safely

outside and the carer preparing to leave. But Ruth took a detour to say goodbye to him; unaware that he was eating a rabbit, something the cats had brought home. As she patted him, Boris whipped round to protect his 'kill' and sank his teeth into her fingers. By the time I came home she was lying prostrate, her fingers held in a tight tourniquet. Her ring finger was hanging on by a thread; and another had been broken in three places. Evil had been done that day but it was not Boris' fault; certainly no more than ours. It was not choice but instinct that caused him to bite. It is not instinct but choice that causes man to hurt others.

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And then we had the most terrible dilemma. The doctors saved Ruth's fingers, but for three days we were in turmoil. Whatever we did, we must do it as a family, and it was the hardest decision we had ever had to face. Agonizingly we went through the options; a muzzle when there were 'strangers' in the house? But he couldn't live his life in a muzzle as, used to being one of the gang, he would have been distraught at being excluded from events. And who was a stranger to Boris? We sat around the table and went for endless walks. We debated every possible action and their stark ramifications.

In the end, and having looked at all the options, we took the decision that we thought would remove least from him, by ironically removing the most. A sort of negative utilitarianism. We decided that safety must come first – for him as much as us. And so it was, on that gentle September afternoon, Boris went to sleep under the apple tree while we stroked him and lay with him, and refused to let him know fear. And when he died I felt the slightest tremor as his great soul left his body. He was silent. And I was incredulous that no one came to arrest *me* – such was the horror of the event. I had decided – and I had the power – to take the life of this friend.

At the risk of sounding ridiculous, it was pain of the rawest kind. David's lasts indefinitely. And daily on the news we see scenes of such appalling cruelty that it's impossible to comprehend what people must go through. Maybe it's wrong to write about the death of my dog, when all around is suffering of a totally different league. But when we talk about evil we are also talking about pain – and this was painful for us. Tragedies, injustices and grief are all part of the human condition. And the theist has their own added torment. 'Why?' they wonder, 'When it would have been *so* easy to stop it?' and we imagine our God seeing it all, but failing to lift a finger. Or turning away, or not caring. As the old joke goes – there could be a deity who's 100% malevolent but only 80% effective, and that's the reason for pain.

And our priests and our wise ones offer platitudes; 'a necessary part of free will,' a painless or toned down universe not offering the same potential. The early Greeks were not so blithe; their anarchic, wayward gods happy to sink a ship or spill some blood in pursuit of their private vendettas. The average man was lucky if he slipped past them to old age.

It was Epicurus who first alerted us to the *problem* of pain. If your gods don't care – or don't exist – there's no concern. Only when God is made in man's image, or vice versa, does pain become a problem. Only when there is a God who's supposed to be in some kind of deal does it hint at a cosmic decision. That is the problem. We had a relationship – right? And I wouldn't cause *that* to my worst enemy. How could You, when you're supposed to be God? For Epicurus it was simple – evil could not exist within the realm of omnipotent, sentient Goodness. Therefore 'It' did not exist. The dignified man accepted this quietly and got on with life as he could.

The old theodicies – Irenaeus' soul making, Augustine's free will defence, even Hick's epistemic distance have always seemed to me to be…. distant. 'Too much in the head' as my Buddhist friend would say; meaning too keen to make rational a thing of another sphere. And the genius of Christianity has been to take seriously the problem of pain. So seriously that it only half answers it – and leaves us to do the rest. God-made-man comes up against evil and subjects Himself to pain. 'Why have you forsaken me?' He asks, along with every other being who has ever felt let down. And the most revered churchmen are at their best when they admit, with candour, 'I don't know.'

Spinoza saw the problem and attributed it – partly – to language. Ostracised from the Jewish community, he set up as a lens grinder in Rijnsberg where he could eke out a living and allow himself time to think. In correspondence with some of the greatest minds, Spinoza caused his own excommunication by refusing to accept the old ways. The God he could recognise was not the product of language – and only partly accessible to man. Spinoza rejected the hegemonies that sought to explain this god. God was not explicable because – and I'm paraphrasing – we are *within* the thing we crave. 'Laws' he wrote, 'are put in place by men to subdue and terrify other men.' In which he included any kind of theodicy that makes it somehow 'our fault.' God is no storybook figure, but neither is he a tease. Rather, the god of Spinoza is the totality of all that can be. He is every possible outcome. Every apparent contradiction. Every evil. Whatever exists, does so in God and in him finds its rest. So that 'sub specie aeternitatisis' is true. Seen through the eyes of eternity there *is* nothing that man cannot bear.

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Spinoza himself had his troubles. But he didn't lose a child, or watch his brother being thrown off a building, or club his mother at the point of a gun. His God is fine for an intellectual assessment. He is fine when it's all 'in the head.' But is there any comfort in the face of the hideous evil we see?

At the risk of sounding trite – and not really attempting an answer – I want to reveal what happened after Boris died. It is a personal tale 'told by an idiot' – but to me at least, it does not signify nothing.

On the night after he was destroyed, I stared blankly at the moon. It was a full moon, lighting the sky. And there he was, staring back at me; his ears and the shape of his nose. His eyes were wider and his one ear didn't flop – but he stared back. And I willed the shape in the cloud into looking like Boris – though in fact he was slightly off. Him, but not *quite* the dog I so loved.

And in the morning, before the events of the day before surged back in all their emotion, I heard a tune in my head. A thin little thing that I couldn't locate, but slowly the words filtered through. It was an old chorus that we used to

sing at school;

> So Mary, sing now the song of all creation,
> Sing to the glory of that which can explain,
> That in the pain we share,
> Rebirth is always there
> Death is a changeling
> And life must live again.

Months went by. A miserable winter came and went. And then one day, and not really looking, the 'children' found a reference to a dog on the internet. He was called 'Chazelaw's Second Chance;' and he had been Boris' father. We rang the breeder. There was a brother called Apache. And Apache had just fathered pups.

'You're mad!' people said. 'Why would you risk it? Why would you do it again?' And there was a part of me that agreed. If we weren't good enough dog owners to keep our beloved pet safe; weren't dominant enough or hadn't trained him sufficiently, then what right had we to own another dog? Let alone from the same blood line. But something made me respond.

Was it the old lady who – on hearing the story – clasped my hands in hers and said 'Get another dog,' with all the authority that came from her own proximity to death? Or the white feathers that settled around me whenever I thought about Boris? Or the still voice – not quite in my head – that whispered of safety when I was sad? I don't know. Yet one spring day, Peter and I visited a house in a village, which looked unpromising somehow. We knocked – and no bark answered. Not the slightest canine noise. But inside there was a mound of puppies and one that wriggled and thrust. It seemed intent on us noticing him – it wasn't for letting us go. It was settled, and a few weeks later he arrived.

Blue is not Boris. Not in any sense that would honour them both. Blue is laid back where Boris was fire. He is relaxed where Boris was tense. He has absolutely no instinct to be a guard dog and lets the cats have his food. Indeed, he is so scared of one of the cats that he regularly retreats to safe distance. And yet he does the things that Boris did – the things that don't cause harm. He plays a game of retrieving kicked stones that I didn't teach him to do. He thunders after the geese and swims in the river and responds instinctively to my mood. And he loves us. Not yet with the fierce bravery of his 'wicked uncle,' but with something more gentle and tame. And we love him – not yet with the unconditional thing that we felt for the older dog – but again more reflective perhaps.

And the relationship of all this to the problem of evil is not as tenuous as it appears. It is simply that in my ridiculously limited exposure to evil that is not of anyone's making – that could have been other at the flick of fate, as is the evil of illness – that there *can* be comfort there. Evil is bleak. It is unjust. And there are evils ten thousand times magnified to the death of a dog and even more magnified than a terrible illness. But we cope. And we are helped to cope. And that may be what the Crucifixion was saying. 'I can't stop this, but I am in it with you.'

'Why can't You stop it?' our rational brain cries out. 'Why when You're supposed to be God?' and we're back on the old treadmill. And I don't honestly think I have ever really heard a theodicy that is convincing. There is no answer to the problem of evil that is acceptable to the human pysche/heart.

The dog that I saw in the clouds that night was not Boris, but it turned out to be Blue. Recognisably him, with the slightly wide-spaced eyes. 'Mad?' Yes, undoubtedly. But why did I see him if he did not somehow already exist, and why does evil have to have the last word? It may not have. As I lay with my dog on the last night of his life we made a sort of pact. 'Come back' I said, and felt as if I were surrendering him to the unknown, but it was a place where he would be safe. If there are things we don't understand, then evil may be less than we think. Engulfing, hideous; evil remains so – but it withers if we survive our own deaths. It withers if we are returned to the state we enjoyed before we knew life; a state beyond any evil.

The German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote '*A god who let us prove his existence would be an idol.*' The death of millions of Jews under the Nazi regime he opposed was a case of extraordinary evil. The refugees we see moving in their tens of thousands are escaping from extraordinary evil. Evil exists in the big events as well as the tiny tragedies – they are all evil for the people involved. But if God *were* with us – and held us – would that dissipate the evil? If death did deliver us from evil, would that nullify the event? I think it

possibly would. An assumption, I know, based on another and both founded on trust. But Bonhoeffer went to his death with courage – noted by the SS Doctor at the time. His last words; 'It is the end... for me – the beginning of life" were not the product of anything superficial. He took seriously the problem of evil and thought that others should do the same. But in the end, having resisted it, his only answer was faith.

Faith is not easy and we are not failing if we rage against the evil that surrounds us. 'No!' we say when faced with an evil that we *can* avert. But what should we say when faced with the ones that we can't – the evil that is left after the doctors have gone – or any of the innumerable, heart breaking things that happen to us as we stumble towards our own mortality and the end of all that we know? Evil seems to be built into the very structure of things. And none of us have an answer for it unless we listen to the voice in the back of our heads. The thin, insistent thing that is present in a half heard tune, or a dream, or through the healing of time. The voice that says 'Be still,' and helps us to be. And get up and move on, or lie down and find peace. If we can love one another *as He has loved us,* however ironic those words might sometimes feel, we are doing all that any human can do about evil. And all we can do about pain.

Nicky Hansell is co-author with Joe Jenkins of award winning RE, Philosophy and Ethics films *including Ethical Theory I* and *II*, *Life after Death* and *The Problem of Evil*. Her first philosophical novel *The Sage Train* is published on 28th November 2015.

www.ethicsonline.net
www.thesagetrain.com

For another perspective by the author see, Nicky Hansell & Joe Jenkins, "Fear & Trembling: Teaching the Problem of Evil," in *Dialogue Australasia* Journal, Issue 28, November 2012, 1-3.

For discussion

1. ***At the end of the article the author refers to the words 'to love as He has loved us.' In a sentence or two, summarise the tension/irony that someone facing evil might find in Jesus' words.***
2. ***How might a Christian explain the problem of evil?***
3. ***In the news we often read of 'a tragedy' and there is an entire literary genre known as 'Tragedy.' What is a tragedy? What is the difference between a tragedy and the tragic? Does a tragedy have to involve large numbers of people, for example?***
4. ***The inconsistent triad refers to the tension between three premises of the Christian faith – that God is all loving, all powerful and that evil exists. They seem to be incompatible – one or other must be false. The ancient sect of Manichaeism (from which St Augustine converted), sees good and evil as two equal but distinct forces. Explain why Christianity would reject this.***
5. ***If God is not all powerful, does that make him more or less attractive to you?***
6. ***What is the greatest evil in the events the article talks of?***
7. ***An animal cannot be said to be evil because it is cannot choose what it does. How important is choice when considering the problem of evil? If man is the only being capable of evil does that make him more – or less – like God?***
8. ***Faced with events they cannot control, humans often turn to faith. Is this legitimate – or simply a desire to regain control?***
9. ***With hindsight, we allocate blame for causing evil, but rarely do we praise leaders for averting it. Is our lack of understanding of how things* might *have worked out something that God has to deal with? Why would He choose to have it that way?***
10. ***Does evil fade if we survive our own death? Is death the greatest of all evils, or is suffering worse?***

The Buddhist view of Good and Bad

Robina Courtin

Does evil exist?

From the Buddhist perspective there is no concept like 'evil' as defined as 'the force in nature that governs and gives rise to wickedness and sin.' Everyone has some negative and positive tendencies; it's a question of degree. Clearly, some people have very strong tendencies to do very evil things, but there is no talk of anyone being innately evil. There is no badness that cannot be eliminated, and no goodness that cannot be developed.

According to Buddhism, all sentient beings possess the potential to be free of suffering and its causes, the ultimate state of which is known as buddhahood. The Tibetan word for "buddha," *sang-gye*, conveys the meaning well. *Sang* implies the utter eradication of all negative states of mind and delusions, which Buddha has established as extrinsic to our being. *Qye* implies the development to perfection of all positive states and goodness, which he has found to be at the core of our being. What prevents us from being a buddha right now is the presence in our minds of negative or deluded states.

What is the mind?

As it is in the mind that good and bad tendencies exist, and become free of suffering and its causes, it is necessary to understand the nature of the mind: what it is, how it functions, and where it comes from. Besides the body of a person, Buddha does not assert any phenomenon other than mind – or consciousness: these are synonymous – such as a spirit or a soul. The presence of consciousness within the body defines a

What prevents us from being a buddha right now is the presence in our minds of negative or deluded states.

sentient being, in Tibetan, *sem-chen*: mind-possessor.

Mind has several characteristics. First, it is not physical, and its function is to cognise. Obviously mind exists in dependence upon a body, at least at the grosser levels, but it is not a function of the body.

Second, as implied by the etymology of *sang-gye*, consciousness is pure in its nature, insofar as it has the potential to be rid of all suffering and its causes and fully developed in goodness.

Third, mind encompasses the entire spectrum of our inner being: intellect, feelings, emotions, unconscious, subconscious, instinct, intuition, as well as our sensory experiences, those parts of our mind that function through the medium of the eye, the ear, and so forth.

Fourth, our consciousness is not the handiwork of any external source, neither a creator nor our parents. In fact, there's not an atom of our being that comes from a superior being, although indeed our body comes from our kind parents.

Thus, fifth, we don't need creating because our mind is a beginningless continuity of mental moments, each moment of awareness necessarily being the result of – having as its substantial cause – the previous moment of cognition in that very mindstream, or mental continuum. Mind, being a product of the law of cause and effect, necessarily cannot have a first, causeless, moment.

Sixth, from the Mahayana point of view, our mindstream is also endless.

And seventh, mind has far subtler, more refined levels of cognition than are posited as even existing in the materialist models. In order to accomplish buddhahood – to rid our mind utterly of all delusions and their imprints and to develop to perfection all goodness – we need to access the subtlest level of our mind by using specific meditation techniques.

Three categories of states of mind

Mental consciousness has three categories of states of mind: negative, positive and neutral. These are technical, not moralistic terms. The negative states, such as attachment, anger, jealousy and pride, are necessarily disturbing, as well as delusional – literally, misconceptions. The positive states, such as love, compassion and generosity, are necessarily not disturbing and not delusional (relatively, at least). The neutral states – that is, those that are neither negative nor positive – such as concentration, mindfulness and alertness, are involved in both positive and negative actions. Both murderers and meditators need mindfulness.

The law of karma: cause and effect

All sentient beings exist according to the law of karma: cause and effect, a natural law that plays out in our minds and lives. We come into this life fully programmed with our various tendencies – anger, kindness, intelligence, the tendency to kill, being good at football – habits, basically, that we brought with us from

Both murderers and meditators need mindfulness.

previous lives. Not more than a few weeks before conception in our mother's womb, which is when consciousness entered into the egg and sperm, our mind was in a previous body. And so forth, back and back.

Every moment of happiness, pleasure and joy, is necessarily the fruit of our past positive actions, those that benefited others and were motivated by positive states of mind. And every moment of suffering, pain and distress, is necessarily the fruit of our past negative actions, those that harmed others and were motivated by negative states of mind.

Equally, every negative action we do now leaves seeds in the mind that will ripen as future suffering, and every positive action leaves seeds that will ripen as future happiness – unless they are removed from the mind beforehand.

As the Dalai Lama says, the Buddhist view is one of 'self-creation.' The law of karma occurs naturally; no one runs it. Buddha is not a creator and does not assert a creator.

Why good and bad things happen

In very broad terms, a 'good' person is one who, as a result of having practiced love, kindness, generosity, patience, etc. in past lives, is born with these tendencies, or habits, and thus continues to be loving, kind and generous. Unless they are an advanced spiritual practitioner, they will also have some negative tendencies – a kind mother might steal – but basically the good qualities prevail. A 'bad' person is one who, as a result of having practiced anger, killing, stealing etc. in past lives, is born with these habits and thus continues to harm others. They might also have some good qualities – the Mafia gangster will cherish his own family – but the negative ones prevail.

The karmic tendencies we are born with are called 'actions similar to the cause:' the tendency to be generous is an action similar to the cause of having been generous before; the tendency to kill is an action similar to the cause of having killed before.

Another way karma ripens is called 'experiences similar to the cause.' The way we are seen and treated by others, whether good or bad, is the fruit of our past similar actions to those sentient beings. Being stolen from, lied to, abused, or conversely, receiving things, being trusted and loved – all are the fruits of similar actions of our own in the past.

Actions similar to the cause, and experiences similar to the cause, are like two tracks of karma that run parallel.

Also, a good person can be harmed by others, and a bad person can be helped. Actions similar to the cause, and experiences similar to the cause, are like two tracks of karma that run parallel. A good person being killed now is the result of one of their own past actions of killing that ripens as an experience in this life. A bad person being saved from being killed now is the result of one of their own past actions of not killing that ripens in this life.

Countless sentient beings

According to the Buddhist world-view, there is not an atom of space where you won't find sentient beings. Human beings are a just a tiny percentage of them. There are gods, whose bodies are made of light and who experience bliss; this is equivalent to other religions' views about heaven or paradise. There are animals, as well as beings known as spirits, or hungry ghosts, and hell beings. They are all necessarily experiencing the fruits of their own past actions: happiness as a result of virtue and suffering as a result of non-virtue.

As one Tibetan teacher said, hell is not some place where the devil is waiting for you! It's the result of the negative energy of your own past actions.

These states of existence are not permanent. Eventually the karma of the animal will run out, and at the time of death a virtuous karmic seed is triggered and they are reborn as a human. Equally, a human would be reborn in a suffering realm as a result of negative tendencies that cause them to harm others, such as killing.

Hell is not some place where the devil is waiting for you! It's the result of the negative energy of your own past actions.

No random events

Given that karma is a natural law – it is not created by anyone; it is not punishment and reward; it simply occurs – there is no such thing as a random event. Countless sentient beings are taking countless lives, bumping into each other countless times, harming and helping each other and thus creating the cause to be harmed and helped in return. A small child will experience kindness and love as a result of their own past goodness, just as another will experience abuse as the result of their own past negative actions.

In 2003, in New York, Richard Gere organised a meeting of the Dalai Lama with a group of former prisoners, all of whom had done some kind of Buddhist practice in prison. Among them were two young Tibetan nuns who'd been tortured and sexually abused in prison in Lhasa. As they described their suffering it was clear that they were sad, but because they use the law of karma as their explanation for why things happen, they were not angry; they weren't agonising over "why is this happening to me?" One of them concluded her talk by quietly saying, "And, of course, we had compassion for our torturers because we knew we must have harmed them in the past."

But because these abused nuns were experiencing the results of their own past abuse, doesn't mean abuse is not immoral; of course it is. It doesn't mean they shouldn't be protected from the abusers; of course they should. And it doesn't mean the abuser shouldn't be punished; of course he should. Karma is simply the explanation for *why* things happen, good or bad.

Group karma

When millions of people suffer, such as the Tibetans at the hands of the Communist Chinese, or the Jews at the hands of the Nazis, or African slaves at the hands of white slave-owners, evil seems more shocking. But it should not be surprising. The very group that oppresses another group will be the oppressed group in another life. We create good and bad karma in groups, so will experience the results in groups.

We create good and bad karma in groups, so will experience the results in groups.

There is no karma that cannot be purified

Evil is not permanent. There is no negative karma, no evil tendencies that cannot be purified from the mind. Tibetan Buddhists have a daily practice called the Four Opponent Powers in which they deeply *regret* the actions they have done to harm others because, first of all, they themselves do not want the suffering results; then they have *compassion* for those they have harmed and, crucially, for those who have harmed them; next they do a particular practice such as recitation of a mantra as the *antidote*; and finally they commit to not doing those actions again.

Why have compassion for the harmers, the evil ones? Because they will suffer unbearably in the future as a result of their harming – unless, of course, they purify the causes. And, like the Tibetan nuns, we know that we have harmed them in the past.

Evil is not permanent. There is no negative karma, no evil tendencies that cannot be purified from the mind.

The experiential implications of karma

The person who uses the law of cause and effect as their explanation for why things happen would take responsibility for their own experiences, and because they do not want more suffering, would attempt to live a life or morality by not harming others and trying to help them. When bad things do happen, they would rejoice that those seeds are now finished. And they would have compassion for those who harmed them.

When they look at the world, they would understand why things happen, good and bad, and would have compassion for everyone: those experiencing suffering at the hands of others and those causing the suffering. We're all in the same boat, in life after life, harming and helping.

Their long-term goal would be buddhahood – the eradication of all the bad and the development of all the good – because then they would have the wisdom to see the minds of others and the effortless compassion to never give up helping them, life after life, because every one of them possesses buddha nature.

Venerable Robina Courtin has been a Buddhist nun since the late 1970s and has worked since then with the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, a worldwide network of Tibetan Buddhist activities, serving at different times as editorial director of *Wisdom Publications*, editor of the magazine *Mandala*, executive director of Liberation Prison Project, and as a touring teacher of Buddhism. Her life and work with prisoners have been featured in the documentary films *Chasing Buddha* and *Key to Freedom.*

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Bystanders and the Social Psychology of Evil

Kylie Bourne

June Lee, *Bystander*, 2011-2015, Mixed media, 8x1.5x2" each figure

In 2013, Australia's Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, responded to allegations of endemic harassment within the defence forces by saying that, "the standard you walk past is the standard you accept." For him, witnessing harassment, or knowing that it is occurring and yet choosing to look the other way, amounted to tacit consent to an abhorrent practice. In this opinion, Morrison is in good company. Since the Holocaust, standing idly by while an evil action is perpetrated has been roundly condemned. Albert Einstein is reported to have said "the world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing." Similarly, Edmund Burke declared "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

"the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

These are strong statements, often repeated and invariably applauded. But how exactly are we to understand them? Do bad or evil things occur because we, as bystanders, do nothing? Even if we can argue that evil will occur whether or not we are direct witnesses to it, is our inaction as bystanders tantamount to tacit consent for the performance of such deeds? And if we do not act, should we share in the blame attributed to those who perform such deeds?

It is usual that questions like these are asked after horrific or tragic events. In 1964, Catherine (Kitty) Genovese was murdered in her apartment block in the United States of America. The media reported that 38 people had heard her screams for help, yet not one intervened. After stabbing her, the murderer, Winston Moseley, raped Genovese as she lay dying. The public commentary that followed characterized Genovese's neighbours as apathetic and self-centred and in some instances as 'evil.' The case also initiated a body of social psychological research into the 'bystander effect.' Speaking about Genovese's murder, Stanley Milgram – who went on to conduct one of the famous experiments in this area – said the "case touched on a fundamental issue of the human condition, our primordial nightmare. If we need help, will those around us stand around and let us be destroyed, or will they come to our aid? Are those other creatures out there to help us sustain our life and values, or are we individual flecks of dust just floating around in a vacuum?"

To ascertain whether we do in fact behave like 'individual flecks of dust' and stand by while another people need assistance and whether, if this does occur, it counts as evil, we need to understand two things. First, we need to understand whether bystanders do indeed refuse to render aid or to speak out against evil deeds. Second, we need to know what we mean when we talk of something being 'evil,' and whether bystander inaction (should it exist), can rightly be considered in such a way.

The notion of evil

To start with the second question, we need to understand what we mean when we talk about 'evil' deeds or actions. This is not quite as easy as it seems. Scholars distinguish between secular and faith based understandings of evil, and although most philosophers consider that evil causes harm, not all agree. Even if we assume that evil causes harm, we need to be explicit about the kind of evil we mean. Generally speaking, the actions of people bring about harms from 'moral evil,' while natural disasters and the like bring about harms from 'natural evil.' There are broad and narrow concepts of evil, Kantian notions of radical evil and Arendtian concepts of the evil that comes from following orders in unreflective ways.

For our purposes, we will define evil as occurring when one person or group of people cause non-trivial harm to another person or group of people. By labelling the

harm as *non-trivial*, we emphasise that the suffering that results from evil actions is usually extreme.

It has been a topic of ongoing debate in social psychology as to whether moral agents freely chose to perform evil actions, or whether such actions result from the situations in which people find themselves. The work of psychologists such as Stanley Milgram (quoted above) and Philip Zimbardo, is renowned for purporting that people will obey orders from those in authority, even when this results in the suffering of others, and even when the orders given conflict with one's own conscience. In 1963, Milgram conducted an experiment where volunteers followed orders to administer repeated, and increasingly large electric shocks to an unknown subject. In 1971, Zimbardo orchestrated the famous 'Stanford Prison Experiment,' where volunteers acted out a scenario of a prison, with one group assuming the role of prisoners, and the others the guards. On the basis of their work, both Milgram and Zimbardo claimed we are more influenced by things outside of us than by our inner environment; our genes, moral history or even religious training. Their research tried to understand the motivations for actions such as those of people who carried out the Nazi orders in death camps, to prison guards who tortured and humiliated prisoners in Abu Ghraib. (Zimbardo, notably, appeared as a witness in the trials of the USA guards charged at Abu Ghraib). According to this 'situationism,' how we behave in situations - including whether we intervene as bystanders - is determined largely by factors external to us. We are, says Zimbardo, far less influenced by our own moral codes or religious beliefs than we think. We are far more capable of inflicting suffering on others than our own moral vanity would have us believe.

Situationism appeared to echo long-standing archetypes in social psychology, notably among crowd theorists, who considered that our decision-making and agency is compromised when joining groups like crowds. Gustave le Bon, who in 1896 popularised the theory of 'mental unity' in crowds, wrote "the mere fact that he [sic] forms part of an organised crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation. Isolated he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian" (le Bon, 1896, p. 36). A person 'loses themself' in a crowd, and their actions are determined by those around them, instead of by their own sense of right and wrong.

All of this might leave us feeling quite bleak about whether there are others who, as Milgram opined, would "help us sustain our life and values." If orders, situations or other people so easily sway us, then do we perform evil deeds easily? Is it easier still to stand by while evil occurs without intervention? An even more disturbing question is not whether it is easy to stand by, but whether we are somehow programmed to do so, even though, upon reflection, we ought to intervene?

Bystanders, or standing by?

This brings us back to the first of our two questions: do bystanders merely stand by when witnessing evil deeds? Well, yes and no. Social psychologists have determined the existence of phenomena such as 'diffusion of responsibility,' whereby people are less likely to intervene the more bystanders there are; and 'emergent norms,' wherein norms in a group can develop to be more extreme than those held individually by members. However, situationism and the idea that people blithely follow orders, or adopt roles despite their obviously harmful consequences is in dispute. For instance, empirical evidence dispels the notion of the 'barbarous' and 'mentally unified' crowd popularised by le Bon. Steve Reicher and Alex Haslam are among several social psychologists that have also disputed the findings of studies conducted by scholars such as Zimbardo and Milgram. They argue, for example, that the very limited observational data from the Stanford Prison Experiment "casts doubt on the analytic conclusions that have been drawn from it." Although the experimenters directed the subjects to behave in certain ways in their assigned roles, there are numerous and repeated instances of this direction not only being ignored, but questioned. Even the most aggressive guard said that his actions were spurred on by a desire to help out the experimenters, to "do some good." Experiments like those of Milgram and Zimbardo would not pass the ethics committees of today, so it is impossible to find out whether the results are repeatable. We must be careful therefore, not to draw wide-reaching conclusions from them.

We do know that bystanders do sometimes merely stand by. In 2009, a 15-year-old high school student was raped by a group of young men in the courtyard of a high school in Richmond USA, while at least twenty people watched the act, some filming with their mobile phones. These bystanders were condemned in media reports for not reporting the incident to police, and for failing to intervene on the victim's behalf. Similar instances appear periodically. In March 2015, for example, a woman was reportedly drugged and gang raped on a Florida beach, in "broad daylight while bystanders watched." We must be weary of concluding too much from media reports, given their potential for misinformation. Articles published after Kitty Genovese's death incorrectly reported that neighbours did not render assistance, and that Genovese's screams when unreported. Several neighbours did intervene; one called the authorities, another shouted at Moseley causing him to flee, and another comforted Genovese as she lay dying. Additionally, the design of the apartments meant that no-one could see the incident from beginning to end, and the stab wounds Genovese received punctured her lungs so she could not call for help, let alone emit those so-called repeatedly-ignored screams. This is not to say that the neighbours actions ought not to be scrutinised, but rather that we need to know exactly what behaviour we are criticising.

Conversely, we know that bystanders sometimes do intervene to save people in danger, and help victims of aggressors. Often at great personal risk, people smuggled out, or offered safe harbour to slaves in 19th Century America and to Jews across Europe during the Second World War. Studies have shown that contrary to popular assumptions, crowds in disaster situations can band together to help others. In 2011 in England, following an horrific multi-car pile-up on the M5 Freeway, passengers and local residents attempted to rescue motorists who were trapped in burning cars. These people quickly organised themselves so that some contacted the emergency crews and comforted the rescued, while others continued in their attempt to save as many people as they could. Similarly, when hundreds of people were trapped in pens at Hillsborough stadium during the 1989 crowd crush, other crowd members in nearby stands worked together to form human chains to lift those trapped in the overcrowded pens below to safety.

If, like Morrison, Einstein and Burke, we think that evil deeds occur when we 'walk

past' them, what then, reasonably, can we expect of bystanders? How are we to make sense of the often-contradictory views of bystanding, where on the one hand non-intervention is seemingly unavoidable, but on the other praised when it occurs? Perhaps a first step is to separate the causal and moral aspects of bystanding. We know, for instance, that that the actions of bystanders are often critical to deciding the extent of an evil action: with bystanders a fight can become a fight to the death. Studies into race riots as far back as Chicago in 1919, indicate that bystanders increase not just the severity of an action, but the likelihood that it will occur in the first instance. The coroner investigating these riots said that although bystanders did not commit crimes, they must share the responsibility, because "without the spectators, mob violence would probably have stopped short of murder in many cases." The presence of non-intervening bystanders gives protagonists a false sense of consensus. Whether or not bystanders actually agree with them, without expressions of dissent, actors come to believe that they are operating on behalf of those around them. Actors are not only emboldened, but may also feel they can't back-out of proceeding. Any action they do take may also be more severe than had they acted with no audience. Studies into racism and bystanders, genocide and even cyber bullying, all note the pivotal role of the bystander. Harmful actions can be influenced by whether a bystander expresses dissent, or intervenes when a harmful action is in progress. Intervention can reduce not only the severity of an action, but the chance that it will occur in the first place. Conversely, non-intervention can increase the severity of the action.

Since there is a causal link between bystanding and harmful – even evil – actions, does this mean there is a moral link? I would say yes. Bystanders set the context in which evil actions occur. As bystanders, we set the standard for what we collectively will, and will not accept. This is not to say we ought not to carefully consider what we should expect from bystanders. For example, we would not expect a single person to put themself in danger by opposing a violent gang. Whilst some individuals would do this, it is not reasonable to expect everyone to follow suit. Rather, we may expect bystanders to intervene when it is safe to do so, by reporting incidents to authorities. We might even expect them to

As bystanders, we set the standard for what we collectively will, and will not accept.

'bear witness' by recording harmful behaviours and handing footage to police. Advances in technology allow us to 'bystand' in ways we have never previously been able. We watch as something trends on Twitter, help video footage go viral, or watch as someone is shamed on social media as much for a lapse of judgement as for an outrageous or abusive comment. This is a 'live' issue; these advances outstrip our capacity to thoroughly consider the moral and legal obligations of bystanding, and we need to be reasonable in our expectations.

Take the Adam Goodes case. In July 2015, Adam Goodes – Sydney Swans Captain and 2014 Australian of the Year – was continually booed by a crowd of West Coast Eagles Supporters during an AFL game. Goodes, who has received honours for his sporting prowess and his strong stand against racism, had controversially celebrated a goal with Indigenous gestures that mimicked spear throwing only weeks previously. Goodes had been booed at previous games during the season, but the West Coast Eagles crowd in July booed him loudly from the time play began, and repeatedly each time he came near the ball. Although two fans were ejected from the game for overtly racist behaviour, large sections of the crowd joined in the booing of Goodes. Many others nearby watched. No doubt some sections of the crowd opposed the booing, and some spectators may even have expressed their disagreement. Without being in the crowd at the time, it is difficult to know what bystanders ought to have done. Some may not have spoken out, considering it too risky. Others may have tried to counter the booing by cheering more loudly in compensation.

Whatever the actions of the crowd on the day, the actions of other bystanders – those who were not present, but who nevertheless saw the incident telecast or on news sites – had a dramatic effect. We saw an outpouring of support for Adam Goodes, and a series of public comments denouncing the actions of the crowds. Social media campaigns gave people a way to intervene by condemning the booing, and some print media outlets even distributed posters that read 'I Stand With Adam Goodes' that people displayed in the windows of their homes. Without directly intervening in the initial incident, a whole community of bystanders became socially engaged to affirm standards of racial equality. Research into anti-racism and bystanders suggests that as well as confronting perpetrators, or reporting harmful incidents to authorities, bystanders play a role in "changing social norms towards the intolerance of racism."

Research into cyber bullying and trolling similarly suggests that users who witness aggressive behaviours influence the contexts in which these harms occur. In July 2015, feminist campaigner Coralie Alison was targeted by fans of rap artist Tyler, The Creator (real name Tyler Gregory Okonma), who had tweeted (incorrectly) that Alison was responsible for his inability to obtain a visa to tour Australia. His tweet was retweeted over 5000 times, and favourited 7,500 times. Ms Alison received over 2000 tweets from Mr Okanma's fans, mostly containing rape or death threats. Speaking in August 2015, Alison remarked that although she felt targeted, the support of bystanders who reported aggressors, or tweeted messages of support made her overall experience positive, and that she ended up feeling more supported than attacked. Australia's Office of the Commissioner of eSafety taps into this sentiment in its educational campaign against cyber bullying, an important component

Bystanders do causally contribute to evil actions that result in non-trivial suffering.

of which is teaching children about the importance of being a 'positive bystander,' and equipping them with tools to be so.

Morrison, Einstein and Burke propose a cautionary thesis we should take heed of. Bystanders do causally contribute to evil actions that result in non-trivial suffering. Evil can occur through non-intervention and merely standing by. While it may be that few bystanders are inclined to directly intervene, this does not mean we ought not to expect them to do so if safe. We certainly ought to expect bystanders to influence the broader contexts in which evil actions occur, by standing against racism, sexism and discrimination for example. With social media increasing our capacity to spectate, further discussion about bystander responsibility is surely warranted.

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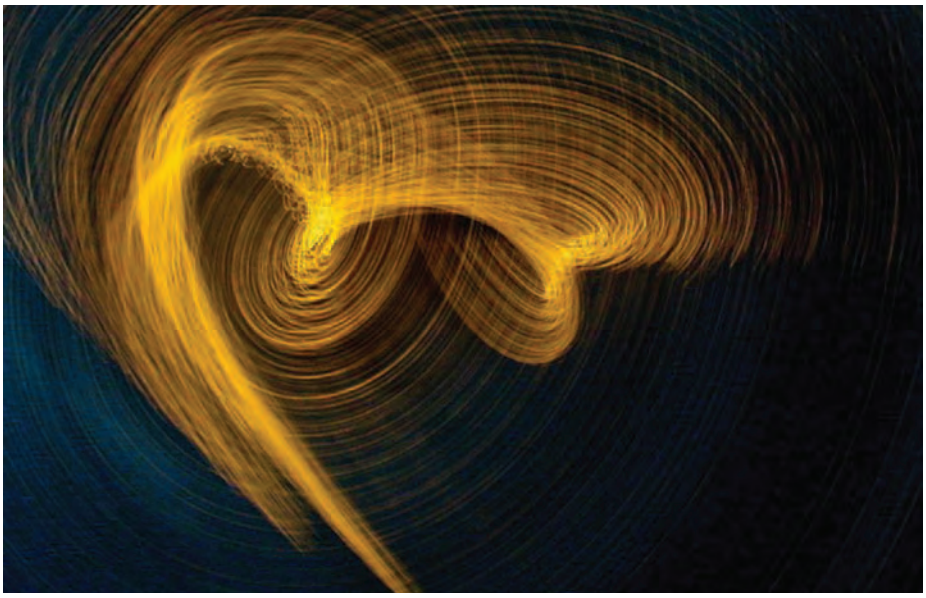
The New Moral Horizon: Going Beyond Good and Evil in The Dark Knight Trilogy *and* Dead Man Walking

Nikolai Blaskow



Ethics in its desperate contemporary context: where to from here?

Jean-Pierre Dupuy, in his excellent book *A Short Treatise on the Metaphysics of Tsunamis,* sets ethical discourse in the context of the urgency of our times:

> … any feasible answer to our problems can only be political in nature. But politics presupposes ethics, which in turn depends upon metaphysics. Nothing can be more plain than that none of the moral philosophies presently available to us is adequate to the predicament we face. Ethics must be given a new foundation… an "ethics for the future…"[1]

I want to argue that a transcendent moral approach to ethics may offer us such a foundation, one strong enough to meet the catastrophic predicament Dupuy identifies. As a consequence of the *Shoah* (the Jewish pogrom of the Nazi era), the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (and so the inauguration of an era dominated by nuclear deterrence and the constant possibility of mutually assured destruction) and 9/11, humankind has moved to an almost dangerously intransigent (possibly apocalyptic) state of affairs. But far more chilling is *not* even the state of denial humankind seems to be in, but more that we have shifted our mindset to a misplaced sense of responsibility and a terrible misperception.

Politics presupposes ethics, which in turn depends upon metaphysics.

Dupuy claims that Jean Jacques Rousseau had prophetic (if rather ironic) glimpses of what this shift would mean:

> He [God] who willed that man be sociable, touched his finger to the axis of the globe and inclined it at an angle to the axis of the universe… I see men [sic] gathered together in a few dwelling places in order to devour each other there, to make a frightful desert of the rest of the world; a worthy monument to social union and the usefulness of the arts.[2]

Citing Pierre Boyle's *Dictionary*,[3] which enunciates the dictum that we cannot simultaneously affirm the following three propositions without contradiction, Dupuy underlines the familiar, if paradoxical propositions that:

1. Evil exists in the world
2. God is benevolent
3. God is almighty

Dupuy goes on to observe that 1. is incontrovertible; but if God is benevolent 2. he cannot at the same time be 3. 'almighty.' Hence, Rousseau, reflecting on the natural disaster of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, may well have been right to say that 'only those who dare look into the abyss of meaninglessness, are capable of true compassion.'[4]

Only those who dare look into the abyss of meaninglessness, are capable of true compassion.

Dupuy then notices that ever since this reflection by Rousseau, humanity has set itself on the path of a process of what he calls the 'naturalization of evil.'[5] By this he means that the language we use to describe *natural* disasters is increasingly slipping into the language we use to describe *moral* trauma. Take for example, how the survivors of Hiroshima refer to it as if it were an earthquake, or a tidal wave. As a consequence, human action, particularly political action 'makes happen what must happen,' and so creates '[the] closed

The language we use to describe natural disasters is increasingly slipping into the language we use to describe moral trauma.

circuit…[of]… a most peculiar mixture of colossal responsibility for the future with [a] deterministic release from responsibility.'[6] In effect, Dupuy argues that human responsibility linked with the natural order of disasters in the world renders it 'limitless.'[7]

Thus, no longer can there be any moral evil: human crimes are now to be listed as 'cosmic' in scale. And so Primo Levi is able to say of the *Shoah* that 'Hier ist kein warum' ('Here is no why.')[8]

Dupuy then interrogates the conundrum that is the *Shoah*,[9] in that it presupposes a divinity that receives the offering of the lives of millions of victims who have been tortured and consumed by fire. He then asks the terrible question: 'To which divinity, then, were the millions of Jewish victims sacrificed?'[10] Clearly, by 'confusing mass murder with the expiation of sins, one sacrifices barbarism and in this way justifies it. No purer example of sacrilege can be imagined.'[11]

So Hiroshima is justified as a 'necessary evil' by its perpetrators.[12] Not long after on the 8th of August 1945, the International Military Tribunal at Nuremburg was set in motion to judge three types of crime: crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Günther Anders, in referring to the subsequent bombing of Nagasaki, coined the term 'the Nagasaki Syndrome' which, in making the 'unthinkable real,' introduced the notion that 'inevitably more atrocities' would follow in much the same way as 'a series of after-shocks [that must] follow'[13] an earthquake.

The trend to link human atrocities with natural disasters and 'sacrifice' continues today. 9/11 spectacularly revealed, if not created says Dupuy, an evil before the eyes of the world. The twin towers were referred to as 'a sacred space.'[14] But once again, what 'divine purpose' is served?'[15] asks Dupuy. His answer appeals to the insights of René Girard:

> If sacrifice resembles criminal violence we may say that there is inversely, hardly any form of violence that cannot be described in terms of sacrifice… [S]acrifice and murder would not lend themselves to this game of reciprocal substitution if they were not in the same way related.[16]

Dupuy finally arrives at the chilling conclusion that humanity might have reached the moral 'inevitability' of wanting to 'kill [or] assassinate itself',[17] where the horror of human action so transcends any human scale that no God can prevent it.[18] And if so, we may well ask: where to from here?

Ethics as 'Moral Transcendence' or 'Moral Responsiveness'. How might it be taught?

The moral transcendent, or moral responsive approach to ethics I am positing – and which may help us out of the alarming *cul de sac* which Dupuy claims we are in - draws on the writings of Iris Murdoch, Raimond Gaita and Cora Diamond who, in the estimation of Sarah Bachelard, write from "a lively sense of the depth and mystery of human life… woefully lacking in the analytic tradition of moral philosophy."[19] It is a moral awareness, which in effect takes us beyond 'good and evil' and even death.

How is this possible, and how might we develop such an awareness in our students?

At Radford College, Canberra (a co-educational, Anglican school), nurturing a moral responsive approach to ethics is part of a long gestation period, which begins in Year 9. In Semester 2, we run a course entitled *Human Experience*: *Living with Joy and the Gift of Pain*. It was a re-write of material that had previously attempted to deal with matters of *theodicy,* and to tie it in with Service Learning visits to Black Mountain and Cranleigh Schools for the mildly to severely mentally and physically disabled children and adolescents in our region. In the new curriculum, it was thought important that disability *not* be seen in isolation, but on a continuum of varying degrees of the 'dis-enablement' and confusion that we *all* feel from time to time, and that the experience of disability and responding to it might contribute important insights on how to reconcile suffering, pain and evil in the world with the idea of goodness and a loving God.

One strand of this Yr 9 Unit is **the importance of awareness and self-awareness** – that is to say: *metacognition* – being aware of our thinking and what others are thinking (empathy); and *metacognitive processing* – changing our thinking, and so changing our behaviour (when warranted). By viewing films such as *Beautiful*, *I am Sam*, *The Intouchables* and *Samsara* (excerpts only), and melding this with Service Learning visits, students are encouraged to practice awareness (in the interests of empathy) and self-awareness (by way of self-observation) – and of course to attempt to change if they feel their thinking or behaviours are negative, undesirable, and perhaps even destructive to themselves and others.

Using the films indicated above, we tease out and discuss cultural (American, Australian and French/European), gender and personal (individual) differences. It was agreed (especially by the students themselves), that many factors could have a direct bearing on levels of awareness of self and others, including degrees of introversion/extroversion, range of experiences, levels of well-being (mental and physical), *performance* versus *mastery,* mind-sets and breadth of reading (fiction and non-fiction), not to mention the impact of the *frequency* and *quality* of exposure to theatre, art and film.

Students are then gradually introduced to *the moral responsive* paradigm (a scaled-back and simplified version under the title *personal responsive* approach to life.) It includes **the *steps*** that might be taken when confronted with a problem, issue or just simply a new challenge. The steps are framed as a set of suggested actions:

- **Begin in vulnerability** – don't be afraid to say: 'I don't know' what this problem or issue is, what it might mean, why I'm feeling this way about this person or thing or action – a kind of Socratic style of questioning.
- **Be motivated by compassion and empathy** – 'I see you, I hear you' (i.e. pay attention to the moment): why *am I* seeing this way, what is blocking my vision (we tie this in with Jesus' advice to take the log out of your own eye before removing the splinter in another's.)
- **Allow yourself to be disciplined and guided by reality and truth** – is what I'm thinking and doing, the way I'm seeing things, the choices I'm making… aligned with reality, with truth? If not, is what I'm about to say and do going to fail or be destructive to me and to others?

Is what I'm thinking and doing, the way I'm seeing things, the choices I'm making... aligned with reality, with truth?

- **Allow the situation to *reveal* its own solution by careful study/ research/examination of the issue (and seeking professional help if necessary), without preconceived ideas** – only then might my thoughts and actions be affirmed and affirming – and a solution might emerge.
- **And most of all, be assured**: that there is a goodness in the world, constantly revealing itself to us and encouraging us in new and unexpected ways.

In addition to the 'awareness and self-awareness' program, Year 9s are presented with extracts from Etty Hillesum's *Diaries,* which she crammed into twelve exercise books from 1941-1943. [20]

Under the title *Self-Awareness as Self-Reflection*, these extracts are accompanied by eight principles, elucidated to help students explore the art of developing a heightened awareness of the inner life, with a strong emphasis on how to deal with suffering and loneliness.[21] Etty's attitude to *evil* in the world prepares Year 9 students well for the ethical and moral issues examined in Year 10.

Etty felt guilty whenever she was overcome with a profound sense of a 'goodness' and 'beauty' despite her bleak surroundings. In an address to the *Faversham Stoa Philosophy group,* Dr Phillip Knight cites Etty as noting: "That part of myself… that deepest and richest part in which I repose, is what I call God." And then Knight adds,

> By her faithfulness to her ideals, [she] sustain[ed] her belief in the goodness of human beings and the beauty of life, even in the horrors of the concentration camps from where she addresses the transcendence of the future (us) with her hopes for a better society in which goodness, beauty and love can flourish in everyone.[22]

This is also powerfully illustrated by Etty in the following extract:

> I know what may lie in wait for us. I have already died a thousand deaths in a thousand concentration camps. I know about everything and am no longer appalled by the latest reports. In one way or another I know it all. And yet I find life beautiful and meaningful. From minute to minute… I now listen all day long to what is within me, and am able to draw strength from the most deeply hidden sources in myself. I keep following my own inner voice even in the madhouse […] Let me perform a thousand daily tasks with love, but let every one spring from a greater central core of devotion and love.[23]

Alexandra Pleshoyano describes Etty as "a vehicle and a voice for God in the midst of evil."[24]

Let me perform a thousand daily tasks with love, but let every one spring from a greater central core of devotion and love.

Yr 10 Unit: A Moral Responsive Approach

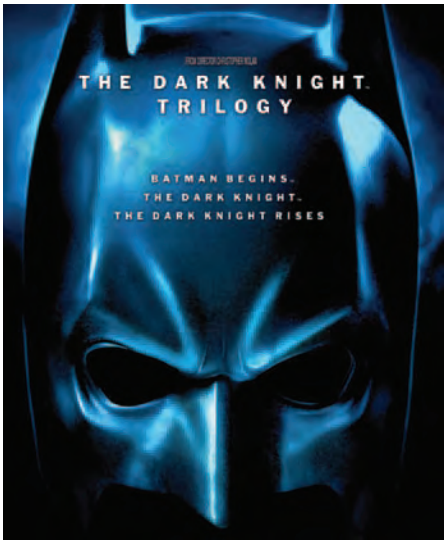
The aim of our Semester 2, Year 10 Unit, is to evolve the notion of personal responsiveness (from Year 9), to a new ethical and moral level. By the time students come across the notion of 'moral responsiveness,' they have a foundation of understanding upon which to build. This is how I explain it to my classes:

> 'moral transcendence' can never be understood without some idea of what it means to be self-aware and aware; some concept of reflection and self-reflection, some idea of what is involved in cultivating the consciousness of an inner life from which to draw strength and insight.

We start the Unit by introducing students to the four main ethical systems of *consequentialism, non-consequentialism, virtue ethics,* and the *ethics of care.*

The class is now encouraged to see how awareness and self-awareness, ethical systems, and learning to practice a moral responsive approach can serve as strong allies, and offer potential solutions to concrete problems and issues.

To help them see the whole schema, a double sided, A3 summary is given to students, and they use it as mirror through which to view and test the four movies covered in the Unit (*The Dark Knight Trilogy* and *Dead Man Walking*), as well as what they see, hear and experience throughout the term.[25]



The first step in the moral responsive approach is to *define the problem*. In our first movie, *The Dark Knight* (*TDK*), Gotham's problem is that it staggers from one crisis to another without ever resolving (or even knowing) what the core issue is. As such:

- Compassion (*ethics of care*), however sincere, is doomed to fail, illustrated by the deaths in *Batman Begins* (*BB*) of Bruce Wayne's father and mother, proving that idealism alone is never enough.
- Appeals to *virtue* must falter, demonstrated so powerfully in Harvey Dent, 'the best of us all,' 'the white knight,' 'a decent man living in indecent times' who dies (unbeknown to Gotham), as a murderer and a villain.
- Gotham's democracy and system of law break down again and again, because its newfound peace at the end of *TDK* is based on lies. The Batman, for example, murdered Dent in cold blood. As a consequence, the *Dent Act* in honouring an 'honourable man,' claiming to rid the city of its criminality, actually drives it 'underground,' producing an even lower life form in the figure of Bain in *The Dark Knight Rises* (*TDKR*).

Put simply, Gotham fails to solve its core problem because it has never really defined the problem properly . And to define it, the problem has first to be understood.

To illustrate the dynamics of how this works, it was useful to come back again and again to the example of how Pompey the Great solved Rome's pirate problem in the Mediterranean.[26]

Gotham fails to solve its core problem because it has never really defined the problem properly.

Having divided the Sea into 24 'zones' over which generals were appointed, Pompey could easily have imposed a purely military solution. Instead, he took great care to study the problem and to pay attention to (become aware of), what its *real* cause was: the fact that the pirates were mostly, and just simply men without purpose, without the means of survival, men in need of security – and that the greatest surety that could be offered them was land.

And so with a stroke of genius, Pompey asks his generals to confront the pirates with a choice: either they take the land Rome offered, or they risk extinction under the full weight of the Empire's military might. It was not difficult for most of the pirates to choose wisely, and not before time Rome (itself on the verge of starvation because of the grain crisis occasioned by the piracy problem on land and sea), experienced a time of peace, which under Augustus Caesar became the *Pax Romana* (the Roman Peace).

The Pompey case study is an important one, insofar as it establishes the simple principle that:

- if you don't take the time and the trouble,
- if you don't pay attention to the problem in its context,
- if you don't think outside the square (as it were) and *see* things as they are, rather than through the lens of the ego,
- if you're not aware and self-aware enough to know how others think, what others are looking for and desire…

…then your project will most likely fail.

So:

- neither sporadic compassion (the *ethics of care*)
- nor idealism (*virtue* ethics)
- nor even principled *non-consequentialist* behaviour (*Kantian ethics,* for example),
- nor *consequentialist* ethics as enshrined in the *law,*

will *in themselves* avail - if there is only a scant understanding of the nature of the crisis, and if the critical emotional and moral intelligence, that awareness of what is real and true, is missing.

This is where the moral transcendent approach, in concert with each of the other four ethical systems, may help us to engage with the problem at its source – devoid of preconceptions, constraints and expectations (as far as possible).

We have *first* to 'see' and 'hear' the issues for what they are if any *one*, or indeed *all* of the systems are to be usefully employed. To repeat, as Jesus so wisely put it (paraphrasing): you have to take the pole out from your own eye in order to see the splinter in someone else's – and that requires the kind of *internal dialogue* referred to above. When that dialogue doesn't happen we are like Bruce Wayne – unaware and lost in the make-believe world of our own making.

In one of the most revealing scenes of the trilogy, in *TDKR* the truth finally catches up with Wayne. After the failure of his first intervention in many years, which helps Bane escape, Alfred confronts Wayne with some stark realities:

- Bain is stronger and more brutal than Wayne admits – he is as one who has been expelled from the League of Shadows, not a man to be trifled with.
- The days of hiding behind a mask are over – Gotham doesn't need a faceless Batman, but the resourcefulness and integrity of a Bruce Wayne -the kind of man who can do extraordinary things while living a normal life.
- For this very reason (and before her death), Rachel preferred Dent above Wayne, and wanted to marry him.
- Alfred burned Rachel's letter to spare Wayne the reality of that pain.

This is too much truth for Bruce Wayne to bear. He lashes out with, "How dare you use Rachel to stop me," and then accuses Alfred of wanting to destroy his world. But later, in a nightmare, Ra's al Ghul appears to him saying: "You yourself fought with all your strength and all your resources, all your moral authority. And the only victory you could achieve was a lie," reinforced by Bain's humiliation of him with the words "Victory has defeated you."[27]

As Bachelard discerns,'truthfulness' and 'reality' are the lynchpins of the moral responsive approach.[28] And these are not stated in an abstract, but in an experiential way:

> What is at issue is the possibility that one's life might be lived in illusion, that one might fail to be properly oriented towards the real. If that is the case, then moral perception or vision is necessarily distorted, and deep responsiveness to the reality of other people is impossible.[29]

Truthfulness and reality are the lynchpins of the moral responsive approach.

We then watch *Dead Man Walking*. At first it seems like a 'tack on' to the *Trilogy*. But it doesn't take long for the students to realise that this is the film which brings together the truths of the transcendent moral approach scattered throughout the *Trilogy,* into the one personal 'journey', one based on a true life story.

What follows is a necessarily truncated and re-fashioned overview of that journey.

Dead Man Walking tells the true story of Matthew Poncelet, a murderer and rapist condemned to death in the US state of Louisiana, and of Sister Helen Prejean, a Roman Catholic nun, accompanying him through the weeks and days leading up to his execution. On the film's account at least, this is no straightforward journey for Sr Helen. She struggles with her own revulsion for the man and his crimes, as well as with her ostracism from systems of goodness which condemn her for committing to remain in solidarity with Poncelet. Yet, as Bachelard intimates, what grows from this struggle is a love which has the power of revelation in at least three dimensions.[30]

First, Sister Helen's love reveals humanity in someone in whom it is obscured. This awareness is a far deeper matter than believing that even someone who has committed terrible crimes has rights which must be respected by the legal system, and which inform the way he may be treated. It is perfectly possible to protect the rights, and even to believe sincerely in the 'inalienable dignity' of another, and yet fail to know their humanity as 'like ours' in any serious way.[31] Through Sister Helen's eyes, we begin to see Poncelet's childhood with its vulnerabilities and hurts, his need to belong, his inarticulate love for his mother and brothers mixed with an indiscriminate rage at their poverty, their social deprivation and impotence. We see tragedy in the pathetic bravado and pointless waste, which has led him to death row.

The second dimension in which Sister Helen's love has the power of revelation is in relation to Poncelet's own moral understanding. Early in *Dead Man Walking*, Poncelet seems incapable of facing what he has done: he claims he is innocent, that his partner in crime is the only culprit. Sister Helen intuitively sees him whole, and seeks to love him anyway; not in a sentimental way which allows him to evade or excuse his crime by focusing on the deprivations of his childhood etc, but in a way which holds open the possibility of truthfulness, repentance, forgiveness and restoration. Eventually, in the light of the way Sr Helen sees him, diminished by his crime yet called into wholeness, Poncelet is able to let go of his evasions, to admit what he has done. For the first time he calls his murdered victim by his name. Love reveals the reality of the other.

Love reveals the reality of the other.

Finally, Sister Helen's love reveals in a deeper way not only Poncelet to us and Poncelet to himself, but also what is morally at stake in the use of the death penalty. Although the film is pitched from the point of view of those opposed to the death penalty, it does not directly argue that it is 'wrong' or morally indefensible, or that it violates basic human 'rights.' Rather, it repeatedly focuses on the horror of the crimes for which this punishment was meted out, and on the ruined lives of the families of those murdered. Even so, in all that complexity and unremitting pain, the film reveals to us the brutal reality of what we are doing when we execute a human being.

Through Sister Helen eyes and her experience of this inhumanity, we come to know more deeply what a human life is, because we see that even an evil-doer possesses a depth of life which could so easily be passed over.

The final scene with Poncelet's mother and brothers poignantly illustrates the beauty and depth of that reality, one that existed *before* he admits his culpability.[32] It is the same beauty as is revealed in the 'two boat scene' in the harbor in *The Dark Knight*. One of the 'scumbags' on death row - who is seen by others as worthless, having already made his choices and deserving to die – takes the trigger for the detonator and throws it out of the window into the harbor with the words: "I am going to show you what you should have did ten minutes ago."

Through the remorse which Helen's love makes possible for Poncelet, we come to know more deeply what a terrible thing it is to harm another, to be a murderer.

By the end we have seen ourselves however dimly in his life, and he has come to see himself in those he murdered, finally understanding what he has done in depriving them of their lives. As Poncelet takes the terrible final walk from his cell to the death chamber, stripped of all dignity, dressed in a nappy, just a 'dead man walking' without a name, it is Sister Helen who offers him a strong love that will never let him go.

The film is not an argument about the pros and cons of the death penalty, but reveals what the death penalty is. This is what it means to execute someone, and it is a morally responsive approach that helps us to see it.

In the same way that Poncelet had to realise what it means to be a murderer, so the film asks us to realise what it means to be a society that executes. No serious moral reflection about the death penalty is possible without it first being revealed to us what it is that we are talking about. It is only love that has the power to reveal this.

Love and knowledge belong together in the moral domain.

Love and knowledge belong together in the moral domain – and here we have the moral responsive approach revealed in all its awesome fullness.

Ethics as Philosophical Explanation

Where, however, does this leave the notion of evil? Luke Russell, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Sydney, arguing from a purely secular position, makes a strong case for why the use of the term 'evil' is still a helpful one from an *explanatory* point of view.[33] For instance we may want to:

- Know about the environmental conditions which prompted actions deemed 'evil.'
- Determine what state the agent was in when she committed the action.
- Understand why *this* action rather than *another* from the presenting alternatives is chosen.
- Assess why it is this *agent* rather than another agent who finally performs the action.
- Identify the agent's motives just prior to the action itself (synchronic explanation).
- Trace the process over time which led the agent to have those motives.

Russell states:

> My account of evil suggests that there is not a single unified concept of evil. We must distinguish the concepts of evil actions, evil person and evil feeling.[34]

The Moral Responsive Approach: Concluding Remarks

It is simply impossible to cover everything that should be conveyed to reveal the full power of the moral responsive approach. For example, the notion of resurrection within the context of the moral imagination is a whole other discussion. Sufficient to say that all four films suggest this possibility in their own unique ways – ways that are totally accessible to a young mind – whether it be in symbol/allegory of the *The Dark Knight Rises*, or in the factuality of a Poncelet walking to his execution in the knowledge that he is now a 'son of God,' loved in his imperfection. This is a teaching tool offering insights that will deepen and mature over the years for both teacher and student.

My sense is that in the moral responsive approach, combined with other ethical systems (bearing in mind Dr Russell's rehabilitation of the word 'evil'), we have a multi-strand approach that helps students think their way through some of the most urgent ethical and moral questions of our day, in ways that are relevant to their own lives.[35]

And this, surely, is a great gift and an ethics for the future perhaps?

Nikolai Blaskow
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For further insights and a Senior Student Ethics Unit on *The Dark Knight Trilogy* and *Dead Man Walking*, see: Nikolai Blaskow, 'Beyond Death and Judgement: An Ethics Unit for Senior Students Using Film,' in *Dialogue Australasia*, Issue 30, November 2013, 13-20, also accessible at www.dialogueaustralasia.org under Resources.

Endnotes

1 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, A Short Treatise on the Metaphysics of Tsunami (Michigan State University Press, 2015), 10.

2 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages,* Chapter 9, in *Collected Writings of Rousseau,* 7: 310.

3 Rousseau, 25.

4 Rousseau, 29.

5 Dupuy, 31.

6 Dupy, 32, drawing on the wisdom of Hans Jonas.

7 Dupuy, 40.

8 Dupuy, 35.

9 Claude Lanzmann admitted that he chose the name but "didn't understand what it meant... It is a word the rabbis found in the Bible after the war."

10 Dupuy, 43.

11 Dupuy, 43.

12 Dupuy, 44: ironically the B-29 bomber that carried the scientific team for studying the conditions and effects of the atomic explosion on 6th August 1945 was named 'Necessary Evil.'

13 An address of Anders, on being awarded the Adorno Prize, given in Frankfurt in 1983.

14 Dupuy, 51.

15 Dupuy, 33.

16 Dupuy here citing *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 1.

17 Dupuy, 53.

18 Dupuy, 53.

19 Sarah Bachelard, *Resurrection And Moral Imagination,* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 1.

20 *Etty Hillesum, Life and Letters*, (Henry Holt and Company, 1996).

21 This Yr 9 Resource is accessible on www.dialogueaustralasia.org under Resources

22 Ibid, 519 – Dr Phillip Knight, http://www.stoa.org.uk/topics/etty-hillesum/index.html, accessed 6 October, 2015.

23 Cited by John Dear in an article entitled 'Etty Hillesum's Inner Journey', January 26, 2010, *National Catholic Reporter*, http://ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/etty-hillesums-inner-journey, accessed 6 October 2015.

24 Alexandra Pleshoyano, 'Etty Hillesum: A Theological Hermeneutic in the Midst of Evil', in *Literature and Theology* Vol. 19:3 2005, 221-237.

25 This Yr 10 Resource is accessible on www.dialogueaustralasia.org under Resources

26 This idea came to me after many years of teaching Ancient History. I was always fascinated by how Pompey saw beyond the surface of the problem to its heart.

27 As I have pointed out to my students time and time again, it is often humanity's best intentions, its most earnest convictions and its sincerest outrage that wreaks more havoc than criminal acts.

28 I am indebted here to Sarah Bachelard – see note 19. Sarah speaks of a 'goodness that is distinct from what goes by the name of morality, which we receive as a gift' (85).

29 Sarah Bachelard, *Resurrection and Moral Imagination,* (Ashgate, 2014) 12.

30 Bachelard, 94.

31 Bachelard, 94ff., for an overview of *Dead Man Walking,* and 7ff for her account of the philosopher Raimond Gaita's encounter as a 17 year old with the nun who opened his mind to the reality of something 'more.'

32 By contrast, the prison Chaplain shows the emptiness of life lived out only in symbols.

33 Luke Russell, *Evil. A Philosophical Investigation* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 196-216. This is a very truncated overview, and I strongly recommend Russell's account.

34 Russell, 198.

35 It occured to me after a whole day of discernment with Dr Sarah Bachelard and the contemplative community of *Benedictus*, Canberra (wonderful resources to be found on www.benedictus.com.au), that another avenue of investigation would be to explore how meditation, indeed the contemplative life as a practice of life – steeped in vulnerability – might be used more intentionally in nurturing the kind of openness to reality and truth that is so essential to the moral responsive approach.

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