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LIVING WITH MYSTERY: VIRTUE, TRUTH, AND PRACTICE

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Abstract. This paper examines how a person's life may be shaped by living with a sense of the mystery of reality. What virtues, if any, are encouraged by such a sense? The first section rehearses a radical 'doctrine of mystery', according to which reality as it anyway is, independently of human perspectives, is ineffable. It is then argued that a sense of mystery may provide 'measure' for human lives. For it is possible for a life to be 'consonant' with this sense – through exercising humility, for example – and even to emulate mystery. A further section corrects a misunderstanding about the connection between a sense of mystery and the virtues it invites, while a final section considers the relationship between living with mystery and religious faith.

The words 'living with mystery' may be heard in various ways. Maybe they suggest something like living with insomnia or some other unwelcome circumstance with which, nevertheless, a person defiantly copes. This, it seems, is how Albert Camus's Sisyphus lived with the 'absurd' situation of having to believe and act in a world that is unknowable, that keeps silent when questioned.[1] Or perhaps a person lives with the mystery of things as do a couple of newly-weds who decide that, yes, they can live with the wallpaper in their new house. It's nothing to enthuse about, but it can be tolerated and with any luck ignored until something better can be afforded. To live with mystery in this sense is to put up with it, perhaps put it out of mind.

But when someone speaks of living with animals, say, or with music, the reference is probably to a life led in intimate association with them – a life to a degree shaped and guided by a relationship to them. And this is sort of way I want the phrase 'living with mystery' to be heard. What

[1] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. J. O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1975), pp. 23f.

might it be for a life to be properly responsive to – shaped and guided by – a sense of mystery? How if at all might certain virtues – like humility – take their place in such a life? And would it be a life with a character that invites the label 'religious'? These are the questions I ask in this paper.

A DOCTRINE OF MYSTERY

In order to provide these questions with a context, I need to explain what I have in mind by 'a sense of mystery', and what indeed the mystery is with which one is to live. So I'll briefly rehearse 'a doctrine of mystery' that I have defended in some detail in a number of earlier publications.[2]

The central claim of the doctrine is, quite simply, that reality as such – as it 'anyway' is, irrespective of human perspectives – is ineffable and mysterious. Here, 'mysterious' should be taken in a strong sense. The point is not that, due to our limited intelligence and resources, reality may for ever lie beyond our ken. It is, rather, that in principle no account of the world that we or other imaginable creatures might ever provide could count as a description of reality as such. Reality is not 'discursable', to speak with Kant: it is radically and inevitably ineffable.

This claim is entailed, in my view, by the rejection of two rival positions that, between them, exhaust the alternatives to a doctrine of mystery. First, there is the 'absolutist' view that there is indeed a way reality anyway is and that this is something which, in principle at least, can be articulated – by natural science perhaps, if not today's then an 'ideal' one of the future. Second, there is the 'humanist' view that while the world can indeed be described, this is only 'a human world' – one that, as Camus put it, is inevitably 'stamped' with a human 'seal'.

I've argued elsewhere that absolutism and humanism are each a combination of truth and error. The humanist is right to hold that description is necessarily of 'a human world', for any description cannot but reflect human interests, purposes and perspectives. 'You can't', as William James wrote, 'weed out the human contribution'.[3] Humanists err, however, in maintaining that the human world is all that there is. There is reality beyond the human. Absolutists are quite right, therefore, to recognize

[2] See David E. Cooper, *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); 'Life and Meaning', *Ratio*, 18 (2005), 125-37; and 'Mystery, World and Religion', in *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason*, ed. John Cornwall and Michael McGhee (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 51-62.

[3] William James, 'Pragmatism and Humanism', in *The Writings of William James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 449-60 (p. 455).

this, but they err in supposing that this reality is discursable and effable. That it is ineffable is guaranteed by the humanist's correct insistence that nothing could be describable which purported to be entirely free from the human contribution, showing no sign of the human seal.

There is, if I'm right, just one way out of the impasse created once absolutism and humanism are both rejected. This is to embrace a doctrine of mystery – to hold that there is a reality beyond the human, but for that very reason a mysterious reality. Why maintain, however, that there is this mysterious reality? The answer, crudely, is that it is impossible to live or cope with the supposition that the human world is all that there is. To suppose this is to think that one's beliefs, commitments and purposes are subject, finally, to no measure beyond, in Sartre's words, 'principles man himself ordains'.[4] But this thought, I suggest, is a piece of hubristic posturing. Genuinely to be committed to beliefs and aims requires a sense that these are answerable to what is beyond the human. A belief or value which cheerfully acknowledges that it is simply the product of human ordinance or convention is bogus. And it is a type of arrogance to imagine that human beings possess the self-sufficiency to do without a sense of answerability to what is not of their own making.

This hubris of posture is matched by a different style of hubris on the part of absolutists. Theirs, quite simply, is the conceit of supposing that human beings possess the capacity to transcend their condition so as to attain an objective vision of reality free from the human contribution – a capacity to soar above all purposes and perspectives.

A doctrine of mystery, by contrast, is doubly blessed with humility. For to assent to it is to abandon the two hubristic pretensions – first, to a capacity to know and describe reality as it anyway is, and second to an ability to live without a sense of answerability and measure. Humility and hubris, so understood, are something of terms of art. But there are good precedents for my use of them. Nietzsche, for example, decried the (absolutist's) 'arrogant pride' in supposing we possess an 'organ of truth' enabling knowledge of reality as such, while Thomas Nagel condemns the (humanist's) 'lack of humility' in supposing that the world is simply 'our world', the human world.[5] As these and other precedents suggest, my

[4] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. P. Mairet (London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 55-6.

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, trans. D. Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1979), p. 80; Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 109.

use of 'humility' and related terms is, moreover, intelligibly connected to everyday uses. Indeed, it had better be – if a sense of mystery is able, as I claim it is, to give shape to a life in which virtues, like humility, have their place.

Someone will wonder, of course, how a sense of mystery in my strong sense of the term can guide or shape *anything*. If nothing can be said about the mystery which is beyond the human, how could appealing to it possibly yield any measure of human life? One would expect this scepticism from the scientific realists and humanists whom I have been criticizing – but doubts of a similar kind are also expressed, as we will now see, from quarters more hospitable to some aspects of my approach.

THEISM AND MYSTERY

In a number of recent books, John Cottingham has argued for a Christian, or at any rate theistic, conception of reality on grounds not dissimilar to those I have given for a doctrine of mystery.[6] I have found it helpful to compare and contrast my position with his, and doing so certainly helps to prepare my case for the contribution that a sense of mystery may make to a good life.

Just as I argue for a reality that is beyond the human, so Cottingham urges the existence of a 'transcendent', indeed 'supernatural' reality that cannot be reduced to the world that is experienced through ordinary perception and explored by natural science (pp. 47, 78). And he does so on the basis of rejecting rival alternative conceptions that have easily discernible affinities to what I dubbed 'absolutism' and 'humanism'. Of particular interest is his rejection of 'secular naturalism' and an associated 'relativism' about value on the grounds that these are incapable of accommodating, or even making sense of, profound and abiding human aspirations. These are the 'basic human responses', 'deep yearnings', 'sensibilities and impulses' that inform and motivate our aesthetic, moral and spiritual lives (pp. 13, 15, 19). Naturalists and relativists, to be sure, pretend to be able to accommodate such responses – to make room, for instance, for humility, gratitude, love, wonder and beauty – as products of human commitments. But, precisely because they are no longer perceived as 'values we did not create' and as reflecting 'a perfection ...

[6] See, for example, John G. Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Why Believe?* (London: Continuum, 2009). Pages references in the text are to this second work.

not of our own making', these 'secular analogues' are 'inauthentic' and without a genuine 'power' to command allegiance (pp. 4, 15, 95). Like myself, Cottingham discerns in the pretence of naturalists and relativists a kind of hubris, an unrealistic and vainglorious 'dream of autonomy and self-sufficiency' (p. 3), for it is the pretence to live without a sense of humanity's subjection to objective measure.

This measure, for Cottingham, is provided by the God of Christian and perhaps other theistic creeds. 'For the theist ... God himself is in his essential nature merciful, compassionate' and possessed of other virtues, so that when we act virtuously 'we are drawn closer to God, the source of our being, and the source of all that is good' (p. 41). As this remark implies, the theist is able to know at least some aspects of God's 'essential nature'. His God is, in certain essentials, entirely effable. And Cottingham is explicit that the unknowable divine reality of mystics cannot provide the measure we are unable to do without. 'There has to be at least something that can be validly said of God', if He is to command devotion and to be recognized as the source of the good (p. 65).

So, despite the affinities between my position and John Cottingham's, there is this difference: he is a theist, I am not. I subscribe to a doctrine of mystery; he does not. My 'beyond the human' is insufficiently discursable to count as Cottingham's divine source of the good. His God, meanwhile, is too discursable to count, for me, as beyond 'the human world'.

But it is not the respective metaphysical merits, as it were, of the two positions that is my present concern. This, rather, is with whether Cottingham is right to deny that a doctrine of mystery can provide measure and guidance for our lives. Is he right to hold that only a theistic framework 'provides a secure home' for such attitudes as 'humility, hope, awe, and thankfulness' (p. 163)? Is he right to take me to task, albeit politely, for imagining that the ineffable 'impersonal flux' to which Buddhists refer might 'find a genuine place' for such attitudes (p. 170)? In the following sections, I hope to show he is not right.

CONSONANCE AND EMULATION

In this section, I propose that mystery may find a place for virtues such as humility and compassion in two ways. First, the exercise of these virtues is *consonant* with a life informed by a *sense* of mystery. Second, their exercise might intelligibly be held to *emulate* what is mysterious. In the following section, I protect these proposals by challenging a modern

conception of moral philosophising different from an older one more congenial to proposals like mine.

I urged earlier that a sense of mystery is 'in the truth', for the absolutism and humanism to which a doctrine of mystery is the sole alternative are untenable accounts of reality. People should, I'm going to assume, try to live 'in the truth' – to lead lives that are consonant with what they take to be an authentic sense of how things are. Now it is obvious, I think, that various attitudes, ambitions and stances are *not* consonant with a sense of mystery. Instead, they are ones consonant with absolutist or humanist doctrines. They are not consonant with a sense of mystery since they occlude, or otherwise cause to atrophy, this sense.

These dissonant stances are ones that are marked by one or other form of the hubris referred to earlier. Consider, first, what might be dubbed the Promethean stance that is the natural associate of the robust humanism according to which human beings are answerable to nothing but their own schemes, commitments and the tables of values they themselves have constructed. The Promethean stance is one of admiration for the alleged virtues of strong commitment, self-sufficiency, creativity, autonomy, authenticity and individuality. It is these virtues, as the Promethean sees it, that properly chime with – are consonant with – the true relationship of human beings to their world. As the free producers of this world, and of the truths and values to be found there, human beings must admire above all else the virtues of creative production. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that it is in philosophical tendencies like existentialism or constructivism, with their insistence that a human world is all that there is, that these virtues are prominent.

Consider, next, the 'scientistic' stance which is the natural bedfellow of absolutism in its currently most fashionable form, that of scientific realism. The scientistic stance is one that privileges a natural scientific account of the world, thereby encouraging reductions of the world so as to fit this account – a reduction, for instance, of living beings to 'vehicles for genes'. It is a stance which promotes a host of evaluative attitudes – impatience, for example, with scruples about the individuality of animals that might obstruct genetic engineering programmes of shunting genes around from one species to another. The scientistic hero is the detached, objective enquirer, entirely free of sentimentality – of, that is, feelings and responses which, while they may once have been of adaptive advantage, have no place in cool, rational examination of what people should do. For the scientistic mind, sentimentality and allied vices are vices precisely

because of their dissonance with the natural scientific appreciation of how the world objectively and ultimately is.

And now consider, by contrast, a stance more consonant with a sense of mystery. Prominent in this stance is *humility*. For humility is the antidote to the hubris apparent in the Promethean and scientistic stances. The person who lives with a sense of mystery is free, for a start, from Promethean confidence in people's capacity to achieve autonomy and self-sufficiency and to live honestly and well through the pursuit of these. This is the dangerous pretence or posture that, as he recounts, the nature writer Richard Mabey came to reject. He describes how 'disorientating' he eventually found the pressure to exercise individuality, freedom and 'choice' that these alleged virtues exert. Indeed, it is 'a block to more spontaneous, organic changes'. More important than 'choice', he realized, was 'to find a way of "fitting" ... [of] going with the flow' of things. It was when he succeeded in re-engaging with the flow of the natural world – with, say, the rhythm of bird migrations – and in regaining a way of 'fitting' with it, that Mabey emerged from a severely depressed condition.[7]

If the humble person is liberated from Promethean pretensions, so he or she is from the arrogant scientistic elevation of a particular view of reality. For someone possessed of a sense of mystery, the natural sciences provide an important, yet parochial account of the world, with no greater title to objectivity than countless other possible accounts – accounts reflecting concerns and ambitions very different from those of the natural sciences. This person is thereby freed, as well, from a hubristic confidence in an allegedly unsentimental, forthrightly technological management of the world, and of the beings which belong in it, that the parochial account serves to motivate.

Liberation from Promethean and scientistic pretensions attests to an appreciation on the part of the humble person of a dependence on what is neither of human making nor within the compass of human knowledge and discourse. This is not the sense of dependence experienced by the theist – the Sufi adept, say, or a disciple of Kierkegaard – who regards himself as 'nothing' in comparison with his God. But it is an appreciation, nevertheless, of a radical dependence inspired by recognition of the relationship of human beings to reality.

Here, then, is how a virtue – humility – may be consonant with a sense of mystery and, in this respect, be found a place by a doctrine of mystery.

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[7] Richard Mabey, *Nature Cure* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005), p. 74.

Might living with mystery also find a place for this and other virtues through *emulating* the reality of which the mystic has a sense? A negative answer to this question, we saw, is given by theists, like Cottingham, for whom it is only a 'person-like' God that human beings can emulate or 'draw close' to, by manifesting, however imperfectly, the virtues which God pre-eminently possesses.

I don't have the space to make good the suggestion that there can also be emulation of what is mysterious and ineffably beyond the human. But there would, surely, be something itself smacking of hubris in dismissing an idea that has been central to several spiritual traditions. Neo-Platonists, for example, maintained that the ascetic, disciplined and intellectual life brought a person closer to the Good or the One – to the ineffable source of everything – than a sybaritic, lax and sensuous life. This is because the former life is freer from immersion in and subjection to matter. And while nothing positive can be asserted about the One, it is nevertheless legitimate to assert that it is nothing material.

Daoism, perhaps, provides the best example of a spiritual dispensation that calls for the good life, that of the sage, to emulate the impersonal, and ineffable, Way of reality. The 'constant' Way – *dao* – cannot, as the opening chapter of the *Daodejing* reminds its readers, be spoken of, but the authors of the text concede, indeed stress, that one may say what *dao* is not. As the wellspring of everything, it cannot be bound by anything outside itself and is therefore without any obstacles to overcome and devoid of partiality and aggressive purpose. *Dao*, therefore, invites figurative description as 'gentle', 'spontaneous', and 'non-contending'. And these are precisely the terms that name the Daoist virtues. The sage adopts the way of *wu wei*, literally 'non-action', but in effect a spontaneous, responsive style of living that eschews the rules and goals that constrain most people's behaviour and encourage them to be aggressive and contentious.[8]

I find nothing absurd, nothing to dismiss out of hand, in the neo-Platonist's or the Daoist's sense that some lives are close to, indeed to a degree emulate, the way of reality – the way of the One, the way of the Way. A desire to draw close to one's God is not the only form in which people manifest a yearning to experience a unity with the reality that encompasses them. (One thinks of the contemporary rhetoric of

[8] On Daoist spontaneity and other virtues, see David E. Cooper, *Convergence with Nature: A Daoist Perspective* (Dartington: Green Books, 2011), which draws on A.C. Graham's Introduction to his *Chuang Tzu: Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).

recapturing a lost 'oneness' with nature.) And if I'm right not to dismiss these and many other comparable views, then here is another potential strategy for finding a place for virtues within a doctrine of mystery.

INFERENCE AND RESPONSE

But here is a predictable challenge to my attempt to find a place for virtues within such a doctrine. Surely, someone will urge, it is perfectly possible to concede that there is mystery – and to reject the absolutist and humanist alternatives – but then sensibly to ask whether one's life should be humble, compassionate and so on. Equally, it is possible to sympathize with, say, Daoist metaphors of the Way, but to deny that any particular practices and attitudes are entailed by them.

This challenge reflects the characteristically modern conception of moral philosophy as a process of inference. The moral philosopher is someone who *argues* – who, having established or assumed certain truths, infers from these that such-and-such actions or attitudes are morally required. Since I have produced no sound argument to the effect that acceptance of certain virtues is entailed by a sense of mystery, I have therefore failed, according to the modern conception of moral philosophy, to find a place for these virtues.

This challenge, however, would leave unmoved the ancient philosophers of mystery who inspire my own approach. It is often remarked that, for the ancients, philosophy was primarily 'a way of life' or a spiritual dispensation, and what is intended here is that the decisive aim of philosophy is not the production of sound arguments or inferences, but the transformation of human practice and feeling. Hence the emphasis – puzzling to the modern philosophical mind – placed by many of these thinkers on 'spiritual exercises' and disciplines of the body as ingredients in the philosophical life.

The Daoist, Buddhist or Neo-Platonic thinker did not first provide an account of reality and then *argue* or *demonstrate* that a certain life is therefore mandatory. Instead, he provided a vision that, if properly absorbed – 'deeply cultivated', as Buddhists put it – would have, as a natural response to it, a certain attunement and comportment towards the world. Indeed, the failure of the appropriate response on somebody's part would be sufficient reason to suppose that he or she has *not* fully absorbed or internalized the vision of reality. For example, the Buddhist doctrine that, in reality, there is only 'not self' has not been deeply

cultivated by someone who fails to exercise compassion, for its exercise belongs to the very understanding of the doctrine. Virtue and wisdom, in dispensations like Buddhism, are inseparable: the vicious prove their lack of wisdom, while the wise necessarily manifest the virtues.

A virtue, then, is consonant with a doctrine of mystery, not because it is entailed by it, but because it is naturally felt to chime with it – to be a natural response to it – by someone in whom this sense goes deep. It is reasonable to speak, here, of the response being natural for, according to the ancient dispensations, what drops away when a sense of mystery goes deep, are various artificial obstacles to the life of virtue. The arrogance and hardness that infect our treatment of human beings and other living beings are the products of societies in which a true vision of the way of things has been occluded – by febrile economic pursuits, for example, or the hegemony of the natural sciences in our educational systems. When this vision is retrieved, these obstacles to the life of virtue wither away. A sense of mystery, one might say, *finds* room for the virtues by *making* room for them – by clearing from the soul or mind of a person the clutter of prejudices, ambitions, and 'wrong views' that have been denying air and space to the virtues.

The sage in these ancient traditions is not an expert in ethical ratiocination or casuistry, not an axiological genius who deduces what to do from how things are. Rather, the sage is one in whom the truth of things has so deeply penetrated that, spontaneously and naturally, he or she lives a life of virtue consonant with this truth. The sage succeeds in making room for the virtues in a doctrine of mystery, not through constructing a sound argument, but through clearing a space in which people may appropriately respond to a sense of mystery and live in natural consonance with it.

MYSTERY, RELIGION, FAITH

In this final section, I ask whether to live with mystery is to live religiously. My aim in raising this question is not to get stuck into perennial disputes about the meaning of 'religious', but to provide a context for adding some further strokes to my sketch of what it is to live with mystery.

A person does not qualify as religious simply through assenting to a doctrine of mystery and endorsing the kind of argument for mystery that I rehearsed earlier. But, then, nor does someone qualify as religious simply through assenting to the proposition that God exists and

endorsing the ontological or cosmological argument for His existence. I agree, once more, with John Cottingham when he writes that 'patterns of behaviour and affective response' are 'a more significant indicator of the difference between atheism and theism' than acceptance or rejection of 'abstract metaphysical claims' (p. 164). And, more generally, I would endorse Gordon Graham's judgement that 'religion is primarily a way of living life' and 'letting it be shaped' in certain ways.[9]

My question therefore becomes this: is there enough in a life informed by a sense of mystery – in its practices and attitudes, in its shape – for this life to count as a religious one? Clearly there are aspects of this life which incline one towards applying the label – the exercise of such virtues of humility and compassion, an acute sense of dependence on what is supernatural or beyond the human, and a yearning to emulate the Way that is the source of the world. But there is an ingredient so far missing – one that some people would argue is essential in a life that could legitimately be described as religious. This is *faith*.

These people would include Kierkegaard, who argued vigorously that purely natural, rational religion is not really religion at all – precisely because of its denial of a place for faith. It is faith, arguably, that constitutes the tie to something beyond oneself that is implicit in the very term 'religion'. It won't follow, though, that this faith has to be, as it was for Kierkegaard, unfounded belief in a personal God. Indeed, it won't follow that faith must take the form of belief at all – not at any rate if the belief in question is detachable from (or only contingently connected to) the patterns of behaviour and response, the way of living a life, in terms of which, we just saw, religion is primarily to be characterized.

To elucidate the notion of faith, it is more promising, perhaps, to turn from a vocabulary of belief to one of resolve and confidence – of resolute confidence, if you like. And I want to suggest that there are at least two (related) modes of faith, understood as resolute confidence, which are entirely consonant with – or even integral to – a sense of mystery. If that's so, then the requirement of faith does not exclude living with mystery from the domain of the religious.

The first mode is a resolute confidence that, with sufficient effort, engagement, openness and patience, a person may achieve an attunement to mystery sufficient for intimations of how one's life should go, of how

[9] Gordon Graham, 'Religion and Theology', in *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason*, ed. John Cornwall and Michael McGhee (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 217-30 (p. 229).

to respond to a sense of mystery. The confidence is that whether through virtuous practice, mindful attention, experience of art, engagement with nature, spiritual exercises or meditation, one will not be left perfectly *stumm* – without an inkling or intimation of mystery beyond the bare (metaphysical) thought that *there is* mystery.[10] Were a person left like that, mystery would, so to speak, have failed him so that, with some justification, he might join Camus's Sisyphus in shaking his fist at reality. It is the sage's resolve or calling to surrender or become permeable to intimations of mystery by being rid of the obstacles that occlude a lived appreciation of mystery. This is a resolve or calling that would have no sense in the absence of confidence, of faith.

The second mode of resolute confidence is a confidence or trust in certain people – those sages or heroes whose lives seem authentically to answer to, and be given shape by, their intimations of mystery. They are men and women whose lives strike one as models of attunement to, and consonance with, mystery. They may be big names – Gautama, Zhuangzi, Plotinus, Shankara, or whoever. But they need not be. The hero could be a personal friend, a teacher or someone working in your office. The hero need not even be a real person, for the life of a fictional character – from the pages of Dostoievsky, perhaps, or Hermann Hesse – might provide a model in which people feel drawn to invest confidence.

What makes reference to confidence, resolve and faith apposite in respect of these heroes is a person's willingness to go where they go even when he or she does not understand why the hero took this or that step. After all, if you could work out why the steps are taken – and what, exactly, the direction is – you would not require a hero to lead you. Faith in the hero is comparable to trust in the guide who takes you through unknown territory. So, for example, I may have no idea what to expect from some meditative practice, no grasp of how it might provide intimations of mystery. But I know it to be the practice of people I recognize as heroes – men and women whose demeanour, style, speech, expression, gestures, eyes, and comportment fill me with a confidence that their way goes somewhere, that it is a way worth following.

The two modes of resolute confidence are, as these last remarks suggest, related. It is partly because certain people are not, as far as I can discern, left *stumm* and empty-handed by a sense of mystery that I am

[10] These remarks draw on Michael McGhee's discussion of Buddhist 'faith' in his *Transformations of Mind: Philosophy as Spiritual Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

able to invest confidence in them as heroes or sages. Confidence in *them* is thereby confidence in receiving something in return for cultivating or surrendering to a sense of mystery.

A doctrine of mystery, then, can have room for kinds of faith. When set alongside the virtues consonant with a sense of mystery and dependence, and with a yearning to emulate the source of things, this faith renders living with mystery a form of religious life.

RELIGION AND THE MYSTERY OF EXISTENCE

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Abstract. This paper questions the idea that theism can function as an explanatory hypothesis to account for the nature and origins of the cosmos. Invoking God cannot dissolve the mystery of existence, and the characteristic religious response here is one of awe and humility. I then address David E. Cooper's challenge of showing how a 'doctrine of mystery' can have any discursible content. It is argued that certain aspects of our human experience (of the wonders of nature and art and the demands of morality) afford us glimpses of the divine nature – intimations of the transcendent, which shine through from the ineffable source of our being to the human world we inhabit.[1]

I. SECULARISM, SCIENCE, AND THE LIMITS OF EXPLANATION

Against all expectation, and in defiance of the naturalist orthodoxy that rules over much professional academic philosophy, religion is firmly back on the agenda in our contemporary intellectual culture. Despite the vehemence of today's militant atheists, indeed partly perhaps as a result of that very vehemence, many thinking people have begun to ask if the relentless secularism of the last few years may not have overreached itself. To be sure, it can be readily conceded to the militant critics that much institutionalised religion has been, and often still is, sectarian, intolerant,

[1] This paper takes further some of the themes in a presentation I gave in June 2011 at a one-day workshop at the University of Durham devoted to the work of David Cooper and myself, on the theme 'Mystery, Humility and Religious Practice'. I am most grateful to Guy Bennett-Hunter and Ian Kidd for their initiative in planning and organizing that event, and for their own contributions to the discussion on that occasion, from which I have learned much, as I have from perceptive questions and comments of the other participants in the workshop, not least David Cooper himself.

dogmatic (in the bad sense), corrupt, exploitative, and worse; but the sense remains among many thinking people that something precious remains beneath all the dross. What exactly is that precious something?

One way of answering this is by reference to the notion of the 'spiritual'. This term is often used in contemporary culture to refer to aspirations and sensibilities of an especially powerful and profound kind, that take us beyond our ordinary routine existence and afford a glimpse into something more rich and meaningful.[2] So a deep appreciation of the wonders of nature or the transforming qualities of great art may be described as bringing a 'spiritual' element into our lives. The 'depth' that is in question here is not easy to specify precisely, but it seems to have something to do with our human aspiration to 'transcend ourselves' – to seek for something beyond the gratifications and dissatisfactions of everyday living and locate our lives within a more enduring framework of meaning. Those who favour the term 'spiritual' perhaps intend to signal their commitment to some of these aspirations, while distancing themselves from the doctrinal assumptions or institutional structures of organized religion (this seems to be the point of the T-shirt reportedly seen on some campuses bearing the slogan 'I'm not religious but I'm spiritual'). But however it is labelled, the religious or 'spiritual' impulse cannot be entirely eradicated, for it seems to spring from yearnings deep within our nature that we cannot ignore – yearnings that cannot be satisfied by the brave new world of secularism, or by the onward march of scientific and technological progress.

It is not a question of turning the clock back to pre-enlightenment times: we all have reason to be deeply grateful to the clear light of scientific reason for freeing us from superstition and ignorance, as well as for contributing immeasurably to the quality of our lives (one only has to think of the debt so many of us or our loved ones owe to the advances of modern medicine and surgery). And indeed, not just in its practical benefits, but in the grandeur of its aspirations and the hard-won precision and rigour of its methods, science surely ranks among the very greatest achievements of the human spirit. But there is also something in the human spirit that reaches beyond what science can deliver. Even were science and technology to secure optimal conditions for a healthy and secure human existence, even were it to formulate covering laws that

[2] For more on this, see John Cottingham, 'Theism and Spirituality', forthcoming in V. Harrison, S. Goetz, and C. Taliaferro (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Theism*.

fully described the operation of the macro and micro worlds, and even were it to unify these laws with supreme simplicity and elegance into the elusive 'TOE', the grand 'Theory of Everything', it would still not be in our nature as human beings to draw a line and say 'So that wraps it all up, then!' As Blaise Pascal observed in the seventeenth century, 'l'homme passe l'homme' – 'man goes beyond himself', or 'humanity transcends itself'.[3] To be human is to see that we are somehow incomplete beings, advancing to a horizon that always recedes from view. And this is not a scientific, but a metaphysical or a religious truth about us. In the words of T. S. Eliot, writing in the depths of the Second World War, centuries away from the cultural milieu of Pascal yet sharing something of the restlessness of his religious vision: 'We shall not cease from exploration.'[4]

If you agree with me, or rather with Eliot and Pascal, that this kind of restlessness is at the heart of the religious impulse,[5] then it may seem somewhat surprising that many leading approaches in contemporary philosophy of religion tend to discuss religious belief in a way that bypasses it altogether. So far from conceiving the religious adherent as a restless pilgrim, reaching towards something mysterious that transcends the boundaries of human comprehension, many philosophers apparently see the believer as calmly and dispassionately accepting a precisely formulated hypothesis which does in principle the same kind of explanatory work as that found in science, except at a more general and abstract level. To be a theist, on this view, is to subscribe to 'the God hypothesis' (as its fierce detractor Richard Dawkins terms it),[6] namely the hypothesis that the universe came into being as a result of being willed to exist by an immortal, immaterial spirit with certain specified properties, including maximal power and knowledge. Given the nature of the universe as we find it, positing such a God is, according to the eminent philosopher of religion Richard Swinburne, the 'most probable explanation' of its existence.[7]

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[3] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* [c. 1660], ed. L. Lafuma (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), no. 131.

[4] T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' [1942], in *Four Quartets* [1945] (London: Faber, 1959), line 239.

[5] The thought is perhaps as old as humanity, and in any case goes back way before Pascal; compare St Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* [*Confessiones*, c. 398], Book I, Ch. 1.

[6] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Books, 2006), Ch. 2.

[7] '[T]he most probable explanation of the existence of the universe and its most general features is that they are caused by God. These most general features include the universal operation of simple laws of nature ... those laws and the initial (or boundary) conditions of the universe being such as to bring about the existence of human bodies, and humans being conscious beings , open to a finite amount of suffering and having

It is, I suppose, theoretically conceivable that further rational discussion will eventually settle the dispute between the opposing sides of the argument represented by the two thinkers just mentioned, Dawkins and Swinburne; but it has to be said that the present state of play appears to be a deadlock (in a sense, perhaps, the two sides are perfect foils for each other). One side maintains that modern science is the only valid method of investigating the nature and origins of the cosmos, and appears to look with genuine incomprehension and exasperation upon the interference of theologians and philosophers who presume to muddy the waters with their theistic speculations. The other side presumably feels baffled that their rigorous and meticulously deployed arguments for a personal creator fail to convince opponents that (as Swinburne puts it) 'the hypothesis of theism satisfies the criteria of correct explanation [simplicity, and ability to account for the relevant data] better than does any rival explanation'.[8]

It is no part of my purpose to denigrate this latter approach; anyone who reads Swinburne's work must acknowledge its philosophical integrity and the luminous clarity of the arguments offered. But I cannot help feeling, nonetheless, that the 'explanatory hypothesis' approach to God has little connection with the religious impulse as it typically operates in human life. I do not deny that some potential believers may be encouraged by the thought that certain features of the universe might seem to make God's existence more probable; but the restless 'transcendent' impulses of the kind I was discussing a moment ago in connection with Pascal and Eliot are not, it seems to me, of the kind to be satisfied by probabilistic calculations; they belong in an entirely different arena.

Speaking for my own part, I am inclined to agree with the Dominican writer Herbert McCabe, that 'to say that God created the world is in no way to eliminate the intellectual vertigo we feel when we try to think of the beginning of things'. 'Recognition of God's action', McCabe goes on, 'does not remove any mystery from the world.'[9] Or as he puts it

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some ability to bear it or alleviate it.' Richard Swinburne, 'God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe', in Anthony O'Hear (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 68 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3-24 (p. 11).

[8] Swinburne, 'God as the Simplest Explanation', p. 11.

[9] Herbert McCabe, *God and Evil in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* [1957] (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 102. Compare, in a rather different vein, the argument of William Charlton that there is no proper scope for the idea of a causal explanation of the universe itself. Charlton goes on to suggest that God's responsibility for the cosmos is more akin to

elsewhere: 'When we speak of God we do not clear up a puzzle, we draw attention to a mystery.'[10] It seems to me best to follow McCabe, and to start by accepting our helplessness in the face of the stupendous enigma that is the existing cosmos. The primal human existential response – of vertigo, of terror, of wonder, of awe – this (as I see it) is the well-spring of spirituality, the basis of the religious impulse. Or, if I may revert to 'Little Gidding', since no one I think has put it better than T. S. Eliot:

> You are not here to verify,
> Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity,
> Or to carry report. You are here to kneel ...[11]

Yet of course when we are operating in the mode of scientific inquiry, we are precisely here in order to verify and instruct ourselves. And the drive to understand, and to satisfy our human curiosity, is a wholly legitimate one: the pursuit of truth by means of the 'natural light' of reason, as René Descartes put it, is part of what we are here for. (Descartes himself followed a long tradition in regarding rationality and the thirst for knowledge as divinely bestowed endowments.) But Descartes (again following a long tradition) was *also* quite clear that the ultimate divine reality underlying the natural world is beyond human comprehension. God, for Descartes, is like a mountain which we can approach, and somehow touch in our thought, but which we can never encompass, can never put our arms round.[12] And it is this essential, and authentically religious, acknowledgement of the ultimate mysteriousness of reality that should, it seems to me, be our guide here.

For how much, after all, is really *explained* by supposing that the cosmos was created by a powerful and all-knowing immaterial spirit? Calling God 'immaterial', to begin with, solves nothing: our bafflement

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moral than to causal responsibility. See W. Charlton, 'The Doctrine of Creation', *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (July 2008), 620-31.

[10] McCabe, *God and Evil*, p. 128.

[11] Eliot, 'Little Gidding', lines 43-45.

[12] René Descartes, letter to Mersenne of 27 May 1630, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III, *The Correspondence*, transl. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch and A. Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, l991), p. 25: Just as we can 'touch a mountain but not put our arms around it', so 'we can know that God is infinite and all-powerful, even though our soul, being finite, cannot comprehend or conceive him'. The typical understanding of Descartes's approach to God as being based entirely on transparent rational reasoning is in my view something of a distortion; see further J. Cottingham, 'Sceptical Detachment or Loving Submission to the Good: Reason, Faith and the Passions in Descartes', *Faith and Philosophy*, 28:1 (January 2011), 44-53.

at how a divine being could exercise unlimited power throughout the cosmos, unconstrained by the limitations of time and space and place, shows, no doubt, that the deity cannot be conceived on the model of any physical object we can imagine; but to think that our understanding is somehow assuaged by pronouncing that the Deity is 'incorporeal' – a Cartesian-style ghost – is surely to delude oneself. Nicolas Malebranche seems to have been nearer the mark in his *Recherche de la Vérité* when he stressed how far the deity must wholly transcend any human conceptions. Just as we should not imagine God to be corporeal, Malebranche observed, so we should not really describe him as a Mind or Spirit, since that invites comparison with a human mind. Rather, Malebranche suggested, we should think that 'just as He contains within himself the perfections of matter without being material ... so He also comprehends the perfections of created spirits without being a mind, in the way we conceive of minds'.[13]

But the reasons why I think 'the God hypothesis' fails to count as an informative explanation run deeper. None of the features that puzzle us about reality – the mere fact of there being something rather than nothing, the baffling intricacy and organization of the cosmos, its mysterious ability to bring forth life, and eventually intelligence – none of this actually turns out to be less mysterious in virtue of positing God as its source. All that the theist is doing here is taking the baffling features – existence itself rather than non-existence, order rather than disorder, vivifying power and consciousness rather than their opposites – and inscribing them within a (divine) reality that is taken already to have those properties from eternity. It is not that there is anything intrinsically absurd in making such an assertion; on the contrary, if theism is true, that is indeed how reality is. But we should not mistake such a metaphysical declaration for a hypothesis with genuine explanatory power. If I am puzzled by the phenomenon of heat, or the fact of there being hot things at all, the puzzle will hardly be solved if someone triumphantly invokes an eternal primordial reality that is itself hot. Or consider this analogy from Platonic metaphysics: if we say that ants exist because they are patterned after the eternal Form of Anthood, or that ants owe their antlike properties to participation in the Form of Ant which itself eternally possesses the antlike properties in perfect and paradigmatic

[13] Nicolas Malebranche, *Recherche de la Vérité* [1674], Bk. 3, Ch. 9, final paragraph; transl. T. Lennon and P. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 251.

fashion, such a pronouncement, whatever its metaphysical merits (if any), cannot, on pain of circularity, discharge any explanatory burden in accounting for the reality of ants.[14]

But more important than this, the very attempt to close the book on the mystery of being seems somehow presumptuous. Indeed, the French philosopher and theologian Jean-Luc Marion makes an interesting case for the view that it amounts to idolatry:

> God cannot be seen, not only because nothing finite can bear his glory without perishing, but above all because a God that could be conceptually comprehended would no longer bear the title 'God'… God remains *God* only on condition that [our] ignorance be established and admitted definitively, Every thing in the world gains by being known – but God who is not of the world, gains by *not* being known conceptually. The idolatry of the concept is the same as that of the gaze, imagining oneself to have attained God and to be capable of maintaining him under our gaze, like a thing of the world. And the Revelation of God consists first of all in cleaning the slate of this illusion and its blasphemy. [15]

Marion's thought seems to be somewhat as follows. How convenient it would be for our sense of security and self-esteem if we really could 'wrap it all up': looking out at the night sky, at the silence of those infinite spaces that terrified Pascal,[16] we could calmly say: 'No problem about any of that: it's the work of an intelligent designer, a person, rather like us only much greater, but invisible and immaterial, who initiated the Big Bang, and structured the muons and neutrinos and all the rest so that in due course of time conscious beings like us would emerge.' Of course this is just how many theists would express their belief in God, and I'm not at all concerned to subvert that belief – far from it. What I am claiming, rather, is that it is a fundamental mistake to construe the adoption of such a religious framework as part of the same kind of explanatory or

[14] Compare the 'third man' argument against Plato's theory of Forms: Plato, *Parmenides* [c. 360 BC], 132 a-b. (The example in this passage actually concerns the form of largeness; Aristotle's reference to this type of argument as 'the third man' occurs in his *Metaphysics* [c. 325 BC], 990b17.)

[15] Jean-Luc Marion, 'In the Name: How to Avoiding Speaking of "Negative Theology"', in J. D. Caputo and M. J. Scanlon (eds), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 34, emphasis supplied. Marion's point has a long ancestry: compare St. Augustine's *Si comprehendis, non est Deus*, ('If you grasp him, he is not God.'), *Sermones* [392-430], 52, vi, 16 and 117, iii, 5.

[16] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* [1670], ed. L. Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1962), no. 206.

puzzle-solving enterprise as science – or anything remotely like it.[17] The molecular biologist Ursula Goodenough, in her remarkable book *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, strikes me as putting her finger on what is amiss about this way of construing belief in God, when she observes that 'the concept of a human-like creator of muons and neutrinos' has, for her, no meaning; it fails to resonate with anything that looks remotely like a piece of explanatory science. But secondly (and closer to what I had in mind about presumption), she remarks that such a construal of belief in God spoils her 'covenant with mystery'. For Goodenough, 'to assign attributes to Mystery is to disenchant it, to take away its luminance.'[18]

There seems to be something undeniably right about this. We find ourselves in a profoundly mysterious world, a world of strangeness and awesome power and luminescent beauty. That is our human lot. To be religious is to acknowledge this with a mixture of fear and exaltation and gratitude, not to wish it away, or vainly attempt to box it up or trim it down to something we can grasp and control and explain. If William James was right that 'the whole concern of religion is with the manner of our acceptance of the universe',[19] then I would say that the distinctively religious mode of acceptance is that of humility and awe before the tremendous mystery of being.

II. INTIMATIONS OF THE TRANSCENDENT

Those familiar with the work of David Cooper will readily perceive from the foregoing that there are several key points of contact in our respective outlooks. In many of his writings, including the paper in the present symposium,[20] Cooper underlines the importance of coming to terms with the mystery of existence, 'living with mystery', as he puts it. Only a 'doctrine of mystery', he argues, will avoid the twin and opposed

[17] By 'anything remotely like it', I include metaphysics of the kind that purports to offer (not mere conceptual classification or clarification but) a general description or explanation of the most fundamental aspects of reality. Compare Jonathan Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): the 'central concern' of metaphysics is with the 'fundamental structure of reality as a whole' (p. 3).

[18] Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 12.

[19] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902], Ch. 2 (London: Fontana, 1962), p. 58.

[20] David E. Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4/3 (2012), pp. 1-13.

pitfalls of 'humanism' and 'absolutism'. Humanism, succumbing to the fallacy of Protagoras ('Man is the measure of all things'),[21] takes it that there can be no reality beyond what is describable in human terms, and so falls into the 'hubristic posturing' which supposes we are not answerable to any values except those derived from human ordinance or convention. Absolutism, by contrast, falls into the arrogance of thinking we have the capacity to attain to an objective conception of reality that somehow transcends the human perspective – that we have some kind of hot-line to the Truth 'as it really is'. Avoiding these two extremes enables us to preserve our sense of mystery, thus giving 'shape to a life in which virtues, like humility, have their place'.[22]

Starting from this common ground, it is clearly possible to move in very different directions. In my own case, I find the stance of humility towards the 'mystery of being' fully compatible with mainstream Judaeo-Christian theism; while Cooper, in common with several interesting recent writers,[23] turns his back on this heritage and adopts a worldview informed by insights from Daoism and Buddhism. In the remainder of this paper, I should like to explore some of the problems that arise on each of these diverging paths, not in any spirit of polemicism (for anything like point-scoring would be highly distasteful in an area that touches people's deepest emotions and allegiances), but in order to try to get clearer on what is involved espousing these divergent religious outlooks.

The first problem is one for the theist. To insist on the mysteriousness of ultimate reality, to underline our inability to comprehend it or describe it in human discourse, seems to risk sliding into mere agnosticism or scepticism. Something like this point was put with devastating force by David Hume, in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, where he has Cleanthes asking 'How do you mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from sceptics or atheists, who assert

[21] The reference to Protagoras is mine, not Cooper's, but I think he would readily acknowledge the Protagorean view as typifying the pretensions of what he dubs 'humanism'. Protagoras's famous dictum is quoted in Plato, *Protagoras* [c. 390 BC] 80b1.

[22] Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 4.

[23] Other examples are Michael McGhee, *Transformations of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); André Comte-Sponville, *The Book of Atheist Spirituality* [*L'esprit de l'athéisme*, 2006] (London: Bantam, 2008); and Mark Johnston, *Saving God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). It would be an interesting study in the sociology of religion to explore the reasons or causes behind the rejection by these latter three philosophers, all brought up as Catholics, of the faith tradition in which they grew up, and their seeking solace elsewhere.

that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible?'.[24] Cleanthes goes on to say that such mystics 'are, in a word, *atheists without knowing it*'.[25] The use of the term 'atheist' here seems misleading, at least if transferred to a modern context, since we now take the typical atheist to be one who firmly denies the possible or actual existence of any divine reality 'behind' or 'beyond' the natural world, whereas the stance under discussion, that of awe and humility before the mystery of being, simply asserts that the ultimate reality is not comprehensible in human terms. But the main point of Hume's challenge remains: can the stance of uncomprehending awe coherently claim to have any genuine theistic content?

I think we can begin to see our way out of this conundrum if we take seriously Ursula Goodenough's observation that the role of religion is to provide a kind of integration of cosmology and morality.[26] Each of the great world religions appears to address two fundamental concerns: firstly how the universe came to be, and secondly what is our place within it and how we should live our lives. I have argued elsewhere that in a proper understanding of religion the second of these questions has priority over the first – in other words that we need to accept 'primacy of praxis' over theory when it comes to understanding what it is to be religious.[27] To put the matter more explicitly: religious allegiance, I would suggest, is not primarily a matter of intellectual assent to certain explanatory hypotheses about the nature or origins of the cosmos, or the acceptance of certain metaphysical claims about ultimate reality, but involves above all (to borrow some much misunderstood notions of Wittgenstein) a 'passionate commitment', which is inextricably bound up with a certain 'form of life'.[28] The collective evidence of Scripture, which is a rich source for our grasp of what is involved in religious allegiance, is pretty clear

[24] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [c. 1755; first published posthumously, 1779], Part IV, §1; ed. H. D. Aiken (New York: Haffner, 1948), p. 31.

[25] Hume, *Dialogues*, Part IV, §3. (ed. Aitken, p. 32).

[26] Goodenough, *Sacred Depths of Nature*, p. xiv.

[27] See John Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Ch. 4.

[28] For a conspectus of the many passages where Wittgenstein discusses the importance of activity and 'forms of life', see H-J. Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 124-9. For the notion of 'passionate commitment', see L. Wittgenstein, MS 136 [1947], in *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 73. For some of the misunderstandings of these texts, in particular the tendency to interpret Wittgenstein's view of religion as entirely non-cognitivist, see J. Cottingham, 'The Lessons of Life: Wittgenstein, Religion and Analytic Philosophy', in H-J. Glock and J. Hyman (eds),

on this point: the divine call is chiefly heard as a moral and practical as opposed to a theoretical or purely cognitive one. The reality which the patriarchs and prophets of the Hebrew Bible and the key protagonists of the New Testament are made aware of is one that calls them to change their lives, to follow a certain path of righteousness, to hear the cry of the oppressed, to love one another, to forgive those who have wronged them, and so on through a long catalogue of luminous moral insights that form the living core of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.[29]

The upshot of this in theological terms is that however great the mystery of the divine nature may be, however much God is 'invisible', unable to be seen – or even named[30] – by humankind, this much (in the Abrahamic tradition) is clear and central: God requires of us righteousness and mercy. To this extent God is, to use David Cooper's term, 'discursable' – that is, there has to be something that can validly be said of God (and Cooper is quite correct in supposing that this is indeed my view).[31] But how can the ineffable divine reality that transcends the human and natural worlds be, at least in its moral aspect, discursable? For those who subscribe to the three great Abrahamic faiths, the gap between the ineffable and the discursable is bridged by revelation; and indeed for the Christian, that discursability is offered in specifically human terms, through the Incarnation. To sceptical critics this may seem to be a fideistic retreat that puts the whole matter beyond rational philosophical discussion; but before I close by tackling this worry, I want to turn briefly to a different but in some ways parallel problem that besets the alternative worldview espoused by Cooper.

The idea, canvassed a moment ago, that religion characteristically integrates the cosmological and the moral domains, raises the following question about impersonalist outlooks such as Buddhism and Daoism: if reality is simply a ceaseless flow of conditions that arise and pass away, and if individual selves have no real existence, but are merely an illusion arising from temporary configurations within that never-ending flow,

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Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy: Essays for P.M.S. Hacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 203-227.

[29] This paragraph is from my paper 'Conversion, Self-Discovery and Moral Change', forthcoming in I. Dalferth (ed.), *Conversion*, Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

[30] Compare the famous passage in the Hebrew Bible (Exodus 3:14), when God refuses to name himself to Moses, saying only *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, 'I am that I am.'

[31] Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 5.

then why should any particular moral response be demanded of us? It is of course true that the Buddha and other eastern sages enjoined compassion; but they also pointed to the need to escape from the suffering that is inseparable from the endless cycle of coming to be and perishing. So is not entirely clear on this view why an active life of helping others, for example, or a determination to fight for justice, should be incumbent upon us any more than, for example, simply cultivating a trance-like state of detachment.

In a sensitive passage in which he takes up something like this worry, Cooper suggests that the Daoist sage will lead a life that somehow 'emulates the ineffable'. In other words, he will bring his own life into line with an ultimate reality that resists all confining and classification:

> As the wellspring of everything [*dao*] cannot be bound by anything outside itself, and is therefore without any obstacles to overcome, and devoid of partiality and aggressive purpose. *Dao*, therefore, invites figurative description as 'gentle', 'spontaneous' and 'non-contending' ... The sage adopts the way of *wu wei*, literally 'non-action', but in effect a spontaneous, responsive style of living that eschews the rules and goals that constrain most people's behaviour and encourage them to be aggressive and contentious.[32]

Cooper readily acknowledges that this does not amount to a demonstrative argument that a certain kind of life is mandatory for the Daoist; but he suggests that one who is attuned to the nature of reality disclosed by the Daoist worldview will naturally and spontaneously tend to respond with this kind of gentle comportment towards the world and towards one's fellows.

By their fruits shall ye know them. It would be absurd, as well as distasteful, to try to disparage such a vision on philosophical grounds; the worth of a religion must be tested, in large part, by looking at the lives of its practitioners. And in any case, the appeal of the respective types of worldview, theistic versus impersonalist, cannot in my view be properly evaluated in an academic discussion, any more than one could evaluate the merits of marriage versus priestly celibacy from the outside, by clinically inspecting the theoretical assumptions of each form of life. To appreciate a form of life and its associated worldview one has to understand how it is shaped from the inside – how the multiple,

[32] Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 8.

mutually reinforcing strands of practice and thought and emotion and interpersonal interaction combine to condition, slowly and gradually, one's passage through life. But what can perhaps be said, looking at the Buddhist and Daoist pictures from within the alterative presuppositions of the theistic outlook, is that it is fearfully hard to see how morality can retain its normative resonance and power if it is severed from the idea of *personal response* that is so central to traditional (Judaeo-Christian) theism: the face-to-face encounter that reveals us to each other not as mere temporary eddies in a ceaseless flow of changing conditions, but as unique beings, loved into existence, and bearing ultimate responsibility for every single act or failure to act that marks out our short time here.

Let me come finally to the problem of the transition, on the theistic picture, from ineffable ultimate reality to the idea of the divine as discursable – discursable, that is, in so far as it is taken to be wholly good and just and merciful, and to require a corresponding moral response from each of us. Can that transition be made only by reliance on revelation, which in turn involves a long jump beyond reason into the domain of pure faith? This of course is far too vast a topic to be explored properly at this closing stage of the argument (though I have started to tackle it in other work).[33] Let me just say this: that the theistic picture is often, I think, unfairly lumbered with a false dichotomy: *either* we have to rely on the impartially assessable arguments of natural theology which ought, if they are worth their salt, to give us transparent truths about God that command the assent of any rational inquirer; *or* we have to depend on miraculous supernatural revelation, the evidence for which is by its nature likely to be questionable, or unlikely to convince the detached scientific assessor, and which therefore has to be accepted on faith.

The way out of this dilemma, I suggest, is to see that there many aspects of our human experience that function, if you will, as a kind of *bridge* between two types of evidence: the neutral, scientifically evaluable data that is available via the use of our ordinary natural faculties, and the more controversial disclosures that seem to depend on divine intervention or the gracious bestowal of something extraordinary and special. As examples of this kind of intermediate or 'bridging' evidence, consider the 'transcendent' moments that very many people will from time to time have experienced – the times when the drab, mundane pattern of

[33] See the final section of John Cottingham, 'The Source of Goodness', in Harriet Harris (ed.), *God, Goodness and Philosophy* (London: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 49-62.

our ordinary routines gives way to something vivid and radiant, and we seem to glimpse something of the beauty and significance of the world we inhabit. Wordsworth expressed it as follows, in a famous passage in *The Prelude*:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> That with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A renovating virtue, whence – depressed
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
> In trivial occupations, and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse – our minds
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
> A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
> That penetrates, enables us to mount,
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.[34]

What 'lifts us up' is the sense that our lives are not just a disorganized concatenation of contingent episodes, but that they are capable of fitting into a pattern of meaning, where responses of joy and thankfulness[35] and compassion and love for our fellow creatures are intertwined; and where they make sense because they reflect a splendour and a richness that is not of our own making. Notice that this kind of 'transfiguration' is not a 'religious experience', if that latter term is understood in the rather narrow way that has become common in our culture, when philosophers speak, for example, of the 'argument from religious experience'. What is often meant under this latter heading is some kind of revelation which is taken to be evidence for, or to validate, the supposed truths of some particular creed or cult – a vision of the Virgin Mary, for example, or the sense, reported by William James, of 'the close presence of a sort of mighty person'.[36] This kind of notion is I think uppermost in many people's minds when they insist that they have never had a 'religious

[34] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 12, 208-218 [1805 edition].

[35] Interestingly, David Cooper has written of the need to allow ourselves to experience natural beauty as a gift: 'allowing things to be experienced as the "gifts" they are'. This seems to imply a thankfulness not entirely in place for those espousing a neutral and impersonalist world view – unless the inverted commas around 'gift' signal merely that as the world is to be experienced as if it were a gift. See David E. Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 160.

[36] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Ch. 3, p. 75 (reporting the experience of one of his correspondents).

experience'. By contrast, the kinds of 'transcendent' experience described by Wordsworth and many other writers involve not so much a revelation of supernatural entities, but rather a heightening, an intensification, that transforms the way in which we experience the world. The term 'transcendent' seems appropriate not in the sense that there is necessarily an explicit invocation of metaphysical objects that transcend ordinary experience, but rather because the categories of our mundane life undergo a radical shift: there is a sudden irradiation that discloses a beauty and goodness, a meaning, that was before occluded.[37]

Many other examples could be given, including the 'sacred' dimension in works of great music, of which Roger Scruton has eloquently spoken;[38] another important case is the sense of awe which Immanuel Kant and many others have felt before the majesty of the moral law, which seems to demand our allegiance irrespective of our personal inclinations or desires.[39] In these and many other cases, we experience what I would call *natural intimations of the transcendent*. They are, if you like, natural glimpses of the divine, which shine through from the ineffable source of our being to the human world we inhabit.[40]

Nothing, of course, compels us to interpret them that way. The philosophy of the past two or three hundred years has seen an increasing determination to try to 'desacralize' such experiences, to deny that they give us access to an eternal and objective source of meaning and value, and to reduce them instead to mere endogenous disturbances, subjective by-products of biological or evolutionary processes, or projections stemming from merely human convention or conditioning. Such reductive strategies are often deployed with fearsome philosophical

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[37] This paragraph is taken from my 'Confronting the Cosmos: Scientific Rationality and Human Understanding', forthcoming in *Proceedings of the ACPA* (Philosophy Documentation Center), (August 2012). For further development of these notions, see my *Why Believe*? (London: Continuum, 2009), passim.

[38] Describing the experience of a great work of music, Scruton speaks of 'sacred' moments, moments 'outside time, in which the deep loneliness and anxiety of the human condition is overcome', and 'the human world is suddenly irradiated from a point beyond it'. Roger Scruton, 'The Sacred and the Human' (2010) <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/gifford/2010/the-sacred-and-the-human> [accessed 30 March 2010].

[39] See I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* [*Kritik der Practischen Vernunft*, 1788], transl. T. K. Abbott (London: Longmans, 1873, 6th edn 1909), antepenultimate paragraph.

[40] See further John Cottingham, 'Human Nature and the Transcendent', in C. Sandis and M. Cain (eds), *Human Nature*. Royal Institute of Philosophy supplement (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

ingenuity, but it is doubtful if they can survive the 'test of integrity' outside the seminar room. For when we open ourselves to these experiences with the right degree of attentiveness and receptivity, we seem overwhelmingly to be carried towards something beyond ourselves, to be 'lifted up' by a splendour and beauty and richness more enduring than anything merely mundane and contingent. For the religious believer, the natural way of expressing all this will be in the kind of language deployed by John Paul II: 'In the midst of these wonders we discover the voice of the Creator, transmitted by heaven and earth, day and night: a language "without words whose sound is heard", capable of crossing all frontiers.'[41]

The reference to the sound going forth throughout the world, crossing all frontiers, picks up on an ancient theme from the Psalms about the universal wordless language of the Creator heard in nature: 'the heavens declare the glory of the Lord.' And the crucial philosophical point here is that we do not have to rely on special revelations, or the particular claims of any given faith tradition, since our natural human experiences of overwhelming beauty in the natural world (and the same can be said about the commanding authority of the moral law)[42] – these ordinary human modes of response give us access to evidence that we cannot in integrity ignore.

One cannot of course expect this appeal to the character and the phenomenology of our human experience to cause a mass conversion from Daoism to theism, let alone to cut any ice with the militant secularist, who is worlds away from either. But coercive arguments, whether demonstrative or probabilistic, are very rarely found in the philosophy of religion (and in my view they occur far less frequently in the rest over-whelmingly of philosophy than is generally supposed).[43] Yet to forego any claim to coercive arguments in this area emphatically does not entail that we have abandoned rationality or retreated to a narrow fideism. The experiences are there to be had, if we have the openness and integrity to acknowledge them; and they are not the prerogative of

[41] John Paul II, 'Ecological Conversion', (General audience address, 17 January 2001).

[42] It is significant that Psalm 19 [18] *Caeli enarrant* ('The heavens declare the glory of the Lord') moves seamlessly from awestruck wonder at the beauties of the natural world to equal wonder at the awesomeness of the moral law – a transition that undoubtedly inspired Kant's famous linkage of the 'starry heavens' and the 'moral law' as both filling the mind with awe (*Achtung*); Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, antepenultimate paragraph.

[43] See John Cottingham, 'What is Humane Philosophy and Why is it At Risk?', *Philosophy*, Supplement 65 (2009), 1-23; and A. O'Hear (ed.), *Conceptions of Philosophy,* Royal Institute of Philosophy series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

any cosy club of insiders or the 'saved', but a natural part of our ordinary human birthright. So if, as human beings, we cannot hope to encompass or explain the fearful mystery of existence, perhaps we can at least glimpse something of its enduring beauty and goodness.

BIRDS, FROGS AND TINTERN ABBEY: HUMANISM AND HUBRIS

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Abstract. David E. Cooper proposes that the 'mystery' of 'reality as it "anyway" is, independently of human perspective' provides measure for the leading of our lives and thus avoids, on the one hand, the hubris of a humanism for which moral life is the product of the human will and has no warrant beyond it, and, on the other, a theism which appears to be at once too remote from and too close to the human world to provide any such warrant. The paper rejects the role this gives to 'mystery' and locates 'warrant' in a moral perspective that is not the product of will.

Over fifty years ago an Indian philosopher, Daya Krishna, attended a symposium in the West on the philosophy of religion. In an insightful paper he reflected on his experience, and mildly remarked how skewed the discussions were by an unselfconscious concentration on Christianity. He was drawing attention to a bias that has hardly changed since:

> The other great limitation of the discussion ... was its confinement, perhaps naturally, to Christianity alone. It was as if one were to reflect on aesthetic experience and confine one's discussion to Greek art or the Renaissance masters only ... That no one challenged this implicit limitation shows once again the difficulty of getting beyond the perspective of the culture one happens to be born in.[1]

[1] Daya Krishna, 'Religious Experience, Language and Truth', in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. by Sidney Hook, (New York: New York University Press, 1961) and reprinted in *The Art of the Conceptual: Explorations in a Conceptual Maze Over Three Decades* (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1989), pp. 112-121 (p. 114).

Professional philosophers of religion were mainly Christians and ex-Christians and their main work would have been on the efficacy of the proofs for the existence of God and of the rationality of belief as these questions were received through the European traditions. They would mostly acknowledge, if nudged, their debt to the Jewish and Arab philosophers, but would return to focus on the current state of the argument as represented by their contemporaries. The Eastern traditions were largely ignored, by philosophers of religion, but also by western philosophers generally, who would fail to see much 'philosophy' there at all.

That these traditions are now slightly less ignored, at least by younger members of the profession, is thanks to such thinkers as David Cooper, whose work has helped us expand our notion of what it is to do philosophy at all. Cooper is one of the very few philosophers in the United Kingdom to have broken free from this cultural limitation and indeed from the more inward-looking, self-referential forms of analytic philosophy, looking first towards forms of continental philosophy which try to answer questions that analytic philosophy has not thought to ask.[2] But the gradual shift of perspective that opens to view the influence of the Asian and East Asian traditions on the Western, in the work of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger – and in the latter case the influence was crucially mutual – owes much to Cooper's developing sense of World Philosophy, a sense that helps us redefine the philosophical canon. There is a political dimension to this. Nowadays certain politicians and Churchmen, catching an unpleasant public mood, express anxiety about 'multiculturalism', which they conceive as a restive, mutually incurious and tensely maintained tolerance between communities – politically correct but refusing to engage – whereas the possibilities for *fusion*, artistic, intellectual and spiritual, are now starting to become available. We sometimes wring our hands about the public engagement of philosophers, but Cooper's work, first of all on continental philosophy and later on world philosophy, particularly the Eastern traditions, has shown how a critical cultural engagement is possible – an engagement which some might think alters our conception of what the philosophical questions are.

[2] A point made in conversation by Michael Weston (University of Essex).

I. COMMON GROUND AND SCEPTICISM ABOUT 'MYSTERY'

David Cooper's writing is analytically sharp, but also sometimes indirect and elusive in ways which are creatively engaging. In what follows I shall express some scepticism about his direction of thought in a recent paper, 'Mystery, World and Religion',[3] but the scepticism derives from a perplexity which I hope makes for a fruitful conversation and it may be that I have failed to understand him and am at cross purposes.

Cooper seeks to contend against what he calls 'a raw, hubristic humanism',[4] but also to avoid what a surprising number of thinkers take to be the only alternative, some version of theism,[5] thinkers who take humanism to be essentially hubristic, on the grounds that it depends upon the disposition of the human will. This puts Cooper in a very interesting position because it looks as though, inspired by East Asian traditions, he is seeking middle ground between the great polar opposites of contemporary religious debate, a middle ground as it might seem between secularism and theism – though more plausibly between secularism and 'religion', since it is hard to see how there can be middle ground between what are presumably exclusive alternatives. On the other hand, however, there can be *common* ground between the protagonists and this may be the middle ground between secularism and *religion* if we can see some aspect of the religious *life*, some aspect of what we might still want to call spirituality, that allows us to make sense of that idea. One of the salient features of Christianity is the terror and hope of the Garden of Gethsemane, the crucifixion, and the resurrection – and if we prefer a different symbolism because of anxiety about metaphysical commitments, that's fine so long as we don't neglect in our thinking the passages of life that we find need ritual re-enactment and expression. If our secularism is obsessed with an anti-theological triumphalism, it may neglect the necessary poetry – or the reflective reading of that poetry that together with it contributes to a cultural tradition which enshrines and depicts our profound predicaments and moral conflicts.

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[3] David E. Cooper, 'Mystery, World and Religion', in *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason*, ed. by John Cornwell and Michael McGhee (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 51-62.

[4] An expression which leaves open the possibility that there can be an unraw and unhubristic humanism.

[5] See, for instance, Gordon Graham, 'Religion and Theology', *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason*, ed. by John Cornwall and Michael McGhee (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 217-230.

Cooper seems to locate the middle ground when at the beginning of his paper he describes the path that led him to think that

> (R)eality as it 'anyway' is, independently of human perspective, is mysterious.[6]

The question, of course, is whether this is true, though that question must wait upon an interpretation of the remark. Is it true that 'reality as it "anyway" is, independently of human perspective' is 'mysterious'? What is being claimed? It is the reference to *mystery* and the role Cooper wants to give it that I find perplexing. He construes 'mystery' as 'what cannot, even in principle, be conceptualised or literally articulated'. But it does not seem to me that what cannot be conceptualised – what is not 'discursive', to use the word Cooper borrows from Kant – is therefore 'mysterious'. But the role Cooper gives to 'the mysterious' is that it provides 'measure for the leading of our lives, something for these to answer to'.[7] My doubts about the application of the term 'mystery' will lead to questions about just what *can* provide a 'measure for the leading of our lives' ... 'something for these to answer to'. This in turn will lead to reflection on the question whether humanism is *essentially* 'hubristic' – or whether particular formulations of it lead to that impression.

II. INTIMATIONS OF ... 'THE MYSTERIOUS'?

Even within common experience there is much that cannot be described or 'conceptualised' – except by comparison to other things that also cannot be described, as a wine taster identifies the aroma of strawberries or plums in the bouquet of a wine. Nor is there anything mysterious about the taste of a merlot, though it may be interesting. As for what goes beyond the possibility of human experience, *ex hypothesi* that cannot be conceptualised either – but is it to that extent 'mysterious'? The stakes are high, as we have seen – Cooper conceives its role as providing measure and something to answer to: something necessary but unavailable to a hubristic humanism.

It is important to see just how strange this claim is: it is 'reality' that is mysterious and thus provides the measure for the leading of our lives. Surely a very particular conception of reality is being invoked here and it is this which gives specific content to the notion of 'mystery' – but can

[6] David E. Cooper, 'Mystery, World and Religion', p. 51.
[7] David E. Cooper, 'Mystery, World and Religion', p. 55.

any conception of 'reality' give content and point to talk of 'mystery' and what grounds do we have for supposing that what it supplies is a *measure*? Lots of things are 'mysterious' but under what conditions does that kind of talk become interesting?

But now, if 'the mysterious' is to play this role of providing a measure it is 'essential that one is offered intimations of, and an attunement to, the mysterious which enables the faith that lives led in certain ways do answer to, or are consonant with, the way of things'.[8] This last expression, 'the way of things', is a revealing alternative to the bare talk of 'reality as it "anyway" is'. It is reminiscent of Taoist talk of the Way. It seems to me to at least make sense to talk of human conduct being attuned to or consonant with 'the way of things', or even to talk of 'the way of things' providing a measure, since it implies the idea of a rhythm of life that we can also *fail* to be attuned to and can come to see that this is so. But this attunement to or consonance with the way of things thus understood is not obviously a matter of being attuned to the *mysterious* – even if 'the way of things' eludes our conceptual grasp it does not follow that it is 'mysterious'.

Cooper talks of those who have come to a sense of 'the mystery of reality' through special experiences – what he calls 'Tintern Abbey moments'. But I wonder whether this is an example of a sense of 'the *mystery* of reality' or, rather, of a sense, well, to continue with Wordsworth, of 'something far more deeply interfused'. We often talk of a sense or intimation of 'something' that we cannot, at least at the moment, grasp or understand. But 'something far more deeply interfused' is a resonant phrase suggestive of the idea of an active presence coursing through all things, something, in other words, it is not difficult to think of as a divine, creative presence ... even if we conceive it in Spinozistic terms as *natura naturans*. It is a sense of *that*, though, of a presence within reality – or better, within the cosmos or 'creation' – rather than of 'mystery' or even of 'the mystery of reality'. As Wordsworth puts it, 'we see into the life of things', a phrase which suggests a kind of knowledge of 'the way of things', though not a conceptual knowledge, and it may indeed be as he says 'but a vain belief'. However, it may be that 'seeing into the life of things' transforms us in ways that we might call an attunement – not to mystery, indeed, but to the *way* of things.

Now once we start to reflect on what must be the *nature* of this presence and what we can know or understand of it, we might *then*

[8] Ibid., p. 62.

start talking of 'mystery' – which is a word by which we acknowledge that such a nature is beyond our powers to discern or comprehend. It is *what* we cannot comprehend that makes the term 'mystery' interesting, and we shall come to that – but 'mystery' is not as it were the immediate object of what we sense or discern in the Tintern Abbey moment. What we sense is presence rather than mystery, even if we come to *conclude* that the 'presence' is indeed 'mysterious'. We might simply remain with *The Prelude*, with 'a dim and undetermined sense | Of unknown modes of being',[9] where the emphasis is on 'undetermined' but perhaps allowing us to move, through reflection, towards 'beyond human determination altogether' – but the object of this indeterminability is not 'reality as it anyway is' but simply 'unknown (or even unknowable) modes of being' – aspects and dimensions of reality that we are not aware of or cannot conceivably become aware of – though how this could provide a measure for living our lives is seriously problematic.

Talk of an active presence coursing through all things may be poetic but it is also philosophically incautious. Does the Tintern Abbey poem express a sense of the presence of the divine? Well, if it does, it would be a sense of divinity rather than of the 'mystery of reality' even if, as I have said, we conclude that the nature of that divinity must be a mystery to us. More to the point, though, these intimations are the work of the *imagination* leading to a *surmise*, a sense *that there is* a presence moving through all things. The phrase 'a sense of something' may imply a direct awareness or it may be used propositionally, a sense that there is something. That there is a propositional interpretation does not make the experience less profound. Wordsworth's 'blessed mood', in other words, does not put us in touch with 'the mysterious' but with what might lead us to think the idea of what must be mysterious in its ultimate nature. In the right sort of contemplative mood, the vivid and powerful forces of nature, whether serene or tempestuous, beautiful or sublime, can impress their presence upon us, and our sense of this presence works on the imagination and can give rise to or reinforce the idea of a divine creative reality of which these forces become the symbol or image. Not far from here they then step down in the form of Apollo or Athena or Poseidon ... whose 'reality' is constantly reaffirmed by the liveliness of the presence of the forces that symbolise them, putting us back in touch

[9] William Wordsworth, 'The Prelude' [1805], in *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth,* Henry Reed (ed.) (Philadelphia: Troutman and Hayes, 1852), p. 479.

with what they themselves symbolise. There is sufficient epistemological humility available here without recourse to talk of mystery – in the thought that there are aspects or dimensions of reality, of what there is, that are beyond our grasp. But the Tintern Abbey moment gets us to 'mystery' only when we have already interpreted it theistically.

Cooper also refers to 'littler, humbler things ... like the frog-plopping, bird-cheeping and bamboo-rustling that have been the occasion for Zen poets to communicate their sense of the mystery of things'.[10] But is that what they seek to communicate, the 'sense of the mystery of things'? – as opposed, say, to their *suchness*, the suchness of these individual things, their *haecceitas* – 'it strikes like lightning to hear him sing'. Cooper has talked of 'what cannot, even in principle, be conceptualised or literally articulated', but here we refer to what *in experience* cannot be conceptualised or articulated, viz. the resonant presence of particular things. The sound of the bird interrupts the flow of activities that generally prevent us from just listening – where 'just listening' is a dwelling *in* the experience rather than simply noting *that* a bird is singing. I imagine that the former would count as an example of 'non-conceptual experience', in the sense, perhaps, that its content is not accommodated within our concepts (its individuality is not what our concepts reveal), but it is also true that such experiences are not 'discursable' ... when we seek to communicate them, as with the Hopkins line, as with the wine or coffee, we do not so much describe them as *compare* them to other experiences that are equally non-discursable. The point here is that the sound of the bird does *not* give us a sense of the mystery of things – but we gain access to an aspect of reality that eludes the grasp of our concepts. The sound of the frog or that of the bird, the rustling of the bamboo, breaks a silence that is already an object of the Zen monk's attention as well as its condition. So it is also an *image* of reality manifesting itself to us within the limits of the senses, an image of what comes forth out of the silence when the mind is still, a perspective as well as an object.

III. A THEOLOGICAL CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF 'MYSTERY'

Although David Cooper is very well aware of the possible theistic moves here, moves from which, as we shall see, he has his own reasons to distance himself, it is nevertheless true, as I have just hinted, that

[10] David E. Cooper, 'Mystery, World and Religion', p. 51.

talk of 'mystery' has traditionally had a specific theological content, though of course we use the term idiomatically to refer to something that we don't understand or that we lack information about, as when we can't work out whodunit. More fundamentally from the point of view of classical theism – which I seek here to present rather than defend – it is *God's nature* that is the ultimate and transcendent mystery, where the reference to mystery is very specifically to the nature of the source of all created things, a source which is beyond the order of all beings, *supra ordinem omnium entium*. It is this being *beyond* the order (or way) of things which gives content to the talk of mystery and the mysterious. We can, according to this tradition, know by the light of natural reason that there is a God; we can, moreover, know what God is not; what we cannot know is what God *is*. It is not *reality* but the divine nature that is mysterious, in the sense that the source and origin of all cannot but be beyond all comprehension, beyond understanding, not a possible object of experience. Even here we can make a distinction between the idea of what within the cosmos or the universe could not be conceptualised, and the divine source of that cosmos that is beyond comprehension. It is the latter that is 'mysterious'. What God is remains beyond all comprehension and is in this sense 'a mystery'. To put it another way, and to remain within this tradition, what accounts for the existence of things – 'what we call "God"' as Aquinas phrases it – is beyond all human comprehension, and it is for this reason that it is called a mystery. What is 'mysterious' in this tradition is not 'reality as it "anyway" is' but the nature or being of what accounts for reality *whether or not it is independent of human perspective.*

If I may make a sideways move here, in relation to the proliferation of talk of mystery and 'the mysterious', it is significant that some philosophical theologians have wanted to say that the very existence of things is 'mysterious' – not that their nature is a mystery to us, but that they exist at all. This seems to me to be a mistake. It is the *nature* of what accounts for the very existence of things that is a mystery. What stands in need of accounting for is not 'mysterious'; it simply stands in need of accounting for. The 'mysterious' is precisely what cannot itself be accounted for. Herbert McCabe's seminal article, 'Creation',[11] is I think responsible for a common misremembering of a famous sentence from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (6.44) in which he is quoted by McCabe as saying: 'it is not *how* things are in the world that is mysterious (*sic*), but

[11] Geoffrey Chapman, 'Creation', in *God Matters* (London: Continuum, 1987), pp. 2-9.

that it is.' The phrase Wittgenstein uses in fact is *das Mystische*, a term he uses a little later in 6.45: 'Feeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical.'[12] It is hard to see how 'mysterious' properly translates either remark, though the misquotation may reflect the direction of McCabe's thought as he reflects on the question, why is there anything at all. Interestingly, in Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics he says 'I wonder at the existence of the world'.[13] But wonder here is not wonder at mystery, even if such wonder leads a person to acknowledge a divine nature that *is* a mystery.

The point of all this is not that the terms 'mystery' and 'the mysterious' are the private property of the theologians, as that we need to see what the new application is doing, especially in connection with the idea of 'reality as it "anyway" is, independently of human perspective'. What would it mean to be attuned to or to act in consonance with what is thus mysterious – or fail to be? My difficulty with and hesitation about an idea of the 'mysterious' cut free from theology concerns precisely how to make sense of it as something we could be attuned to or consonant with. And the question is whether it genuinely cuts free, or smuggles back some kind of theistic content. In any event, 'the mysterious' seems to be already thereby loaded with a content that cannot really be provided simply by the phrase 'reality as it anyway is'. It is not just what is hidden or concealed from us that warrants talk of 'mystery', but the creative source and sustainer of all things, i.e., it is something worshipped. To put it another way, what is not worshipped is not that mysterious!

Certainly Cooper wants to keep clear of any theistic content. He reports a conversation with his Theology colleague, Andrew Louth, about why even an apophatic theology cannot provide what he wants from his account of mystery. He refers to two opposite tendencies of theologians, to make God too human and to make him too transcendent to provide the measure he is looking for. As for being 'too human' he claims that God is 'too much a denizen of the human world ... to provide measure for our conception of the world, too much a "projection", as it were, of what we anyway hold dear and important to serve as any kind of warrant for our holding them so'.[14] The key idea here is that of 'warrant for our

[12] See also *Tractatus* 6.522: 'There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.'

[13] L. Wittgenstein, 'A Lecture on Ethics', *The Philosophical Review*, 74/1 (1965), 3-12 (p. 8).

[14] David E. Cooper, 'Mystery, World and Religion', pp. 59-60.

holding them so' and I shall return to it when I address the alleged hubris of humanism, partly because I wonder whether talk of 'warrant' here suggests a crypto-theism, though we need to see what Cooper thinks he is guarding against and whether what is at fault is a conception of humanism that makes it appear hubristic. If, however, we hold on to a declaration of God's ineffability and utter transcendence we find ourselves with the problem of 'a disjunctive, two levels account of world and mystery'.[15]

Cooper writes trenchantly against the idea of a disjunctive two level account of the notion of 'reality as it "anyway" is, independently of human perspective', and draws on texts from Nietzsche and Heidegger, as well as on the Taoist and Zen traditions as he formulates an account which concludes as follows:

> This world is not simply a human world, unthinkable in isolation from us, but at the same time a realisation of, a coming forth of, something to which we can strive to answer and measure up.[16]

'Reality' is not distorted or refracted by human perspective, the thought is rather that we have a necessarily *limited* purchase on reality, that is to say, a limited purchase on what we do have a purchase on, and an acknowledgment that there is much that we could never grasp. Once we make that latter point, however, we open up a series of fantasy populations to colonise these spaces and, as Cooper reminds us, make various Platonic or Kantian claims about the causal relation between reality as it is in itself and what is available to us in experience.

But I suggested earlier that the bird singing and the frog plopping mentioned by Cooper could be seen as images of things emerging as it were into our ken, being realised, made real to us. But I cannot see how the world thus conceived is a 'coming forth of ... something to which we can strive to answer and measure up', *unless* we conceive what comes forth precisely as an ethical perspective *on* the world we already inhabit but which interrogates the *terms* of that habitation – a perspective discovered, recalled or restored and a human world 'renewed' by that perspective. The Zen monk doesn't simply hear the bird sing or the bamboo rustling, but is aware of it with a tender care for its beauty.

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[15] Ibid., p. 61. Theologians would have much to say about these claims, but this is not the occasion for discussing them.

[16] Ibid., p. 58.

IV. APPEARANCE AND REALITY

As a means of reflecting on the way Cooper talks about 'reality as it "anyway" is, independently of human perspective', it might be helpful here to turn to an informal sketch of the ambiguities within the distinction between *appearance* and reality, and how the various ways in which things appear to us can conceal or reveal their nature – and ours.

There are straightforward empirical applications of this distinction, where to talk about 'reality' is to talk about how particular things *are* as opposed to how they seem or appear to be. What we have here is a corrective distinction. Whereas things can *be* just as they appear to be, appearances can also be deceptive and we need to be able to correct them. To talk about reality in this kind of context is to talk about the truth of the matter, the 'reality of the situation'.

There are related uses, as when we say that ideological mystification masks the real nature of the relations of production, for instance, where the general appearance of things constitutes an illusion from which people need to be freed, and the functional point of the claim is that under appropriate conditions *access is available* to the truth of the matter. This might be through closer empirical investigation as in the case of an intermittently false consciousness or, and it starts now to look more tenuous, by metaphysical argument to a rationalist monism, for instance, or, even more dubiously, by mystic insight into the real nature of things. Such disturbing claims are empty unless they can be backed up and the truth revealed by some corrective procedure, so that a general appearance is discovered to be some kind of distortion or blindness. This is not an anti-verificationism issue – such claims can be made without our having any means of establishing their truth or falsity – the point rather, is that people make discoveries that lead them to realise and then declare that the reality is different from the appearance. There can be intimations of this kind of possibility as powerful as the Tintern Abbey moment, but it is often the painful matter of discovering or seeing the world at last without previous illusion, as in the case of Eliot's talk of things ill done ... which once we took for exercise of virtue.

There is however a less absolute distinction between appearance and reality in which we want to insist upon how things *manifest themselves* to sense or other forms of empirical observation, where such appearance is not *opposed* to 'reality' but is a form of its expression. Nevertheless the implication is that we have a necessarily limited experience of reality

which impresses itself upon us just to the extent and in the ways that we *can* be thus 'impressed' upon – and that much must elude us because the possibilities for that manifestation depend upon our limited faculties and instruments, so that whatever lies outside their range and how it operates is beyond the scope of our understanding. In this sense, all we have is 'appearance' and it would be an error to seek to apply the corrective distinction to this. This distinction between appearance and reality is not an absolute one since appearance here is precisely *of* reality – or such reality as we are able to assimilate or accommodate into the human world, which is a space or home we have carved out for ourselves within reality, although this home is not entirely wind and water tight, and it can be limited in its dimensions by moral obtuseness or attachment. What appears to us is not to be 'corrected' by reality, but it may betray a limitation of scope that keeps particular realities at bay.

Professor Cooper's talk of 'reality as it "anyway" is, independently of human perspective' might be taken to imply that there is a truth of the matter – what we have a perspective *on* – by reference to which we estimate the *adequacy* of a perspective in the light of another, as when we are wiping the breakfast table. Our perspective on the table from over here fails to reveal the coffee stain that is in plain view when we change our position. That there is a coffee stain is the reality, the truth of the matter, that is available to one perspective but not another, and might not be available to either. But the truth of the matter stands independently of any perspective we might have on it. The perspective that fails to disclose the presence of the stain is not a 'false' perspective, but *gives rise* to a false impression if we base upon it the judgment that the table is now clean. It is not false but it is inadequate because it fails to pick up a truth we are interested in. The significant thing here, though, is that we can become *attached* or locked in to perspectives which conceal what we might need to know about, or which prevent a realisation of, realities we have no reason to call 'mysterious'.

In another sense, 'independently of human perspective' seems to refer to whatever might lie as it were permanently beyond the scope of any human perspective *or*, by contrast, to what is currently outside that scope but which could fall within it under more propitious circumstances. The former of these is a more likely candidate for talk of 'mystery' but implies a transcendence that makes it an unlikely source of 'measure' (by Cooper's own test). The latter seems the more likely candidate for talk

of realisation or coming forth, but is surely not mysterious since what comes forth is precisely a measure not previously available.

V. FREUD AND RILKE: FOREIGN TERRITORY AND *DAS OFFENE*

I should like to make a connection between this notion of the world as a coming forth with an intriguing remark of Freud's, and to connect both with some thoughts of Rilke about what he calls *das Offene*.

In the first paragraph of Freud's chapter on the 'Dissection of the Psychical Personality' in the *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*[17] he deploys a metaphor that repays attention: 'the repressed', he tells us, 'is foreign territory to the ego – internal foreign territory – just as reality (if you will forgive the unusual expression) is external foreign territory.'[18]

It *is* an unusual expression, but highly suggestive in the context of what Cooper is drawing attention to, since it suggests a certain idea of *resistance* to 'reality' which is conceived as 'foreign' in relation to what by contrast must be thought of as 'home', but 'home', I suggest – and this tracks Cooper's own distinction – in the sense of the human world, so that just as what lies over against the Ego is the internal foreign territory of the repressed so what lies over against the World is the foreign territory of 'reality'. If we think in terms of the distinction between Ego and the repressed, the corresponding distinction might be between 'the world' conceived as 'home' or, to keep the edge of defensiveness, 'homeland', with external foreign territory being 'reality' – or better, as I would want to say, such reality as is not (yet) assimilated to the confines of 'the world'. The idea of resistance here implies, as Sartre noticed, that at some subliminal level, or evanescently, we are perfectly well aware of what transcends our dominant perceptions, of what transcends or passes beyond 'the world' we do not want to let go of because we are too much at home in it, too comfortable.

In the eighth of his *Duino Elegies* Rilke talks about what he calls *Das Offene*:

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[17] Sigmund Freud, 'The Dissection of the Psychical Personality', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachley (London: Hogarth Press, 1957). I have discussed this passage briefly elsewhere in 'In the Beginning was the Deed: Philosophers, Reality and the World', in *Practical Philosophy*, Volume 8, No. 2 (2007), 49-53.

[18] '... das Verdrängste ist aber für das Ich Ausland, inneres Ausland, so wie die Realität – gestatten Sie den ungwohnten Ausdruck – äusseres Ausland ist.' Ibid., p. 88.

With all their eyes the animals all see
What lies open. Only our eyes are turned
As it were away and set like snares
Around their clear way out[19]

There is a grotesque or at least ungainly fusion of ideas and images here which passes from what is represented by the direction of our gaze *away* from *das Offene* to a representation of our eyes as snares set around it to prevent others from leaving. The direction of our gaze implies that we are in some way *hostile* to *das Offene* and to those who are aware of its presence – in a way that recalls the reception of Plato's liberated prisoner. If Freud defines a resident temptation, a resistance, Rilke offers us a description of what it might be to overcome that temptation, though he strongly acknowledges the presence of resistance too. Freud captures the resistance to what will disturb the settled formation of a world, on analogy with the disturbance of the Ego and its formation ... so we can see how this might fit with Cooper's talk of realisation or coming forth: it is not always welcome and this suggests the need for cultivating a certain disposition of openness towards the not yet apprehended or accommodated which, if I understand Rilke, is *das Offene* just because it is not yet closed off and brought into our purview, confined within the range of our formation. It will always elude this as what *still* remains there, open to view because it is there to be seen, but unobserved because we live within what we have grasped and, to make full use of the negative associations of 'grasping', our attachments prevent us seeing what is there, which is a vision of things from another perspective which incorporates the values that provide the measure for our lives that Cooper seeks in 'the mysterious'.

When he uses the term 'the world' Cooper generally distinguishes it from the term 'reality'. He occasionally uses them interchangeably, though in the wider sense of the latter. The narrower sense of the former is determined by the interests and perspectives that make it an essentially human world, which is 'the way it is' only in relation to those human perspectives. Such a world is distinguished from 'reality as it "anyway" is, independently of human perspective'. It looks as though we have here a larger and a smaller whole or totality, the distinction between them

[19] My translation, though I generally refer to the Leishman/Spender translation. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies: The German Text with an English Translation, Introduction and Commentary by J. B. Leishman & Stephen Spender* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948), pp. 76-81.

mediated by the presence or absence of human concerns – and it is the presence of this human perspective that determines *a world* and the implication is that the concept of 'reality' transcends that of 'the world' – a world in this sense is just such reality as we apprehend, reality as seen and acted in from the point of view of such perspectives, interests, etc. In other words, there is no *absolute* distinction here – the world is always a human world and just is such reality as we scramble around and have as it were a purchase on – a habitation – and what we have a purchase on will always be determined by, restricted to, our finite powers of apprehension, but also the nature of our interests and our attachments or 'graspings'.

VI. IS HUMANISM REALLY HUBRISTIC?

Remember that the idea of 'mystery' or 'the 'mysterious' had a strategic role in the overcoming of what Cooper considers to be a philosophical impasse that arises when you want to deny both a certain kind of absolutism and what he came to see as an 'impossibly raw and hubristic style of humanism'. What he has in mind is 'the claim, or boast, that human commitments, values and perspectives neither permit nor require any warrant beyond themselves – for there is no "beyond" for them to answer to. In Sartre's words, there is "no legislator" but man, so that "life is a game" whose "principles man himself ordains"'. Cooper observes that this 'raw humanism' is hubristic since 'it attributes to human beings a capacity they do not have – that of genuinely living with the thought that nothing they commit themselves to, none of the values and beliefs they embrace, can be answerable to anything beyond this commitment and embrace'.[20] He thinks that anyone who claims such a capacity 'cannot really believe what they are saying':

> For when immersed in the stream of life, we are required to make decisions, take directions and pursue objectives that it is impossible for us to regard as having no further authority than their being the ones we happen to have made, taken and pursued. If that were the only authority, then it could not have mattered to us if the decisions, directions and objectives had been different. And that is tantamount to saying that nothing we do matters more or less than anything else.[21]

[20] David E. Cooper, 'Mystery, World and Religion', p. 53.
[21] Ibid.

I want to see just what we should resist in the raw, hubristic humanism Cooper sketches out here since the way we look at it will make a difference to how we conceive the alternatives. What is the conception that Cooper thinks cannot be lived? '[W]hen immersed in the stream of life, we are required to make decisions, take directions and pursue objectives that it is impossible for us to regard as having no further authority than their being the ones we happen to have made, taken and pursued.' If they have no further authority than that, then it could not have mattered to us if they had been different.

So, what is the point of introducing a question of 'authority' here in relation to decisions, directions and objectives? The first thing to observe is that what Cooper talks about are things that we *do* – make decisions, take directions and pursue objectives. It at least makes sense, in that case, to talk about our having r*easons* for doing the one thing or the other, so that whether it matters whether we do the one thing or the other is a question we can only answer in the light of a consideration of those reasons *and the relationship in which we stand to them*. We are, generally, 'answerable' for our *actions*; when we think of a measure for judging how we live we are again concerned with our conduct.

But if we look at what else Cooper says in indicting the hubris of this humanism, what we find is that his approach is problematically voluntaristic. He talks about the claim, or boast, that *human commitments, values and perspectives* (my italics) neither permit nor require any warrant beyond themselves – for there is no 'beyond' for them to answer to. In Sartre's words, there is 'no legislator' but man, so that 'life is a game' whose 'principles man himself ordains'. What we need, according to Cooper, is a 'beyond the human', 'something which could serve to give measure to our lives'. Essentially Cooper is claiming that we cannot allow that our commitments, etc., have no warrant beyond *themselves* but he concludes, wrongly in my view, that what we need is a 'beyond the *human*' which could serve to give measure to our lives.

The problem is that Cooper offers us a mixed list – 'commitments, values and perspectives' – and only one of these – commitments – lends itself to Sartre's talk of 'legislation' or what we 'ordain'. It is only in the case of *commitment* that we can readily talk of something that we *do* and it is only in the case of what we *do* that we can really talk about 'answerability'. If I am answerable to someone I have to defend or justify my *conduct* to them. In a similar way, if we talk about 'answerability' or 'measurement', then it is our actions, our conduct, that we measure or

answer for. It looks as though when Cooper talks of 'a beyond the human' he is really thinking, quite properly, of something beyond the *human will* or, better, beyond the mere fact that we will things so. The metaphor of setting a value on something can lead us into thinking that we *confer* value and once we start thinking in that way we are likely to go on to the thought that this conferring of value is a bare act of the will and that we can as easily withdraw as confer, whereas it is in the light of *reasons* that our will points in one direction rather than another; and we do not *choose* these reasons.

However, by contrast, if we come to the question of the values and perspectives that we 'embrace' (a term which misleadingly suggests a voluntary act) it should be clear that we are not naming things that we do but rather the point of view or perspective in the light of which we do them or fail to do them, so that our answerability – the context in which we tend to think in terms of being answerable – is partly a function of how we regard our *failure* to act. We are talking of the *terms* in which we assess whether we have acted well or badly and these are not the product of the will. It is true that they are not warranted, but that is because they *are* the warrant for our actions, the terms in which we judge them. Our values and perspectives are not the products of the human will: they inform it, provide the measure by which we judge our actions – they are if you like the 'conscience' to which we are answerable and it has 'authority' because it is by reference to it that we make our judgments. We do not choose our values, nor do we choose the perspective in the light of which we regard the world. We do not choose that it is the case that these considerations move us ... This provides the terms in which we judge whether our doing this or some other thing *matters*. Sartre's voluntarism is askew, but askew for an interesting reason. He makes human beings the legislators because his version of atheism depends upon a theology of the divine will as determining the rightness or wrongness of action and, in the absence of that divine being, the only other will that is available is the human one. But theologically the divine will is already the will of a just and loving God, so if our atheism takes account of that we are not so much left with the human will as a will that is informed at least some times by considerations of love and justice, in whose absence the race languishes. It is not how the will happens to be disposed that matters but what informs that disposition.

What I have resisted is the idea that 'mystery' has a significant role to play in the emergence of what Cooper calls 'measure for our lives'. What

I should want to endorse, however, is the idea of a realisation or coming forth of what we might be said to answer to. The image he provides of the Zen monk and an attentive silence is the image of the calming of the passions which allows a dormant or overlain moral perspective to emerge into view, a coming forth whose possibility we otherwise resist because it disturbs the settled domesticity of a human, all too human world. This form of attention is indeed an attention to reality in the sense that it puts into question the contours and limits of the world we find ourselves not very securely at home in.

RECEPTIVITY TO MYSTERY: CULTIVATION, LOSS, AND SCIENTISM

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Abstract. The cultivation of receptivity to the mystery of reality is a central feature of many religious and philosophical traditions, both Western and Asian. This paper considers two contemporary accounts of receptivity to mystery – those of David E. Cooper and John Cottingham – and considers them in light of the problem of *loss of receptivity*. I argue that a person may lose their receptivity to mystery by embracing what I call a *scientistic stance*, and the paper concludes by offering two possible responses to combating that stance and restoring the receptivity to mystery that it occludes.

> Let us follow it up ... wherever it is to be found, in the lives of those around us ... If we do so we shall find we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, *mysterium tremendum*. The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane', non-religious mood of everyday experience. (Rudolf Otto) [1]

Understanding the idea of receptivity to mystery depends crucially on the notion or account of mystery in play. This paper focuses upon the sense of that term associated with various religious and spiritual traditions, including the practices, discourses and communities whose

[1] Rudolf Otto, T*he Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-rational Factor In the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J.W. Harvey (London: H. Milford/ Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 12-13.

purpose it is to articulate and perhaps induce experiences of mystery. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for instance, wrote that an aim of religious practice is to align the 'environment to which [one] belong[s]' with the 'universal source of spiritual life'. Through such practical transformation, one's life becomes one of 'communion' with that source.[2] Rudolf Otto also described an awareness of 'the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible', something present in both 'sudden, strong ebullitions of personal piety' and the 'fixed and ordered solemnities of rites', but which, if appropriately cultivated and responded to, is open to being 'developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious'.[3]

These two testimonies help to indicate what I will call receptivity to mystery, and may either remind those who share such receptivity of it, or inspire those who do not – for, as later sections of the paper will indicate, such receptivity is not a universal feature of human beings' comportment within the world.

Since both experiences of mystery and their associated practices are too diverse to treat in any comprehensive sense, I focus here on their treatment by two contemporary philosophers, David E. Cooper and John Cottingham. Both affirm the central importance of 'experiences of mystery' and 'intimations of the transcendent', respectively, in religious life, even though they disagree on the nature of those experiences and intimations. But both agree on two points which are germane to my interests here. The first is that those experiences – of mystery or of transcendence – can sponsor forms of religious life; hence Cooper argues that 'living with mystery [is] a form of religious life', while Cottingham defends the claim that religiosity involves living in responsive awareness of the 'mystery of existence'.[4]

The second is that that both mystery and transcendence, different as they may be, are both vulnerable to a specific concern, one identified by both Cooper and Cottingham, which I will call *loss of receptivity to mystery*. That term offers three related tasks, each to be taken in turn. The first is to explain what Cooper and Cottingham mean by 'mystery' or 'transcendence', or which, for brevity's sake, I will refer to as a 'sense of

[2] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (eds.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), §§93.3 and 6.2.

3 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 12-13.

[4] David E. Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p 13, and John Cottingham, 'Religion and the Mystery of Existence', p. 31, both in the present volume.

mystery'. It is that sense to which certain persons can become receptive. The second is to characterise such receptivity to mystery, as described by Cooper and Cottingham, including the practices through which it can be cultivated. The third then considers what the loss of such receptivity entails and, importantly, what might cause a person to lose it – and my focus will, following Cooper and Cottingham, be upon a prime suspect, which I'll call a 'scientistic stance'.

I. MYSTERY AND TRANSCENDENCE

It is worth beginning by noting some criticisms of these themes of mystery and transcendence. Those two terms are distinct from one another, as this section will indicate, but both arouse the suspicion or concern of many philosophers, a fact noted by both Cooper and Cottingham. The very idea of mystery is dismissed by two luminaries of contemporary philosophy – those being Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam – on the grounds that it 'do[es] not get us anywhere' and that such a doctrine gives us no obvious reason to 'aim at' it.[5] Indeed, it is not just mystery itself, but religion more widely, which has, perhaps, suffered from philosophical neglect. The philosophy of religion itself has suffered a contraction over the last few decades, such that we face, warns Cottingham, the 'genuine possibility' that religious thought and practice may vanish from the philosophical mainstream, 'brusquely dismissed or politely ignored' by those with avowed naturalistic commitments.[6]

The reasons for such sentiments are complex and since I discuss one of them – the 'scientistic stance' – later in the paper, they can be set aside for now. It is, however, worth my noting my agreement with Cooper's judgement that it would be 'hubris' to 'dismiss an idea' – that of receptivity to and living with a sense of mystery – that has featured centrally within 'spiritual traditions', ranging from Neo-platonism in Europe to Daoism in China. There is surely truth, too, in Cottingham's allied observation that such 'traditions of spirituality' have, since antiquity, 'served ... countless human beings' in their efforts to conceive and comport their lives.[7]

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[5] Quoted and discussed in David E. Cooper, *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 281-282. This book is Cooper's most systematic account of his doctrine of mystery.

[6] John Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Value and Human Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. viii.

[7] Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 8 and Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 140.

Perhaps few contemporary philosophers share or easily sympathise with the convictions and sensibilities reflected in those traditions, but that is poor reason to dismiss them. Indeed, once one appreciates that those same concerns continue to animate many persons today, the very idea of dismissing them surely becomes hubristic. It requires little exercise of historical or sociological prowess to recognise that experiences of mystery, including the sensibilities and concerns which gather around them, are deep and abiding features of the human condition.

Let me begin with Cooper, who in several recent writings has developed and defended a 'doctrine of mystery'. The central claim is that reality as it is, independently of human perspectives, is 'ineffable and mysterious', such that 'no account of the world ... could count as a description of reality as such', for any such description would be tied to the purposes, practices and perspectives of the creatures, whether human or not, which provided them. The doctrine of mystery which Cooper develops owes much to Buddhism, Daoism and the later Heidegger, amongst many others, indicating that it is not an 'abstract' doctrine – held on paper but never realised in practice – but is, rather, one which has 'played a central role in [the] moral and religious practice' of many cultures. Indeed, a sense of mystery has been one which 'reflective men and women', from Zhuangzi to Wittgenstein, have been 'apt to cultivate', owing to their recognition that the 'comportments' in which an experience of mystery is 'built-in' provide attractive 'ways of dealing [with and] dwelling' in the world.[8] Such testimonies do not, of course, establish or prove a doctrine of mystery, but they should offset the initial scepticism of those critics who might doubt their very intelligibility.

The doctrine of mystery that Cooper offers is more sophisticated than this brief sketch can indicate, but enough has been said, for now, to indicate that a central feature of it is that it incorporates the possibility of one's having a 'sense of mystery' which shapes and informs one's life. A cultivated sense of the mysteriousness of reality effects a transformation of a person's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour, both by liberating them from unwarrantedly hubristic doctrines and by inducing a sense of acute dependence upon what is beyond human understanding and control – a claim which Cooper makes good on in other recent writings.[9]

[8] Cooper, *The Measure of Things*, pp. 281, 364, 358.

[9] As well as his 'Living with Mystery' in this volume, see also his 'Mystery, World and Religion', in *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason*, ed. John

Cottingham offers a related, though distinct set of claims, writing eloquently of 'aspirations and sensibilities', which he refers to as 'intimations of the transcendent'. Such intimations refer to 'something mysterious that transcends the boundaries of human comprehension', which Cottingham interprets theistically using the resources of Christian theology and the philosophies and poetries it has inspired. So when Wordsworth reported a 'presence that disturbs' him, inspiring 'elevated thoughts [and] a sense sublime', he testified to an intimation of the transcendent, in which the 'setting suns [and] blue sky' became 'deeply interfused' with the 'mind of man'.[10] Cottingham goes on to argue that the 'incorporation' of those intimations into a 'sustaining form of life' can 'enrich and transform' one's life.[11]

These intimations of the transcendent are not the peculiar property of certain privileged persons. For sure, those immersed in 'communities of praxis' which cultivate the requisite sensibilities may be more likely to enjoy them, but Cottingham stresses that they are part of the 'birthright' of all human beings.[12] All of us, he suggests, feel expressions of 'yearnings deep within our nature' which 'cannot be entirely eradicated', or rendered mute. Indeed, they are the 'primal human existential response', the 'well-spring of spirituality', and the 'basis of the religious impulse'.[13]

It is important not to elide mystery and transcendence. Although there are parallels between Cooper and Cottingham's respective accounts – such as a sense of dependence on what is 'beyond the human' and corresponding hostility to 'hubristic' doctrines opposed to the cultivation of that sense – important differences remain between them. Most obviously, Cottingham is a theist and maintains that the transcendent is at least in principle open to human articulation, whereas

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Cornwall and Michael McGhee (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 51-62; and *Convergence with Nature: A Daoist Perspective* (Dartington: Green Books, 2012). Each of these works indicates how a sense of mystery can be cultivated and thereby inform a person's comportment within the world.

[10] William Wordsworth, *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* [1798], in S. Gill (ed.), *William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition of the Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), ii., pp. 89-100. Quoted and discussed in John Cottingham, 'Our Natural Guide: Conscience, "Nature" and Moral Experience', in David S. Oderberg and Timothy Chappell (eds.), *Human Values* (London: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 11-31.

[11] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 171.

[12] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 35.

[13] Cottingham, 'Religion and the Mystery of Existence', p. 19.

Cooper insists that mystery is just that – mysterious and so unavailable even in principle to articulation and description.

Those concerned with the differences between Cooper's and Cottingham's accounts are invited to consult their own respective writings, but the concern I address in the remainder of this paper is one which applies both to mystery and to transcendence, however they are construed. For the scientistic stance that I will criticise applies to both those who deny mystery in Cooper's sense and those who deny a (perhaps effable) transcendence in Cottingham's sense; however, since 'mystery' carries fewer philosophical and theological connotations than transcendence, I will use that in the remainder of the paper.

II. RECEPTIVITY TO MYSTERY

Let me indicate three common features of Cooper's and Cottingham's accounts which are relevant to my discussion of loss of receptivity to mystery. The first is that 'mystery' refers to or involves something 'beyond the human', whether an undiscursible mystery or a transcendent reality. The second is that receptivity to mystery is strongly related to moral and spiritual transformation – ones which, as Cooper puts it, 'clear the mind' of a person from 'prejudices [and] ambitions' which 'deny ... space to the virtues' – thereby releasing those persons into ways of life which enjoy a 'natural consonance' with the world.[14] Cottingham also identifies a sense of mystery, or transcendence, with liberation from false views, such as that the world is 'violent and depressing', 'coloured solely by our own human projections', or perhaps simply 'devoid of anything other than temporary and local significance'.[15]

The third feature held in common by Cooper and Cottingham is the idea that receptivity to a sense of mystery can be cultivated by engaging in and with certain practices, communities and traditions. Many candidates are available, and in their works, Cooper and Cottingham survey some of the more representative examples, ranging from the apophatic tradition of Christian mysticism to Zen Buddhism. Alongside these overtly religious traditions, one should also include figures and traditions for whom the description 'religious' is more contestable. It strikes me that one can legitimately interpret Wittgenstein's remarks

[14] Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 10.
[15] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 87.

upon the 'miraculous' nature of the world as religious, related as it was, for him, with the 'meaning of life [and] the absolute good', reflective of a 'tendency of the human mind' which he reported himself as 'respecting deeply'.[16] Likewise, the practices through which receptivity to mystery is cultivated need not be overtly religious ones – taking liturgical or sacramental forms, say – but can include, as they do for Cooper, practices such as aesthetic appreciation, philosophical reflection, or engagement with the natural world. Indeed, Cooper has argued that gardening, uniquely premised as it is upon the co-dependence of 'human creative activity [and] the natural world', can, if reflectively engaged in, afford insights into one's 'relationship to mystery'.[17]

These three features converge in the claim that human beings can enjoy and cultivate receptivity to mystery through reflective engagement in certain practices. Mystery, then, should be understood less as a taken-for-granted feature of human life, but rather a cultivated feature of certain ways of life. Perhaps certain persons can enjoy a sense of mystery even in the absence of any of the requisite ways of life – just as even the most philistine ecophobe may occasionally be moved by an instance of natural beauty – but that sense of mystery will be unlikely to be able to sustain the 'moral and spiritual transformation' which Cooper and Cottingham emphasise.

The edifying potential of a sense of mystery is premised upon the deep and sustained cultivation of one's receptivity to it. That will require, in Cottingham's words, 'initiation' into a 'community of praxis', participation in 'structured activities and performances', both private and social, which themselves enjoy 'continuity with a tradition', itself 'inherited from the past' and entrusted to the future.[18] Cooper offers a parallel thought in a discussion of experiences of new or novel beauties, those of alien cultures, say: the appreciation of those beauties requires 'initiation into traditions, practices and ... contexts' which 'allow' those previously 'occluded' beauties to 'become visible', and such initiation demands 'effort, imagination, and intelligence', and so is 'educative' and 'improving'.[19] A sense of mystery may therefore be a native feature of

[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein. 'A Lecture on Ethics', *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), 3-12. Quotation from p. 12.

[17] Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 135 and 145.

[18] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, pp. 35, 103, 164, 144.

[19] Cooper, 'Edification and the Experience of Beauty', in Wang Keping (ed.), *Diversity and Universality in Aesthetics* (Beijing: Institute for Transcultural Studies, 2010), pp. 62-80. Quotation taken from pp. 63-64.

human beings – our 'natural birthright' – but the cultivation of that sense will, in most cases, require sustained and reflective practical engagement, resulting in an edifying 'moral and spiritual transformation'.

I draw two points from these remarks on the cultivation of receptivity to mystery. The first is that such receptivity must be actively and practically cultivated. Although it may be a feature of our 'natural birthright', it still requires sustained effort to cultivate it, just as a talent – musical or athletic, say – requires disciplined practice to draw out and develop. The second is that receptivity must be sustained, both practically and reflectively; hence Cottingham's call to religious persons to cultivate the virtues of 'faith and hope' which 'sustain our energies and keep alive our hopes', and Cooper's reminder that it is only through 'sufficient effort, engagement, openness and patience' that a person can 'achieve an attunement to mystery'.[20]

III. LOSS OF RECEPTIVITY TO MYSTERY

Cooper and Cottingham indicate that receptivity to mystery requires reflective and practical activities aimed at moral and spiritual transformation. The relevant 'spiritual praxis' or 'comportments' can, however, fail to obtain for one of two related reasons. A person can fail to initiate or to persist in the practices which are necessary for its cultivation – perhaps like the person who either lacks a musical talent in the first place or who has it but fails to develop it, perhaps through laziness or indifference. A latent sense of mystery may be part of our 'natural birthright', but, without edifying practical and reflective effort, will remain at the level of a latent sensibility.

The question of why a person may fail to cultivate their receptivity to a sense of mystery is a complex one, whose immense scope is indicated by Charles Taylor's vast and magisterial book *A Secular Age*.[21] But a necessary precondition of the cultivation of receptivity to mystery – of the sort described by Cooper and Cottingham – is surely that a person is convinced, or at least willing to consider, that such receptivity is both intelligible and attractive. Unless a person is open to the possibility of experiences of mystery, in the first place, and to cultivating the requisite

[20] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, pp. 125, 172. Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 11.

[21] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

receptivity to them, in the second, they will not – and indeed cannot – take the decision to begin initiation into the practices through which such receptivity is cultivated. The demanding nature of such cultivation is stressed by all of those religious and philosophical traditions within which a sense of mystery plays an integral role; the complex pedagogical and philosophical practices of Zen Buddhism are perhaps the best example of such demanding practices of cultivation.

Cooper and Cottingham clearly regard a sense of mystery as something of immense moral and spiritual significance. A person who lacks receptivity to mystery is, for that reason, prevented from having experiences of immense moral and spiritual significance, rather than just missing out on certain rare but pleasant experiences, like the eating of a rare confectionary or hearing a rarely-performed piece of music. The life of a person who never has the good fortune to eat plum pudding is not substantially impoverished by virtue of that fact, whereas a life lacking in at least occasional experiences of mystery certainly is. But a person who judges that experiences of mystery – of Wordsworth's 'sense sublime', say – are merely something pleasing but inessential, will hardly be compelled to take seriously the demanding task of cultivating a receptivity to them. For such persons will regard a sense of mystery as some regard seeing Niagara Falls or swimming with dolphins; very nice if you manage it, but no great loss to your life if you don't.

Such lack of receptivity to mystery may be a native feature of the persons who lack it. Much as some people have no especial interest in music or sex, an indifference to experiences of mystery may simply be a feature of their character, peculiar as it may seem to any music lovers or romantic couples they report their indifference to. A life without music is not, *pace* Nietzsche, a mistake; not, at the least, for everyone, for there are persons who evince no especial love of music – or of art or sex or animals – but whose lives are, at least by their own lights, satisfying and fulfilling ones. To my mind, the life of a person who is not receptive to experiences of mystery is not, therefore, by definition a peculiar or impoverished one, at least in cases where that lack of receptivity is a native feature of their character or constitution. Perhaps those are William James's 'healthy-minded' people, who lack any sense of the world as 'strange [or] uncanny', such that no sense of mystery – nor the need for one – can obtain.[22]

[22] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1902), p. 151.

I will not consider the question of whether a person ought to cultivate a sense of mystery. Perhaps such persons should not arouse our concern, even if their lives may prove inscrutable or perplexing to those for whom a sense of mystery is integral. But, equally, perhaps not.[23]

Concern should arise, however, concerning persons whose lack of receptivity to mystery may be attributable to more contingent factors. To recall the earlier example of the person with no love of music, their indifference may be native, if it really is the case that Mozart and Bach simply do not engage their interests or arouse their passions. But suppose that their indifference to music is, rather, the result of their growing up within a rabidly philistine household, within which a love of music was dismissed as snobbish indulgence or intolerable ponciness. This would not be a case of a natural lack of receptivity, but an artificial or induced one and therefore not one which would otherwise have come to shape that person's life. Such was the case with John Stuart Mill who famously found the 'states of feeling' suppressed by his rigid education restored by his reading of Wordsworth's poetry, such that he could 'find meaning in ... things' – like nature and art – previously rendered opaque, and whose absence, moreover, resulted in his nervous breakdown.[24]

IV. THE SCIENTISTIC STANCE

The artificial induction of a lack of receptivity to experiences of mystery could take a variety of forms. A person may have the bad fortune to live in an intensely oppressive society, in which opportunities for engagement with art, nature, or religious practice are either minimised or co-opted for ideological purposes. The French Catholic philosopher and existentialist Gabriel Marcel took this line. A 'man cannot be free', he wrote, unless he is 'linked with that which transcends him', either through 'official and canonical' religion or in 'paint, or stone, or music'. A society systematically stripped of the possibilities for aesthetic or religious activities of these sorts is therefore one in which our 'relationship to the transcendent' cannot be 'experience[d] in the most authentic and profound way'.[25] Perhaps the receptivity to mystery of those persons has

[23] See further Ian James Kidd, 'Is Naturalism Bleak?', *Environmental Values*, forthcoming.

[24] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, Jack Stillinger (ed.) (London: Taylor and Francis, 1981), p. 150.

[25] Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962), p. 16.

been atrophied through neglect and underuse, or simply been crushed by forms of physical and psychological oppression.

Such cases of spiritually oppressive societies are depressingly easy to provide, but the loss of receptivity is hardly confined to them. Modern liberal societies afford enormous freedoms of religious belief and observance, yet many of their members evince no especial receptivity to mystery. A defining feature of those societies is, as Charles Taylor has observed, that religious belief is 'no longer axiomatic', that faith, in whatever religion, is 'one human possibility among others', alongside a spectrum of agnostic and atheistic alternatives.[26] Although many factors contributed to what Taylor calls a change in the 'conditions of belief [and] experience', prime amongst them is the emergence of the modern sciences, which have gradually privileged a 'disengaged standpoint' upon the world.[27]

Taylor's arguments for that claim are too complex to be summarised here, but they find resonance with parallel claims made by Cooper and Cottingham. Throughout their work, each criticises what I will call the *scientistic stance*, a powerful and prevailing feature of much contemporary academic and popular culture which, they argue, is eroding our receptivity to mystery. The term 'stance' is here used in the technical sense articulated by Bas van Fraassen, to refer to an 'attitude, commitment, approach [or] cluster of such', possibly but not necessarily including certain beliefs, which constitutes a certain implicit conception of what the world is like, one which helps to pre-structure our experience of and engagement with it.[28] A scientistic stance reflects a sense of the 'exclusive sufficiency' of natural scientific descriptions of reality, and is to be contrasted with what van Fraassen calls a stance of 'abiding wonder' at the world; a sense that the world is not exhausted by scientific description.[29]

The justification for nominating the scientistic stance is that, although many attitudes can contribute to a loss of receptivity to mystery, not all of those attitudes are either current within modern societies, or regarded as plausible and persuasive within it. A scientistic stance, of course, is, being both aligned with central features of 'late modern' societies – such as an enthusiasm for technology – and also incorporated into its *sensus communis* or worldview.

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[26] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 4 *passim*.

[27] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 4 and 11.

[28] Bas van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 47-48.

[29] Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance*, pp. 47-155f.

Cooper and Cottingham both identify the scientistic stance as a prime cause of the loss of receptivity to mystery in contemporary societies. A person in hock to the scientistic stance employs what Cottingham calls a 'schematic picture of truth and reality' which, though difficult to precisely characterise, 'exerts an increasingly powerful influence, in a host of rational and pre-rational ways, on how many people feel able to interpret the world around them'.[30] Those influences can be detrimental, for, as Cooper argues, such scientism surely counts among the many 'attitudes, ambitions and stances' which are, for varying reasons, '*not* consonant with a sense of mystery'.[31] So although the scientistic stance is not unique in its capacity to contribute to a loss of receptivity to mystery, it surely bears responsibility for much of the loss within modern societies.

A main reason why the scientistic stance undermines one's receptivity to mystery was identified by Wittgenstein, a figure invoked by both Cooper and Cottingham. The 'disastrous thing about the scientific way of thinking', complained Wittgenstein, is not simply that it 'today possesses the whole world', but also that it encourages those who embrace it to 'respond to every disquietude with an explanation'.[32] The scientistic stance denies the possibility of mystery in the strong sense defended by Cooper by reducing it to 'merely that [which] has not yet been explained by science', thereby excluding the possibility of an ineffable, undiscursible reality.[33] A certain sense of mystery is permitted, but that concession is compromised by the qualifying conviction that any such sense is destined to be dissolved by ongoing scientific enquiry, perhaps in a future 'Theory of Everything'. A sense of mystery of the strong sort described by Cooper and Cottingham is therefore ruled out and reduced to a transitory feature of our life in the world, rather than an irreducible and enduring aspect of it.[34]

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[30] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 108.

[31] Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 6.

[32] Quoted in James Carl Klagge, *Wittgenstein in Exile* (Boston, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), p. 129.

[33] Wittgenstein, 'A Lecture on Ethics', *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), 10-11.

[34] Might one interpret the rhetoric of awe and wonder popular amongst many science writers – like Carl Sagan and Richard Dawkins – as reflections of a sense of mystery in this sense? I argue not, for two reasons. The first is that those writers allow the possibility, in principle or in practice, of descriptions of reality 'in itself' – perhaps the result of a future physics – and so rule out the strong sense of mystery being discussed here. The second is that those writers' sense of mystery does not tend to initiate moral and spiritual transformation in the way that the strong sense does; certainly the attitudes of

My concern is therefore that the adoption of a scientistic stance will reduce, in part or in whole, a person's capacity to cultivate receptivity to experiences of mystery. Such loss of receptivity can take a variety of forms – from a total lack of native receptivity in one case to the atrophy of a dormant sense in another – and these are discussed in the next section. A scientistic person may find that the 'picture' of the world they implicitly operate with finds no room for mystery, so no sense of it obtains, nor can the possibility of that sense be entertained. Unless the world is pictured in such a way that mystery is possible – perhaps, following Heidegger, in terms of an ineffable 'source' or 'ground' of being – then experiences of mystery will find little purchase. The concern shared by Cooper and Cottingham is that the forms of scientistic stance which are both prevalent and powerful within modern societies tend to militate against such openness, thereby contributing to a loss of receptivity to mystery.

V. SCIENTISM AND LOSS OF RECEPTIVITY TO MYSTERY

There are many ways in which a scientistic stance can contribute to a loss of receptivity to mystery. Cooper and Cottingham identify several of these, which I will present in ascending order, ranging from a person's own receptivity to mystery to their attitudes towards those figures and traditions that report and incorporate a sense of mystery. It is worth noting that one might suggest that some persons simply *lack* any receptivity to mystery, so that a scientistic stance does not, in fact, affect them; that may be so, but it strikes me as more plausible to suppose that receptivity to mystery, just like appreciation of beauty or goodness, is the 'default option' for most persons. Understanding those persons who seem to have a native lack of receptivity to mystery – let alone beauty or goodness – is a task for another time.

There are four ascending ways in which the adoption of a scientistic stance may occlude a person's native receptivity to mystery. First, a scientistic stance may prevent a person from 'responding' to experiences of mystery in the necessary way, perhaps because of their

writers like Sagan and Dawkins towards religion do not evince the sort of edification that Cooper and Cottingham, amongst others, describe. For a useful discussion of such rhetoric, see John Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

conviction that reality lacks anything like a 'transcendent' dimension. That person will, argues Cottingham, be able to respond to the world only as a 'sequence of brute facts', thereby remaining closed to the possibility of an 'intimation' of anything beyond it.[35] Certain 'modes of receptivity' are thereby ruled out, including Bishop Berkeley's seeing the 'mighty frame of the world' as the 'mind of [an] eternal spirit', or Martin Heidegger's, in regarding nature as something which 'assails and enthrals us' – rather than being mere particles in motion – to cite two examples offered by Cooper.[36] Since an experience of mystery is, in part, constituted by one's appropriately responding to it, any inability to respond thereby compromises the possibility of the experience; and so, as Cooper puts it, a scientistic stance occludes our experience of mystery because it 'obstructs the having of it'.[37]

Second, a scientistic stance diminishes our receptivity to mystery by undermining our capacity to openly engage with those persons who are, in fact, possessed of that receptivity. Many persons who are receptive to mystery nonetheless fail to have strong experiences of it, yet are able to take seriously the testimonies of those who do – such as Teresa of Avila or the Sufis; so one may be receptive to others' experiences of mystery, even in the absence of any experiences of one's own. But for a person operating with a scientistic stance, such testimonies are automatically reinterpreted and downgraded in scientistic terms; hence the neurobiologist Vilayanur Ramachandran's insistence that 'our mental life – all our feeling and emotions' are, at base, 'simply the activity of these little specks of jelly in our heads, in our brains'.[38] A person persuaded of this is thereby debarred from experiencing testimonies to experiences of mystery as just that – experiences of mystery – for they will inevitably be 'translated' into other terms (those of neurobiology, in Ramachandran's case).

This loss of receptivity to testimonials of experiences of mystery generates specific problems for Cooper and Cottingham because it

[35] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. 48.

[36] George Berkeley, *Philosophical Writings*, T. Jessop (ed.) (London: Nelson, 1952), p. 148. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 100. For a sophisticated account of Heidegger's views on the role played by science in the occlusion of certain ways of experiencing nature, see David E. Cooper, 'Heidegger on Nature', *Environmental Values*, 14 (2002), 339-351.

[37] Cooper, *The Measure of Things*, p. 341.

[38] V. S. Ramachandran, *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness* (New York: Pi Press, 2005), p. 3.

challenges their specific proposals for cultivating a sense of mystery, which constitute the third and fourth ways that a scientistic stance can undermine receptivity.

Third, a scientistic stance prevents a person from being able to regard certain people – either poets, philosophers, or religious figures – as what Cooper calls 'heroes'. These heroes act as guides or exemplars, for, as Cooper rightly remarks, a person may have no idea about what a sense of mystery is or how certain practices may provide intimations of it. Such persons in that state of uncertainty will, quite naturally, try to seek out a hero, a person – real or fictional, historical or contemporary – whose life seems to 'answer to [and] be given shape by' their sense of mystery.[39] Yet, of course, one will find it difficult, if not impossible, to invest 'resolute confidence' in such people if one is, to quote Wittgenstein, persuaded that 'poets [and] musicians' only exist to 'entertain' rather than to 'teach', and so many potential 'heroes' – including those deeply attuned to a sense of mystery – are thereby lost to them.[40]

Fourth, a scientistic stance prevents a person from participating in the 'communities of praxis' which Cottingham describes. It is only through such practical and social immersion that one can begin the 'process of growth and transformation' which is the 'catalyst' for what I have called receptivity to mystery.[41] Yet that becomes impossible if one subscribes to the view that the praxis of that community is unwarranted nonsense, for then participation in those practices, and the surrounding community, becomes absurd. An illustrative example is Owen Flanagan's recent call for a 'naturalisation' of Buddhism, purging it of 'mind-numbing and wishful *hocus pocus*', like karma and rebirth.[42] If one takes this proposal seriously, then the practices and traditions of Buddhism are thus impugned, for their component metaphysical claims will appear, as they do to Flanagan, as 'silly superstitions', such that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to sincerely participate in them. For it is not at all clear either that concepts like karma are inessential features of Buddhist philosophy or that the integrity of its ethical teachings would survive their removal.[43]

[39] Cooper, 'Living with Mystery', p. 12.

[40] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 42.

[41] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, pp. 143 and 152.

[42] Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalised* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), p. 3 *passim*.

[43] See the interesting discussion of Flanagan's naturalised Buddhism at the 'Buddhist Ethics Naturalised' panel at the *Contemporary Perspectives on Buddhist Ethics* conference,

Once these points are appreciated, a fifth emerges, namely that a scientistic person gradually loses their sense not only of mystery, but of what Paul Feyerabend called the 'abundance' of the world. This refers to the fact of their being a rich diversity of ways of conceiving of and comporting oneself within it, through which one can come to recognise the 'richness of Being'. Such abundance can be lost through an insistence upon the exclusive truth of some one set of conceptions of reality, such as those of the sciences, when it is better, argued Feyerabend, to cultivate a sense of 'spontaneous tolerance' towards alternative traditions and a 'quieter, more wondering attitude' towards the world.[44] A person possessed of this attitude will revoke the scientistic stance and instead strive to learn 'from the sciences [and] also from the humanities[,] religion and from ... ancient traditions', consonant with Cooper's and Cottingham's call to re-engage with those spiritual traditions within which a sense of mystery plays a central role.[45] Indeed, Feyerabend himself argued that reality in itself – what he called 'Being' – is 'ineffable' and unknowable, although 'abundance' in his sense does not necessarily entail that; one can be open to the idea of there being alternative accounts of reality without also subscribing to a doctrine of mystery, even if Feyerabend, for the record, did.[46]

These five ways in which a scientistic stance can contribute to the loss of receptivity to mystery are related in a variety of ways, most often in a mutually reinforcing manner. My treatment of these five ways is not exhaustive, but nor need it be for present purposes. Cooper and Cottingham may, of course, disagree on the details of these ways of reducing receptivity to mystery; however, both agree that a person operating with a scientistic stance may be rendered unreceptive to both their own experiences of mystery and those of others, including the religious and philosophical figures and traditions within which those experiences play a central role.

Columbia University, 6-7 October 2011. A podcast of that panel is available online at <http://www.cbs.columbia.edu/buddhist_ethics/panel-one.htm>. I am grateful to Jan Westerhoff for a helpful discussion of Flanagan's views.

[44] Paul Feyerabend, *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being*, Bert Terpstra (ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. xi.

[45] Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*. 3rd ed. (London: Verso, 1993), p. 249.

[46] See further Ian James Kidd, 'Feyerabend on the Ineffability of Reality', *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, Asa Kasher and Jeanne Diller (eds.) (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2012).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to explore the theme of loss of receptivity to mystery common to Cooper and Cottingham. I argued that both identify the prevalence of a scientistic stance as a prime cause of the loss of such receptivity in modern societies, since it distorts a person's capacity to properly respond to their own experiences of mystery and to engage openly in the practices and with the traditions which the cultivation of a sense of mystery requires. It is worth closing by considering two possibilities – one each from Cooper and Cottingham – for how one might challenge that scientistic stance.

The first is that one could restore appreciation of the traditions within which doctrines of mystery have enjoyed a central role. Cooper writes of a 'modesty or humility' which attends the recognition that 'philosophers from earlier times, and different cultures' would regard many of our beliefs – such as scientific realism – as 'incredible'.[47] Although such appreciation does not in itself necessitate a commitment to a doctrine of mystery, it would surely encourage an abandonment of scientistic insistence on the immaturity or absurdity of those traditions. Such recognition involves humility because it requires us to concede that our own achievements – the scientific *Weltbild* for example – should not blind us to the possibility, indeed the fact, of alternative conceptions of reality and forms of life.

The second strategy for restoring receptivity to mystery is offered by Cottingham's proposals for a reorientation of the philosophy of religion in a 'humane' direction.[48] Although what Brian Leiter calls the 'naturalistic turn' has produced much valuable work, there are good reasons to suppose that its capacity to provide the necessary resources to explore and understand the domain of the religious is reaching its limits. Cottingham proposes that a 'humane turn' is needed, whereby philosophers can 'address ... questions about human self-understanding' using 'methods and resources' quite distinct from those typical of the naturalistic turn. Indeed, Cottingham judges that 'the adoption

[47] David E. Cooper and Peter S. Fosl, *Philosophy: The Classic Readings*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. xxiv.

[48] John Cottingham, 'What is Humane Philosophy and Why is it At Risk?', in Anthony O'Hear (ed.), *Conceptions of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 233-255. On the idea of humane philosophy as a response to scientism, see Ian James Kidd, 'Humane Philosophy and the Question of Progress', *Ratio*, XXV, no. 3 (2012), 277-290.

of a humane approach' is an 'essential prerequisite' of a revitalised philosophy of religion: one liberated from scientistic preconceptions which distort and occlude much about religious life.[49]

These two proposals may perhaps raise as many problems as they might resolve. Certainly Cooper and Cottingham set themselves ambitious tasks, especially since the success of their proposals is crucially premised upon a reassessment of the naturalistic orthodoxy of contemporary mainstream philosophy. But when one considers that such self-reflexive criticism is a central feature of the philosophical enterprise, and that the sentiments expressed by Cooper and Cottingham are aligned with ancient and venerable spiritual traditions, a call to take seriously these claims of loss of receptivity to mystery appears neither unwarranted nor absurd.[50]

[49] Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, p. ix.

[50] I offer my thanks to David E. Cooper and John Cottingham for inspiring my thoughts on this topic and for their kind participation in the 'Mystery, Humility, and Religious Practice' workshop, and to Guy Bennett-Hunter, Arlette Frederik, Thomas Greaves, Jan Westerhoff, and Jonathon Winthrop for their very helpful comments on this paper.

AWE AND HUMILITY IN THE FACE OF THINGS: SOMATIC PRACTICE IN EAST-ASIAN PHILOSOPHIES

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Abstract. Whereas the Platonic-Christian philosophical tradition in the West favours an 'ascent to theory' and abstract reasoning, East-Asian philosophies tend to be rooted in somatic, or bodily, *practice*. In the philosophies of Confucius and Zhuangzi in China, and Kūkai and Dōgen in Japan, we can distinguish two different forms of somatic practice: developing physical skills, and what one might call 'realising relationships'. These practices improve our relations with others – whether the ancestors or our contemporaries, the things with which we surround ourselves or the phenomena of nature – by reducing egocentrism and increasing humility. Because they transform the practitioner's experience, the major benefit of philosophies grounded in somatic practice is that they help close the gap between beliefs and behaviour, and between ideas and action.

The background to what follows is the global environmental crisis we are currently facing, and especially the prospect, if the developed nations insist on continuing with 'business as usual', of reaching by way of several synchronous positive feedback loops – such as reduction of the ice-albedo, methane release, and water vapour feedbacks – a tipping point that will usher in what climate scientists call 'runaway global warming'.[1] This kind of syndrome was apparently a major factor in 'the Mother of All Extinctions' at the end of the Permian Period some 250 million years ago, and something similar appears to have caused the oceans on Venus to evaporate and the carbon dioxide levels in its atmosphere to rise to over 96%. If we manage to reach that tipping point, it will be the end of

[1] I am grateful to Gereon Kopf for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

civilisation as we know it, and all questions in philosophy and religion – perhaps even all questions simpliciter – will be nugatory.[2]

Among the numerous factors driving this current insanity is a lack of awe and humility in the face of the wonders of the world – other people, natural phenomena, and the things we make use of in living our lives. This essay considers the role of somatic practices in cultivating such humility in the context of some East-Asian philosophical and religious traditions. By somatic practice I mean disciplined and repetitive activities of the body that have a cumulative effect on its physiology and transform its experiencing. After considering somatic practices in some representative Chinese and Japanese philosophies, I conclude with a brief remark about the benefit of such practices.[3]

It has often been remarked that a major difference between the Western and East-Asian philosophical traditions is exemplified in the contrast between their primary guiding questions: for Western thought, beginning with the ancient Greeks, the question is usually 'What is the truth?', whereas for classical Chinese philosophy it's more likely to be 'What is the way?' – meaning 'How are we to live?'. It is less often remarked that this difference derives in large part from a difference in methods: whereas the Platonic-Christian tradition favours an 'ascent to theory' and abstract reasoning, East-Asian philosophy tends to be rooted in somatic practice. Another, related difference between the two sets of traditions is that the Western tendency to distinguish between philosophy and religion, secular and sacred, theory and practice, is foreign to East-Asian thought. For example, in the Chinese tradition 'knowing'

[2] See James Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth about the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save the Planet* (London, Berlin, New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), chapter 10, 'The Venus Syndrome', pp. 223-36. The subtitle may strike the reader as unfortunately alarmist – but only until after he or she has read and digested the contents of the book.

[3] Right on the deadline for submitting this typescript, my colleague John Maraldo mentioned an essay of his, of which I had been regrettably unaware, that turns out to deal with my topic here: 'An Alternative Notion of Practice in the Promise of Japanese Philosophy', in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, 4 (Nagoya, 2009), 7-21. There is time only to cite his definition of practice, which is perfectly consonant with my usage in what follows: 'action done over and over again, performed for its own sake but with a learning curve toward improvement, with the whole person, "body and soul," engaged; that is, with attentive seeing or know-how built into the action.' (p. 19) Also too late, I came across *Du musst dein Leben ändern* by Peter Sloterdijk (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), a tour de force that emphasises the central importance of practice (*Übung)* in developing a fulfilled life.

is as much a practical as a theoretical matter, and Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism are religions as well as philosophies.

Broadly speaking, one can distinguish between two forms of practice in these traditions: developing physical skills, and what one might call 'realising relationships' – 'realising' in the dual sense of becoming aware of our relations with others, and also making those relationships real, or actual. This requires imagination, but it is also very much a somatic process. For all their differences, one thing shared in common by the four East-Asian thinkers to be discussed in what follows is a sense that our relations to others tend to be exacerbated by egocentrism and made harmonious by humility – whether in the face of the ancestors or our contemporaries, the things with which we surround ourselves, or the phenomena of nature.

CONFUCIUS: DEVELOPING SKILLS AND REALISING RELATIONS

The prerequisite in ancient China for becoming a philosopher – or a scholar-official, or even just a gentleman – was self-cultivation through the 'Six Arts': ritual ceremony, the playing of music, calligraphy, mathematics, archery, and charioteering. If we can assume that training in mathematics involved the use of some kind of abacus, than all six arts would require considerable physical skill, to develop which requires *practice*.

The most important arts for Confucius (551-479 BCE) are THE first two, the practice of *lǐ*, or 'ritual propriety', and of music. These complement one another in that playing (and listening to) music moulds the moods and emotions from within, while the mastery of ritual ceremony shapes the energies of the body from the outside. There are obvious parallels between the role of practice in each, but the focus here will be on ritual propriety, since its role in realising relationships and enhancing humility is more extensive. Roger Ames has pointed out that the association of ritual propriety with the body (*tǐ* – a cognate of *lǐ*) is established by a passage from the *Book of Rites*:

> Now the great corpus (*tǐ*) of ritual proprieties (*lǐ*) is embodied (*tǐ*) in the heavens and the earth, emulates the four seasons, takes *yin* and *yang* as its standard, and comports with human feeling ...[4]

[4] *Book of Rites*, cited in Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), p. 109.

This body of cultural practices gets its life, then, from being performed by succeeding generations of practitioners, and its sustenance by incorporating the energies of the natural world.

As Herbert Fingarette showed quite some time ago in his *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, the first great philosopher in the classical Chinese tradition dissolved the distinction between religious rituals and secular activities by advocating the application of the skills necessary for the former to *all* social interaction. There are three distinctive features to the forms of ancient sacrifice on which Confucius appears to have modelled his understanding of ritual propriety: one sacrifices something of *value* in acknowledgment of the higher powers with whom one is establishing or cultivating a relationship – whether these are the heavens, the spirits, or the ancestors; one has to practise the ritual with *precision*: the rite must be performed right, if it's going to work; and one's *heart* has to be in it: simply going through the motions is not sufficient.

To give something up in order to enhance a relationship focuses one's attention on the Other in a way that reduces egocentrism. Confucius's insistence that the ritual be performed properly, in the traditional way rather than simply as one likes it, evinces and encourages humility in the face of the wisdom of the ancestors. He does, however, acknowledge that changing circumstances may necessitate changes in procedure: he's prepared to go along with the practice of substituting a simpler cap of silk for an elaborate linen cap in order to spare expense; but he objects to a newfangled switch in the order of doing prostrations and ascending steps, since this change is arbitrary.[5] Those men of old knew what they were doing when they elaborated the ritual in these particular ways, and it would be presumptuous of us upstart latecomers to presume that we know better. It is this kind of submission that is meant by the Confucian expression *kè jǐ*, 'self-discipline' or 'self-restraint' – whose literal meaning is 'conquering' or 'overcoming the self', with connotations in this context of 'overcoming selfishness' or 'egocentricity' (12.1). If for example you announce on your first visit to the martial arts dojo that you intend to do the form (*kata* in Japanese) 'your way', that visit is likely be your last. The whole point is to do it their way, until through prolonged practice you

[5] Confucius, *Analects*, 9.3. Subsequent references in the body of the text simply by the numbers of chapter and verse. I use the translations by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998) and by D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (London: Penguin, 1979) with occasional slight modifications.

have made the form your own. That's why in Japan such arts, whether martial or fine, are practised as a 'way' of life (the way of archery, the way of tea, the way of calligraphy, and so forth).

The work of culture requires a constant cultivation of the movements and attitudes of the human body mindful of its environment. In Confucian ritual the appropriate garments, for example, are prescribed in advance; but how one wears them (the precise angle of the hat, the arc of the sweep of the sleeve) requires careful attention to particular detail. Whether in the presence of the many or the few, the great or the small, 'the gentleman does not dare to neglect anyone ... wears his robe and cap correctly, and is polite in his gaze' (20.4). Ritual propriety demands acute awareness of the position and posture of the body in motion: it simply won't do to be stumbling as one ascends the steps, knocking over the flowers on the altar, or dropping the ritual implements on the floor. Through honing the body's movements in relation to other people and things, one becomes more open and responsive to the world and enhances social harmony through one's skilful interactions (1.12).

The infusion of heart or soul into one's activity depends on a prior mastery of the physical practice, and here the parallels with music are instructive. I may bring to the musical performance an overflowing soul and a heart brimming with good feeling, but if I can't play the instrument the results will be embarrassing at any level beyond the teenagers' garage band or the friends' alcohol-fuelled jam session. But while mastery of technique is indispensable, it isn't sufficient. Witness the flood of teenage violin and piano virtuosos from China these days who command flawless technique and attain almost supernatural speed on the most demanding works in the western classical repertoire – but tend to lack the requisite depth of feeling. Confucius advocates, in the practice of ritual propriety, a balance between 'native substance' and 'acquired refinement': too much 'nature' and you get boorishness, while over-cultivation results in mere punctiliousness (6.18).

An important consequence for Confucius of the assiduous practice of self-cultivation on the part of the gentleman, or consummate human being, is that the power (*dé*) thereby accumulated has an almost magical effect on the people around him: 'The power of the gentleman is the wind, while that of the petty person is the grass. When the wind blows, the grass is sure to bend.' (12.19) The resulting 'charisma' of the exemplar naturally encourages emulation on the part of others: all the ruler has

to do – but he has to be seen to be doing this – is to take up his position facing south, and the empire will spontaneously order itself (15.5; 2.1). The consummate practice of Confucian ritual propriety can thus be awe-inspiring in the way it exerts a mysterious and quasi magical effect on others through some kind of 'sympathetic resonance'.

The central Confucian concern with family reverence (*xiào*, traditionally translated as 'filial piety') is a special case of the Master's conception of human existence as being radically *relational*. His characterization of the way to become fully human and humane (*rén*) – by 'loving one's fellow human beings' (12.22) – involves extending the love one naturally feels for the closest kin to one's more distant relatives, and from there, in a gradated way, to the rest of society.[6] This ability doesn't come naturally but requires practice, practice in the cultivating of reciprocity (*shù*). Confucius's claim that one of the most difficult things in life is to fully own up to one's shortcomings and take oneself to task for them is surely on the mark (5.27): as another Good Book points out, it's so much easier to see the tiny splinter in the other person's eye than the huge log that's lodged in one's own.[7] It's clear from many passages in the *Analects* that Confucius is well aware of the close connection between the human tendency toward selfishness and the prevalence of what modern psychology calls 'projection' – as evidenced in his 'negative' formulation of the Golden Rule. When asked whether there's 'one expression that can be acted upon until the end of one's days', Confucius replies: 'There is reciprocity: Do not impose on others what you yourself do not want.'[8]

The task of realising relationships – in the sense of ensuring that we're relating to the reality of the people we deal with rather than our fantasy projection of how we would like them to be or think they ought to be – requires that one learn to see through (and so check or restrain) one's projections by acknowledging one's own faults. One of the most precious gems of moral-psychological insight to be found (twice) in the *Analects* is this: 'When walking in the company of two others, I am bound to be able to learn from both. The good points of the one I emulate; the failings of the other I correct – in myself.' (7.22, 4.17) How much easier it

[6] See Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, chapter IV.

[7] *Matthew* 7:3-5; *Luke* 6:41-42.

[8] Confucius, *Analects* 15.24; also 12.2. See the discussion of *shù* in Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, pp. 194-200.

is to correct the failings of the other person instead – and how elegantly that rhetorical retroflexion at the end signals the hardness of the task of working oneself into shape. To be able to put oneself properly in the other person's shoes, and see the situation from his or her point of view, requires a depth of empathy that can only be achieved through assiduous practice in imagining.

But this project also involves a kind of somatic practice in the form of honing one's perceptions and sharpening one's attention, so that one really hears what the other person is saying by being sensitive to all the overtones and undertones of the voice, reads his or her body language carefully, and sees clearly the subtleties of facial expression that may reveal what is felt but is not being said. It's a matter not just of letting those 'mirror neurons' get crackling, but also of a sympathetic feeling of patterns of tension and relaxation in the musculature. The task is to open oneself to an intuitive attunement with the other person's life, so that one can practise genuine benevolence rather than merely helping the other become more like oneself.

Admirable though the Confucian project is, the Daoists (a century or two after Confucius) regard it as too narrowly confined to the realm of social relations, and advocate an expansion of concern to the natural environment within which any human society must operate. The relationships to be realised in that broader context will be correspondingly more extensive.

ZHUANGZI: ENTERTAINING PERSPECTIVES AND ATTUNING THE BODY

Along with the legendary Laozi, to whom the *Daodejing* is ascribed, Zhuangzi (369-286 BCE) is the second great thinker in classical Daoism. His main way of realising relationships is through what one might call perspectival practice, exercising body and mind toward greater flexibility by way of 'free and easy wandering' through a diversity of perspectives. He acknowledges the occasional necessity of the perspective of utility (through which we see what things we can use and how) for coping with practical matters, but is also concerned to demonstrate its limitations. For one thing, we tend to get stuck in certain modes of this perspective, as a story in the *Zhuangzi*'s first chapter astutely shows.

Zhuangzi's friend Huizi (a real person and also, tellingly, a logician) has been given some seed that grows into an enormous gourd weighing

over a hundred pounds. He tries to use it in the customary way, as a water container – but it's too big to lift; then, split in half, as a ladle – but it's still too unwieldy; so he ends up smashing it to pieces in frustration. Zhuangzi asks why he didn't think to use it intact, as a different type of vessel in which he could have gone 'floating through the lakes and rivers'. Huizi was stuck in a particular perspective of utility, fixated on the gourds as something to put water in, and so overlooked the possibility of putting himself in the water and using the gourd to keep on top of it.[9] Even in this imaginative shift the body plays a part, insofar as Huizi failed to feel that he could physically fit himself inside the gourd.

As long as we stay fixated in the perspective of utility, we close off the prospect of feeling either awe or humility in the face of things. One way that Zhuangzi shifts us out of this perspective is by pointing out, in a number of passages, what he calls 'the usefulness of being useless' – which, given the arrogant rapaciousness of humans, is a valuable asset for other beings. In one story a certain Carpenter Stone comes across a famous tree at a shrine, which is 'so large that thousands of oxen could shade themselves under it'. He walks past it without a second look, dismissing it as 'worthless timber' and 'useless'. The tree later appears to him in a dream and instructs him on the usefulness of being useless, which is what allowed it to 'live out its natural life span'. The tree's parting remarks are especially telling:

> Moreover, you and I are both beings – is either of us in a position to classify and evaluate the other? How could a worthless man with one foot in the grave know what is or isn't a worthless tree?[10]

The tree shakes the carpenter out of his anthropocentrism by remarking that a reciprocity of perspectives, which highlights their both being finite and impermanent beings subject to death, grants them a salutary ontological parity. Since the tree was good for nothing, the local religion – one of the few forces capable of subverting the human drive to use things up – granted it special protection, which is what allowed it to grow to such awe-inspiring proportions.[11]

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[9] *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, trans. Brook Ziporyn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), pp. 7-8. 'Free and easy wandering' is the title of this first chapter (which Ziporyn translates 'Wandering far and unfettered').

[10] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 4, p. 30.

[11] See the discussion of this story in James W. Heisig, 'Make-Believe Nature', *Dialogues at One Inch Above the Ground* (New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 40-42.

In keeping with the general Daoist move away from anthropocentrism, Zhuangzi invites the reader to entertain (literally, 'hold oneself among') the perspectives of many other species and kinds of beings: more often of insects, reptiles, birds or fish than of mammals – perhaps because these last are easier to empathise with. In the course of a philosophical dispute beginning from the question, 'Do you know what all things agree in considering right?' one of the interlocutors puts the anthropocentric perspective in perspective in a way that's unmatched in the history of world philosophy. After asking which beings among a variety of animals (including the human) know the best places to sleep in, or the best things to eat, he says:

> Monkeys take she-monkeys for mates, bucks mount does, male fish frolic with female fish, while humans regard Mao Qiang and Lady Li as great beauties. But when fish see these legendary beauties they dart into the depths, when birds see them they soar into the skies, when deer see them they bolt away without looking back. Which of these four 'knows' what is rightly alluring?[12]

We humans like to think that of course we know what's what in the world, but this last question shows us just how silly that presumption is. Only when we learn to check the drive to regard the world from the standpoint of what's in it for us, and so slip out of the anthropocentric perspective, can we become open to the mystery of things.

To achieve such an openness one needs to empty the heart-mind (the Chinese *xīn* covers the sense of both terms) of all the conceptual clutter that's been accumulating since one was socialized into a language. According to Zhuangzi, 'The genuine human beings of old breathed from their heels, while the mass of men breathe from their throats.' This seems to refer to meditative practice that 'balances the *qì* energies' that compose the body, and which is also associated with 'fasting the heart-mind'.[13] Such fasting dissolves sedimented judgments and prejudices in the mind, and loosens habitual reactions in the body, so that the *qì* energies of heaven and earth (*tiān*, or *tiāndì*) can flow through unimpeded and keep one on course. ('The Course' is Brook Ziporyn's translation of *dào*, 'the Way', in the *Zhuangzi*.) For all the flexible interchanging of perspectives between human and other beings that Zhuangzi recommends, it's not a matter of abandoning the human perspective altogether, but rather of keeping

[12] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 2, pp. 17-18.

[13] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 6, 40; chapter 7, 52-53; chapter 4, 26-27.

it in dynamic interplay with the perspectives of natural phenomena. The genuine human being is one for whom 'neither the Heavenly [the natural] nor the human wins out over the other'.[14]

Another way of attaining such a condition is through prolonged somatic practice that attunes the entire musculature to the dynamics of natural energies. One of the best known passages in the *Zhuangzi* concerns King Hui's cook, whose skill with the cleaver is such that, after cutting up 'thousands of oxen' over a period of nineteen years, his blade is 'still as sharp as the day it came off the whetstone'. After three years of practice he is able to stop 'scrutinizing the ox with his eyes' and deactivate his ordinary way of understanding, so as to let the subtle energies that constitute his own body resonate with the energies that compose the carcass and thereby guide his blade into the interstices in just the right way.[15] As is often the case with such adept practitioners, the performance is aesthetically as well as practically impressive, a captivating dance rather than a humdrum procedure:

> Wherever his hand smacked the ox, wherever his shoulder leaned into it, wherever his foot braced it, wherever his knee pressed it, the thwacking tones of flesh falling from bone would echo, the knife would whiz through with its resonant thwing, each stroke ringing out the perfect note, attuned to the 'Dance of the Mulberry Grove' or the 'Jingshou Chorus' of the ancient sage-kings.

The cook's explanation of his ability is simple: 'I love the Course (*dào*), something that advances beyond mere skill.' This echoes Confucius's saying that whatever powers he possesses come from 'heaven' (7.23), and exemplifies Daoist humility in the face of the powers of heaven and earth. The cook's love of *dào* is shared by several other characters in the *Zhuangzi* whose practice has allowed them to develop almost supernatural physical skills, but just one more example will suffice.

Qing the Woodworker was carving a bell stand that was so awe-inspiring that those around him 'were astonished, as if they had seen the

[14] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 6, 42.

[15] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 3, 22. The term used here is *shén* ('spirit') rather than *qì* ('energies'), but it's clearly a matter of *qì* as well. In ancient Chinese cosmology *qì* undercuts the distinction between animate and inanimate, and so an ox carcass is as much a configuration of *qì* as an ox, just a less vital configuration. For more details, see the section 'Cosmologies of *Qi*' in my essay, 'Winds, Waters, and Earth-Energies: *Fengshui* and Sense of Place', in Helaine Selin, ed., *Non-Western Views of Nature and the Environment* (Dordrecht & Boston: Kluwer, 2003), pp. 185-209.

doings of a ghost or spirit'. When asked about his technique, he explains that he takes care not to 'deplete his vital energy (*qi*)' and also 'fasts to quiet his mind', so that after three days he has given up any concern for 'praise or reward, rank or salary'. Only after a week of letting go all conventional valuations does he feel ready to search for the proper materials.

> I enter into the mountain forests, viewing the inborn Heavenly nature of the trees. My body arrives at a certain spot, and already I see the completed bell stand there; only then do I apply my hand to it. Otherwise I leave the tree alone. So I am just matching the Heavenly to the Heavenly. This may be the reason the result suggests the work of spirits![16]

As in the case of King Hui's cook, it's a matter of practice that empties the heart-mind of all preconceptions and finds the right material by letting the human body's energies resonate with the energies of the natural body. We can surely assume that this kind of responsiveness continues from the tree-finding into the wood-carving phase.

KŪKAI: LEARNING TO LISTEN AND READING THE SIGNS

Kūkai (774-835) was Japan's first great thinker and is one of the world's profoundest and most comprehensive philosophers. As the founder of the Shingon School of Esoteric Buddhism, he was a master of theoretical speculation whose thinking was always grounded in somatic practice. His best known idea is probably *sokushin jōbutsu*, the idea that it's possible to attain enlightenment in this present body – by contrast with earlier Buddhist views that enlightenment could be achieved only after many lifetimes. What one realises through the somatic practices that Kūkai recommends in this endeavour has to do with a larger body belonging to Dainichi Nyorai (Mahavairocana in Sanskrit), the Dharmakaya or cosmic embodiment of the Buddha. Kūkai's second great idea, *hosshin seppō,* means that Dainichi as the Dharmakaya is constantly engaged in expounding the Buddhist teachings, or Dharma. This contrasts with the traditional understanding of the cosmic embodiment of the Buddha as 'formless and imageless, and totally beyond verbalization and conceptualization'.[17] It also exemplifies one of Kūkai's major innovations

[16] *Zhuangzi*, chapter 19, 81-2.

[17] Kūkai, 'The Difference between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism' (*Benkenmitsu nikyō ron*), in *Kūkai: Major Works*, trans. Yoshito S. Hakeda (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 151-57 (p. 154). Subsequent references will be abbreviated as '*KMW*'.

in the development of Buddhist doctrine, which was to bring the idea of the Dharmakaya 'down to earth' by identifying what was customarily regarded as the Absolute, formless and imageless, with the totality of the actual world we presently inhabit.

This world, for Kūkai, is constantly creating itself through the Five Great Processes (*godai*) of earth, water, fire, wind, and space interacting with each other and with a sixth process, awareness – so that he also speaks of the Six Great Processes constituting the world.[18] At the deepest level these interactions are sound-energies that take the form of signs, just as Dainichi's expounding of the Dharma happens as both spoken sermon and written scripture.[19]

Taking the elucidation of the teachings through sound first: this means on one hand sounds we can ordinarily hear, such as the wind blowing through the grass, the crashing of waves on the shore, the roaring of a forest fire, the song of birds and the cries of mammals. Even for the uninitiated among us, such sounds can seem, if we attend to them with an open mind, in some way meaningful (though we may have no idea what they mean). On the other hand Kūkai is talking about sounds that are ordinarily inaudible: vibrations emanating from the sun, the resonances of clouds, and the voices of rocks. The key to understanding this enigmatic idea is his notion of *sanmitsu*, the 'Three Mysteries', or 'Three Intimacies'.[20] This triad is based on the traditional Buddhist conception of the individual as consisting of 'body, speech, and mind', and working karmically as 'acting, speaking, and thinking'. Corresponding to these three aspects of the individual are three aspects of Dainichi as the cosmic Buddha: the sounds of the world as his speech, the signs of the world as images of his thought, and the things of the world as his body.

Although Kūkai emphasizes that Dainichi's elucidation of the Buddhist teachings is 'for his own enjoyment' and a communication

[18] Kūkai, 'Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Body', *KMW*, pp. 228-29.

[19] For Kūkai reality consists of nothing but sounds and signs, as he explains in his treatise 'The Meaning of Sound, Sign, Reality' (*Shōji jissō gi, KMW*, pp. 234-46), where he recounts a process whereby sounds become signs and signs become things.

[20] See Thomas P. Kasulis, 'Reality as Embodiment: An Analysis of Kūkai's *Sokushinjōbutsu* and *Hosshin Seppō*', in Jane Marie Law, ed., *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 166-85. Kasulis's translation by 'intimacies' is more illuminating philosophically than 'mysteries', and his essay is an exceptionally lucid exposition of these two key texts of Kūkai's.

'between the Buddha and the Buddha', it is also true that 'he deigns to let it be known to us' – at least to those of us who undertake appropriate practice.[21] Insofar as Dainichi preaches the Buddha-Dharma through the sounds of the cosmos, the Shingon practitioner will be able, by chanting mantras, to attune his or her hearing to the cosmic resonances and thereby understand the sermon.

Just as every phenomenon creates a sound that we can learn to hear 'with the third ear', as it were, so everything is also a sign inscribed in the great scripture that is the world. As Kūkai writes in one of his longer poems:

> Being painted by brushes of mountains, by ink of oceans,
> Heaven and earth are the bindings of a sutra revealing the Truth.
> Reflected in a dot are all things in the universe;
> Contained in the data of senses and mind is the sacred book.
> It is open or closed depending on how we look at it;
> Both [Dainichi's] silence and his eloquence make incisive tongues numb.[22]

As for the Dharmakaya's elucidation of the teachings as a sutra, it won't be readable by the uninitiated – even though striations on rocks or patterns in water or vegetation may appear to an open mind to mean something. Full comprehension of the world's signs will require the Shingon practices of visualizing mandalas and settling the mind in meditation (*samadhi*) – an opening of the third eye, as it were.

Finally, to be able to feel and experience all things as constituting Dainichi's body, the somatic practice of mudras (symbolic hand gestures) is necessary. As Kūkai puts it, in 'Attaining Enlightenment in this Present Body':

> If there is a Shingon student who reflects well upon the meaning of the Three Mysteries, makes mudras, recites mantras, and allows his mind to abide in the state of samadhi, then, through grace, his three mysteries will be united with the Three Mysteries [of the Dharmakaya Buddha]; in this way the great perfection of his religious discipline will be realised.[23]

Through these three kinds of practice one is able to realise one's participation as body, speech and mind in the body, speech and mind of the cosmos – thereby achieving intimacy with the world's many mysteries.

If we ask, in the case of natural phenomena, what is to be learned from them, which aspects of the Buddha-Dharma they teach, we find

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[21] Kūkai, 'Exoteric and Esoteric', *KMW*, p. 152; 'Introduction to All the Sūtras', translated by Kasulis in 'Reality as Embodiment', p. 174.

[22] Kūkai, *KMW*, p. 91.

[23] Kūkai, *KMW*, pp. 230-31.

no explicit answer in Kūkai's writings. But presumably they would include: the impermanence of all things, the interdependence of their arising and perishing, the necessity for limits, the infinity of perspectives in the world, and the beauty of natural and spontaneous unfolding. Insofar as the world is what Kūkai calls the 'wondrous' and 'fulfilled' body of the cosmic Buddha, it is worthy of our awe and respect.[24] And insofar as natural phenomena are delivering sermons and scriptures in the primordial natural language, a certain humility in the face of such valuable sources of understanding is called for.

The esoteric practices of Shingon Buddhism are many and various, and often extremely complex, but a few general features deserve mention.[25] In many rituals the practitioner sits in front of a painted or sculpted image of a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva, as if before a mirror, and visualizes the interaction between the two parties as culminating in an identification or union. The context, derived from ancient Indian etiquette, is that the practitioner offers hospitality to the deity, preparing his body and clothing, as well as the ritual implements and reception place, as if he were a host 'receiving an honoured guest'. The square altar platform that is at the centre of Shingon ritual is regarded as a mandala that derives from the place where Shakyamuni attained enlightenment. The primary ritual implement is the *vajra* (single-, three- or five-pronged) which symbolizes 'the diamond-like wisdom that destroys all delusion' and is thus associated with many buddhas and deities in the pantheon. The vajra bells, ritual trays, metal chimes, candle stands, flower vases, model pagodas, incense burners, and other implements have multiple symbolic meanings relating not only to Buddhist philosophy and soteriology but also to the natural world, so that the practitioner's handling of them serves to integrate his activities into the rhythms and resonances of the whole cosmos.[26]

DŌGEN: PREPARING FOOD AND SAILING BOATS

The practices we find in the Zen Buddhism of Dōgen (1200-53) are in general less elaborate than those of Shingon, even though in both cases

[24] Kūkai, 'Introduction to All the Sūtras', cited in Kasulis, 'Reality as Embodiment', p. 174.

[25] See, for example, the descriptions in Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1988).

[26] Yamasaki, *Shingon,* pp. 162, 124, 163-67.

the practitioner's body becomes integrated with the body of the world. For Dōgen 'the true human body' is 'the entire world of the ten directions'.[27] He frequently warns that any intention 'to become a buddha', any striving for enlightenment, strengthens the ego rather than reduces selfishness, and he insists instead on the 'oneness of practice and realisation'. Dōgen might, like Zhuangzi, acknowledge the validity of the means-end schema in certain contexts of practical life, but he would point out that this way of construing experience unhelpfully divides our lives into the worthwhile ends at which we aim and the often burdensome chores we have to perform in order to achieve them. Without this dualism everything one does becomes an opportunity for realisation.

Adopting such a nondualistic attitude would help to counteract a major contributor to the current environmental crisis, which is our poor relationship with *things*, insofar as rampant consumerism encourages using things up – thereby promoting a certain disregard for them. Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye) is unique among the masterpieces of world philosophy in devoting chapters to the preparing and eating of food, as well as to the making, washing and wearing of clothes, the proper care of eating bowls (which he calls 'the body and mind of buddha ancestors'), going to the toilet and performing ablutions, and washing the face and cleaning the teeth.[28] Careful attention to the things we handle to help us take care of the basics leads to care for the wider environment in which we live.

Dōgen advises monks who work in temple kitchens to use the polite forms of language when referring to meals and their ingredients: 'Use honorific forms of verbs for describing how to handle rice, vegetables, salt, and soy sauce; do not use plain language for this.'[29] He also stresses the importance of treating the kitchen utensils as well with the utmost care and respect.

> Put what is suited to a high place in a high place, and what belongs in a low place in a low place. Those things that are in a high place will be

[27] Dōgen, 'Body-Mind Study of the Way', in Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed. and trans., *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, 2 vols. (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2010), vol. 1, p. 426.

[28] Dōgen, 'Eating Bowls' (*Hou*), *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 2, p. 720; see the section 'Care for the Body' in my essay 'Body-Mind and Buddha-Nature: Dōgen's Deeper Ecology', in James W. Heisig and Rein Raud, eds, *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 7: Classical Japanese Philosophy* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2010), pp. 122-47.

[29] Dōgen, 'Instructions on Kitchen Work' (*Ji kuin mon*), *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 2, p. 764.

> settled there; those that are suited to be in a low place will be settled there. Select chopsticks, spoons, and other utensils with equal care, examine them with sincerity, and handle them skilfully.[30]

Gratitude and reverence for what is given us to eat, and for what we use to prepare and ingest our food, dictate that we take care to keep the kitchen clean and well ordered. Yet the order doesn't derive from an idea in the head of the cook, but rather from careful attention to suitabilities suggested by the things themselves. This lets us situate the utensils so they may be 'settled' – and thus less likely to fall down or get damaged.[31] And once we get down to cooking, we find that the creative interplay between activity, utensils and ingredients is a paradigm case of what Dōgen calls 'turning things while being turned by things'.[32] For his ideal of fully engaged activity, or total dynamic functioning (*zenki*), full attention is crucial – for a sense of both how things are turning so that we can align ourselves aright, and how our turning them is in turn affecting what is going on.[33]

When it comes to eating, the activity that sustains all human life, practice becomes all the more important. Dōgen begins an exposition of regulations for the serving and eating of meals in monasteries by citing a line from the *Vimalakirti Sutra*: 'When we are one with the food we eat, we are one with the whole universe.'[34] From this it follows, Dōgen says, that food is also the Dharma and the Buddha. After a thousand or so words on how monks are to enter the Hall, where the various monastery officials are to sit, and on how and where the monks are to sit down and arrange their robes, he finally gets to the regulations concerning the bowls and utensils.

> In order to set out the bowls one must first make *gasshō*, untie the knot on the bowl cover and fold the dishcloth to an unobtrusive size, twice crosswise and thrice lengthwise, placing it, together with the chopstick

[30] Dōgen, 'Instructions for the Tenzo' (*Tenzo kyōkun*), in Kazuaki Tanahashi ed. and trans., *Moon in a Dewdrop* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), p. 55.

[31] Nishitani Keiji draws attention to the 'settling' connotations of the term *samadhi* in the context of a discussion of 'attuning ourselves to the selfness of [for example] the pine tree or the selfness of the bamboo': *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan van Bragt (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 128.

[32] Dōgen, 'Instructions for the Tenzo', *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 56.

[33] See Dōgen, 'Undivided Activity' (*Zenki*), *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 1, pp. 450-52.

[34] Dōgen, 'Regulations for Eating Meals' (*Fushuku-hampō*), in Rōshi Jiyu Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life* (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987), p. 113.

> bag, just in front of the knees. Spread the pure napkin over the knees and put the dishcloth, with the chopstick bag on top of it, under the napkin. The cover is then unfolded and the farther end is allowed to fall over the edge of the tan, the other three corners being turned under to make a pad for the bowls to be placed upon. The lacquered-paper table-top is taken in both hands, the under-fold being held in the right hand and the top one in the left, and is unfolded as if to cover the bowls. While holding it in the right hand, take the bowls with the left and place them in the centre of the left end of this table-top, thereafter taking them out from the large one separately, in order, beginning with the smallest. Only the ball of the thumb of each hand is used for removing them so as to prevent any clattering.[35]

The practice of this ritual at every mealtime inculcates care and reverence for the things that accompany the central necessity of human existence. While we are learning, it obliges us to become acutely aware of how we are handling these things, and of the joy, when the food is served, of harmonious interaction with others. Once the ritual has been incorporated and made 'second nature', the actions flow spontaneously – so that it's not that a subject of consciousness uses the body to unfold the lacquered paper, but rather that my hands guide the paper's unfolding and help it on its way to where it needs to be.

Another discussion of the use of artefacts, in the chapter on 'Total Functioning', broadens the context of our activity to cosmic dimensions. Dōgen invokes as his prime example a product of basic technology:

> Life is just like sailing in a boat. You raise the sails and you steer. Although you manoeuvre the sail and the pole, the boat carries you, and without the boat you couldn't sail. But you sail the boat, and your sailing makes the boat what it is. Investigate a moment such as this. At just such a moment, there is nothing but the world of the boat.[36]

The sailboat is the consummate nature-friendly product of technology, one that – by inserting a human artefact (in the form of sails) into the interplay of the powers of heaven and earth – makes use of natural forces without abusing them or using them up. Since winds are by nature variable, a sailboat functions properly only if it can also be propelled by human action mediated through a pole or oars. And yet these

[35] Dōgen, 'Regulations', p. 117.

[36] Dōgen, 'Undivided Activity', *Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 1, p. 451 (trans. modified).

implements only work in conjunction with a boat. The activity of sailing is thus a prime example of 'turning things while being turned by things'.

> When you sail in a boat, your body, mind, and environs together are the dynamic functioning of the boat. The entire earth and the entire sky are both the dynamic functioning of the boat. Thus, life is nothing but you; you are nothing but life.

Regarded from our customary anthropocentric perspective, a boat, as something made by human beings, is *in* our world, in *my* world, but lacks a world of its own; whereas for Dōgen the context of total functioning allows the world to be construed by any particular focus of energy, or pivot of force, or dynamic function, within it.[37] As in the case of Daoism, this move away from anthropocentrism is accompanied by an increase in humility.

Dōgen has much more to say on the topic of 'realising relationships', where his approach is strikingly similar to the 'creative perspectivism' of Zhuangzi, but there is no space to discuss it here.[38] Nor for a discussion of the role of language in Dōgen's thinking, since the focus of this essay has been on the non-linguistic aspects of somatic practice – though a few brief remarks are in order.

Dōgen's writings are unparalleled in their philosophical and poetical style, and he is thus the complete antithesis to the stereotypical Zen master who rejects language altogether. It is true that the practices discussed above tend to dispense with certain kinds or uses of language: while it may be helpful in the learning stage, language plays no role once the practice has been mastered. If, in performing a fiendishly difficult piece, a concert pianist thinks 'I mustn't forget to flatten that F natural in bar 76', she is sure to fluff it: instead she lets the music flow, without mental commentary, through her fingers and onto the keyboard. The Daoist emptying of the heart-mind is a dropping of all the conceptual clutter and calculative thinking that hamper spontaneous activity. In Buddhist meditation practices, the waves that agitate the sea of the turbulent mind are fanned by the chatter of the internal dialogue: when the waves subside the ensuing glassy calm allows undistorted reflection of what is actually going on.

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[37] On the centrality of practice as activity (*gyōji*) to Dōgen's thinking, see Hee-Jin Kim, *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2004), chapter 3, esp. pp. 67-76.

[38] See the section 'Water and Waters' in my 'Body-Mind and Buddha-Nature: Dōgen's Deeper Ecology'.

By contrast, mantras are central to those practices advocated by Kūkai that help us listen to and understand the sounds of the cosmos – but mantras aren't chatter, and the language in which the Dharmakaya expounds the Dharma is no ordinary, or even human, language. For Dōgen a new and different kind of language begins to emerge from the silence underlying the babble of egocentric consciousness as realisation unfolds, so that there is an inextricable linguistic component to this style of Zen awakening.[39]

On another level the point of practice for Dōgen is actually very simple: to enable full confrontation with, and embrace of, impermanence – the world's impermanence, but more immediately our own. All arising and perishing, as he says, at every moment. In talking to the 'Students of the Way' in his monastery, he says:

> When you truly see impermanence, egocentric mind does not arise, neither does desire for fame and profit. Out of fear that the days and nights are passing quickly, practice the Way as if you were trying to extinguish a fire enveloping your head. ... It goes without saying that you must consider the inevitability of death. ... You should be resolved not to waste time and refrain from doing meaningless things. You should spend your time carrying out what is worth doing. Among the things you should do, what is the most important?[40]

If we allow the embrace of impermanence, it lets us distinguish the meaningless things we do from the meaningful, insofar as Dōgen's 'should' is no universally applicable ethical imperative but rather an existential exhortation for each individual to discover what is worthwhile, what really matters in life.

The benefit, it seems, of philosophies that are grounded in somatic practice is that they help close the gap between beliefs and behaviour, between ideas and action, by transforming the practitioner's experience. When philosophy is pursued on the level of abstract theory, as it so often is in the western traditions, it can generate and disseminate an abundance of wonderful ideas – so many of which never get put into

[39] It would be interesting to explore the consonance here with such thinkers as Nietzsche and Heidegger, who similarly dismiss ordinary language in favour of a quite different poetical and philosophical way of letting language speak.

[40] Dōgen, 'Points to Watch in Practicing the Way' (*Gakudō-yojinshū*), in *Dōgen Zen*, trans. Shohaku Okumura (Kyoto: Soto Zen Center, 1988), p. 1; *Shōbōgenzō-zuimonki*, trans. Shohaku Okumura (Kyoto: Soto Zen Center, 1987), pp. 2-17 (p. 97).

practice. But when the philosophy is embodied from the start, and the practices aim at reducing selfishness and mitigating the desire for profit and fame, the actions that flow from them are likely to enhance natural phenomena rather than harm them, insofar as they conduce to awe and humility in the face of things both natural and human-made.

The mystery of things is amplified by an awareness of their radical impermanence: awe-inspiring how they come and go, and work and play, all together. And amazing that we, too, appear to be coming and going with them, here in this very moment – and the next moment, and the next. So far, at least, but not of course for too long.

MYSTERY, HUMILITY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE THOUGHT OF ST JOHN OF THE CROSS

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Abstract. The 'dark night of the soul' is a common motif in Christian spiritual writing; and the *locus classicus* for this motif is the work of John of the Cross, a Spanish Carmelite friar of the sixteenth century. My aim in this paper is to use John's account of the 'night' to consider how the themes of *mystery*, *humility* and *religious practice* may be subsumed, and related to one another, within a Christian conception of God and of human life lived out in relation to God.

The 'dark night of the soul' is a common motif in Christian spiritual writing; and the locus classicus for this motif is the work of John of the Cross, a Spanish Carmelite friar of the sixteenth century. My aim in this paper is to use John's account of the 'night' to consider how the themes of mystery, humility and religious practice may be subsumed, and related to one another, within a Christian conception of God and of human life lived out in relation to God.[1]

I am going to concentrate on the two works (or two parts of the one work) in which John explores most fully the idea of the dark night, namely the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*. Both works were developed as commentaries on his poem 'The Dark Night'. Given the concerns of this paper, it is noteworthy that in these texts, John takes poetry rather than discursive prose to be primordially the language of religious understanding; but for present purposes, I am going to concentrate on his prosaic rendering of the import of the poem, rather than examining the poem directly.

[1] The proposed theme of this collection was originally 'mystery, humility and spiritual practice' and it is for this reason that I have concentrated upon John's handling of these matters.

I. SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE 'NIGHT'

Before proceeding to a discussion of how the themes of mystery, humility and religious practice can all be expounded, and related to one another, using the motif of the 'dark night', it is important to be clear, if only in very general terms, about the nature of the 'night' on John's understanding. There are in John's work two nights: what he calls the 'dark night of the senses' comes first, and there follows the 'dark night of the spirit'. The first of these nights concerns the rooting out of improper attachments to sensory things, and the second a purification of the person's 'spirit' in relation to God. And each night has two phases, an 'active' phase, where the person's will is actively engaged in various purgative exercises, and then a 'passive' phase, where it is God who acts in the person, while their faculties remain in abeyance. The active and passive phases do not unfold in strict succession but are, rather, interwoven with one another, though it is also clear that as the person advances in the spiritual life, so their experience is increasingly one of passivity.[2]

From his remarks on the nature of the night of the senses at the beginning of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, it is evident that John is using the notion of 'darkness' in a variety of ways. First, as attachments to creatures, the appetites can be regarded as 'darkness'; depriving the appetites of satisfaction, and rooting them out, can also be considered as forms of 'darkness', by analogy with the way in which loss of sight plunges a person into darkness, and leaves them lacking in orientation; and lastly creatures in so far as they are 'nothing' can also be likened to darkness in so far as 'darkness is nothing'.[3] So sometimes it is the appetites themselves, sometimes it is their effects, sometimes it is the effects of their removal, and sometimes it is their objects which are the focus of attention, and the notion of darkness is extended, analogically, to cover each of these cases. In all of these respects, we are concerned with 'darkness' in relation to what John calls the 'faculty of the will'.

John thinks that not only the will but also the understanding is consigned to 'darkness' during the course of the 'night'. This further kind of darkness is a consequence of the fact that there is no proportion of being between creatures and God. As John says, 'the difference that lies

[2] See Kieran Kavanaugh's account of this point in his introduction to 'The Dark Night' in *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. K. Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 159. Hereafter this source is referred to as KK.

[3] See KK, pp. 64-66.

between His divine being and their being is infinite'; and he concludes: 'Consequently, intellectual comprehension of God through heavenly or earthly creatures is impossible.'[4] So the language of darkness also serves as a way of recording the fact that in approaching God intellectually, it is necessary to lay aside all knowledge of creaturely things, since there is no route which will lead incrementally from a knowledge of these things to a knowledge of God. It is not just that knowledge of creatures is of no help in the spiritual life; on John's view, it is clear that such knowledge is apt to be a hindrance in the earlier phases of the spiritual life. As he says, 'all that can be grasped by the intellect would serve as an obstacle rather than a means to [union with God] if a person were to become attached to it.'[5] As well as meshing with John's account of the faculties of will and understanding in these respects, the term 'darkness' is also intended of course to carry an emotional charge: as the person encounters, or is subjected to, darkness of these various kinds, so they are liable to fall into a state of bewilderment and even of desolation.

Lastly, it is important to note that on John's account, the various phases of the night can be distinguished from one another by reference to their phenomenology. In general terms, this is because progression through the night leads the person into ever deeper forms of anguish and desolation. John's purpose in writing is to chart these various phases of the night using the language of experience: for pastoral reasons, he wants to help the novice (or their confessor) to locate their position within the night, so that they can deal appropriately with the practical and emotional challenges that are posed by that particular stage of the spiritual life, so far as that is possible. Hence much of the discussion in the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* is cast in phenomenological terms.

This is only the briefest sketch of the character of the Dark Night, but it is enough to allow us to broach the question of how the notion of the night may be used to think through the relationship between *humility*, *mystery* and *practice* in the spiritual life, from the vantage point of Christian theology.

II. HUMILITY AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: DARKNESS IN THE WILL

The dark night requires, as we have seen, a rooting out of the appetites, and in this sense a purging of the will. The person can advance this

[4] Ibid., p. 99.
[5] Ibid., p. 98.

process in some measure by their own labours, but these efforts at best help to prepare the way for God's activity, which is of course more fully efficacious. As John comments: 'however assiduously the beginner practises the mortification in himself of all these actions and passions of his [in the active night], he can never completely succeed – very far from it – until God shall work it in him passively by means of the purgation of the ... night.'[6] In brief, then, the active night needs to be succeeded by the passive.

This development has a counterpart in feeling. The person who engages in various purgative exercises in the course of the active night will typically derive some pleasure from these activities, once they have become reasonably accomplished in performing them. But when they stand on the threshold of the passive night of the senses, these pleasures give out, and the person finds that 'not only do they experience no pleasure and consolation in the spiritual things and good exercises wherein they were wont to find their delights and pleasures, but instead, on the contrary, they find insipidity and bitterness in the said things'.[7] The same sort of pattern, of activity and then passivity, is taken up in turn in the spiritual night; and in both cases the movement into a condition of passivity is painful and even harrowing.

These features of John's account are of some importance for an understanding of his conception of the place of humility in the spiritual life. According to John, a person's approach towards a condition of greater intimacy with God can be tracked in some measure in experiential terms. And one of his primary concerns in these works is precisely to map out that track, by drawing attention to the relevant phenomenological distinctions. But in so far as that is his strategy, he evidently risks encouraging in the spiritual novice a kind of self-satisfaction, and even a kind of spiritual masochism. For if the novice uses John's phenomenological categories to record their progress through the spiritual life, then there is a risk that they will take pride in their growing proximity to God. And mightn't they come to enjoy, and

[6] This passage is taken from Saint John of the Cross, 'Dark Night of the Soul', in *The Essential St. John of the Cross: Ascent of Mount Carmel; Dark Night of the Soul; A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ; Twenty Poems by St. John of the Cross*, tr. E. Allison Peers (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, LLC, 2008), pp. 370-476 (p. 388). Further references to this volume will be listed as EAP.

[7] Ibid., p. 390.

even to cultivate, experiences of 'darkness', in so far as those experiences are thought to betoken growing proximity to God?

A question of this general type will arise for any spiritual practice which draws distinctions between spiritually inferior and spiritually superior states of mind or activity, and which undertakes to move the novice towards a condition in which there is a preponderance of good spiritual states over bad. Any such practice will run the risk of handing over to the novice a body of information which will allow them to chart their progress through the spiritual life, and to take a degree of satisfaction in their spiritual development, and to think of themselves as superior to those ordinary folk who have not made similar progress, or who have not engaged in similar feats of spiritual discipline. Since humility must of course count as a core virtue for any Christian account of the spiritual life, there is in this respect a tension between the Christian ideal of life and the very idea of a spiritual practice.

Although he does not say as much, a great deal of John's text can be read as a sustained meditation on the question of how to combine an account of the spiritual life which distinguishes between more and less advanced conditions of 'the soul' and a commitment to humility as a core Christian value. Two central planks of this case are evident in the comments I have just cited. John does acknowledge that in the active phase of the night, the person can indeed find a measure of satisfaction in their development in the spiritual life, by applying the criteria of progress that John himself has supplied, and by taking pleasure in their growing competence in the performance of the various exercises which appear to induce progress so understood. But he is clear that this incipient self-satisfaction cannot endure, for two reasons.

First of all, this is because the active night must give way to the passive: so whatever satisfaction the person may have found in their 'performance' in earlier stages of the night will now be lost, as they come to recognise that they cannot effect further progress by their own efforts. In these later phases of the night, it is the agency of God, rather than directly human agency, which draws the person nearer to God. Secondly, as John notes, the transition to the passive night is registered in feeling, so that the person comes to find only 'insipidity and bitterness' in the exercises in which they formerly took such pleasure. So it is not just the clear-headed recognition that it is now God's agency which is moving them through the spiritual life that prevents the person who is in the later stages of the night from deriving satisfaction from their performance

of various spiritual practices; they also come to feel a kind of revulsion for such practices, at least to the extent that they find the prospect of engaging in them in the present repellent. And although John does not say so, we might infer that such a person is in no condition to derive satisfaction even from their past performance of such practices, however accomplished or dedicated that performance may have been.

Moreover, it is clear that for John, a central constituent of the darkness of the later phases of the 'night' is precisely the sense of having been abandoned by God: it is the felt sense of one's worthlessness before God, and of one's having being forsaken by God, that in large part comprises the desolation of the night.[8] And John notes that even if the person who is enduring the passive night should be told by their director that their condition in fact signifies a deeper intimacy with God, they will be unable to believe this, such is their feeling of wretchedness, and of worthlessness before God.[9] So for this reason too, the night, in its later phases especially, cannot be a source of spiritual self-satisfaction: the person who is undergoing the night cannot construe it as a mark of growing proximity to God, let alone of spiritual achievement, because the condition consists in important part in the sense of oneself as having been abandoned by God.

So in these ways, John's account remains resolutely committed to the ideal of humility: while his programme of spiritual direction does allow us to distinguish between more and less elevated spiritual states, the person who is undergoing the night cannot use this map to shore up their sense of their own importance, in ego-centric terms, because they are required to recognise that their progress (so far as there is any) is now the product of divine agency, and because they come to feel revulsion for their own efforts to advance in the spiritual life, and because the night consists in important part in the sense of one's littleness before God and even in the sense of one's having been forsaken by God. In all of these ways, John's text can be

[8] See John's remark that 'the soul ... believes God to be against it, and thinks that it has set itself up against God. This causes it sore grief and pain, because it now believes that God has cast it away' (EAP, p. 417). Or again, he says that such persons 'suffer great trials, by reason not so much of the aridities which they suffer, as of the fear which they have of being lost on the road, thinking that all spiritual blessing is over for them and that God has abandoned them since they find no help or pleasure in good things' (EAP, p. 395).

[9] See his comment: 'For, although in many ways [the soul's] director may show it good reason for being comforted because of the blessings which are contained in these afflictions, it cannot believe him.' (EAP, p. 423).

read as a response to a general challenge which may be raised for the idea of a spiritual practice: in so far as it promises to improve a person's spiritual state, how is such a practice to prevent the devotee from succumbing to a sense of their 'accomplishments' in the spiritual life?

We might wonder: in that case, what is the practical point of the map of the spiritual domain that John has provided, if the person who is undergoing the night cannot use it to determine that they are being drawn closer to God? The map's purpose is, I take it, at least in part, to encourage the person of growing spiritual maturity to adopt a kind of negative practice, that is, to desist from various attempts to improve their spiritual condition by their own efforts. It is partly for this reason that John takes such care to record the signs which mark the movement from the active into the more passive phase of the night, because a key task for this transitional stage of the spiritual life is simply to accept this state of growing passivity; and if the person can do this, then their new condition may even become a source of what John calls 'inward refreshment':

> If those souls to whom this comes to pass [who find themselves being drawn into the passive night of sense] knew how to be quiet at this time, and troubled not about performing any kind of action, whether inward or outward, neither had any anxiety about doing anything, then they would delicately experience this inward refreshment in that ease and freedom from care.[10]

So here is a form of spiritual practice which consists in part in learning how to give up all 'anxiety about doing anything' – or in learning, we might say, to 'let go' or to desist from any 'practice'. The notion of a spiritual practice is in a sense being undone here. And the reasons for this are connected, once again, to John's commitment to humility as a core value of the Christian life: for if the spiritual life were, on the contrary, to be a matter of athletic self-exertion, or hard won 'success' in relation to the standards of a clearly defined practice, then it would be possible for its practitioners to revel in their achievements, and to hold others as spiritually inferior, and even as spiritually blameworthy.

John prevents such a reading of the significance of the spiritual life not only by emphasising that in its later phases this life is the work of God, and that it is necessary therefore to learn to 'let go', but also by insisting that the person must become detached even from those pleasures which have their source in God's activity and which are genuinely tokens of

[10] Ibid., p. 392.

growing proximity to God. Thus the passage I have just cited continues: 'So delicate is this refreshment that ordinarily, if a man have desire or care to experience it, he experiences it not; for ... it does its work when the soul is most at ease and freest from care; it is like the air which, if one would close one's hand upon it, escapes.'[11] So a person can experience these signs of growing intimacy with God only on condition that they have surrendered any attachment to them. And this suggests that any recipient of these tokens of divine favour will not regard them in a spirit of self-satisfaction or use them to shore up their sense of self-regard – for any such response would presumably indicate that the person had retained, after all, an attachment to these pleasures, considered as markers of their own importance.[12]

I have been arguing that John's emphasis on the 'passivity' of the later phases of the spiritual life serves as a buttress against the possibility of spiritual self-satisfaction or pride. Characteristically, his account of this shift, from activity to passivity, also carries an emotional charge. It's not just that the person is invited to observe themselves falling into a state of passivity, to resign themselves to that condition, and thereby to make progress in the spiritual life, while remaining free from self-satisfaction. Rather, the movement into the passive phase of the night, especially the passive night of the spirit, is experienced as bewildering and even as traumatising. Here we find a further respect in which John's picture of the spiritual life implies a deep-seated commitment to the ideal of humility.

What John is describing is the dissolution of the habits of desire and perception which formerly constituted the person's sense of self, and their gradual replacement by a new centre of personal energy, where this transition is registered in experience, from the perspective of the former self, as the onset of a kind of passivity. Crucially, John is clear that it is only when the old self has been swept away that the new self can take shape. There is therefore an interim period, which obtains after the demise of the old self and before the formation within the person of a new centre of willing and thinking. And the horrors of the 'night' arise not least when the person finds themselves in this intermediate state. In this condition, their interest in the world and their sense of their own agency have been brought to nothing, while they have, as yet, no capacity

[11] Ibid., pp. 392-3.

[12] Compare David Pugmire's discussion of 'dramaturgical' emotions: that is, emotions which are prized because of their role in shoring up a person's self-regard: *Rediscovering Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 119.

to register in experience the emergence of a new, divinely focused habit of willing and thinking. This two-step view of the spiritual life is evident in John's comment that 'the Divine fire of contemplative love ... before it unites and transforms the soul in itself, first purges it of all contrary accidents'.[13] Similarly, he remarks that 'God makes [the soul] to die to all that is not naturally God, so that, once it is stripped and denuded of its former skin, He may begin to clothe it anew ...'[14]

The term 'humility' is cognate of course with the term *humus* meaning ground or earth. To be humble is, then, to exist in a lowly state. And John is here suggesting that in this intermediate phase of the spiritual life, the 'soul' registers its condition in the felt recognition of its own nothingness – that is, in the feeling of its alienation from created things, and even from its own powers of activity, while it remains unable, as yet, to enjoy the new, divinely focused mode of life that awaits it. So here is a further, still deeper sense in which humility, on John's picture, is integral to the later phases of the spiritual life.

In sum, if we take up John's account of these matters, then we should say that the formation of 'humility' in the person in the course of the 'night' involves among other things the loss of all sensory satisfactions, and the loss of any capacity to undertake spiritually elevating exercises and of any desire to do so, where the self registers this loss of its former appetites, habits of willing and competences in the abject feeling of its own nothingness, and in the sense of its having been forsaken by God. In these ways, the person is brought to a condition of humility which consists fundamentally, as John says, in the 'death' of the old self considered as a bundle of attachments and projects.

It is striking that in the course of his discussion, John does not as a rule issue explicit exhortations to 'humility'. This is perhaps because such an exhortation might admit the very corruption that he is bent on resisting; for in that case, the spiritual novice might strive to make a 'success' of being humble, and might even derive some satisfaction from that 'achievement'! But while his comments do not pick out humility explicitly as a value in the spiritual life, let alone as a goal for the spiritual life, it is clear nonetheless that John's discussion of the purgation of the will can be read as a sustained meditation upon the variety of ways

[13] EAP, p. 433.

[14] Ibid., p. 445. Elsewhere, John develops the point by noting that the palate must first be cleansed before it can properly appreciate some new taste. See for example EAP, p. 392 and EAP, p. 430.

in which development in the spiritual life, for the period of the 'night', consists fundamentally in a progressive deepening of humility, until one reaches the point where all one's satisfactions and all one's achievements, both sensory and spiritual, have been brought, from the subject's own perspective, to nought.

III. MYSTERY, HUMILITY AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: DARKNESS IN THE UNDERSTANDING

When he turns to the purgation of the understanding, John's discussion amounts once again to an affirmation of humility as a core value of the spiritual life. On one longstanding tradition, which would certainly have been known to John, it is the human person's capacity for reason which raises them above the condition of the non-human animals.[15] In the 'night', however, the person's powers of reasoning, as well as their powers of willing, are brought to nothing. For John, this is not just a matter of coming to some abstractly intellectual recognition that there is no proportion between the being of creatures and of God, and that there is therefore no route leading from a knowledge of creatures to a knowledge of God. Rather, the purging of the understanding takes the form of a generalised and painful break down in the operation of reason.

John notes, for example, that the person who is entering the passive night of the senses will typically 'desire to be alone and in quietness, without being able to think of any particular thing or having the desire to do so'.[16] Here the person is no longer absorbed intellectually in the everyday world, and this disengagement reflects a break down in their capacity for intellectual activity, and at the same time a break down in their desire to undertake any such activity. This is incidentally one example of the deep interconnectedness of the purgation of the will and of the understanding: the incapacity to think about the everyday sensory world is born in part of a felt resistance to such activity, so that the intellectual failure is bound up with a failure in desire. Characteristically, John is careful to distinguish the case where this sort of development marks a movement into the passive night from the case where it reflects simply, say, some 'indisposition'. While an 'indisposition' is a passing

[15] For a particularly famous formulation of this view, which would surely have been known to John, see Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, reproduced in *The Ethics of Aristotle: the Nichomachean Ethics*, tr. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), Book I.

[16] EAP, p. 392.

condition, the person who is genuinely entering the passive night will find that their 'inability to reflect with the faculties grows ever greater'.[17]

In John's terms, the soul which has entered the passive night is in a state of passive 'contemplation', where contemplation is to be distinguished from image-based 'meditation' and from discursive reasoning. He notes for example that '[f]rom this time forward, imagination and fancy can find no support in any meditation, and can gain no foothold by means thereof'.[18] So although the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* are commentaries upon the images which are set down in his poem 'The Dark Night', John is clear that, for a time at least, images as well as abstract or discursive forms of thought can no longer be relied upon to orient the person in the spiritual life. The person who is in this condition, he notes, may 'fatigue and overwork their nature, imagining that they are failing through negligence or sin. But this trouble that they are taking is,' he continues, 'quite useless, for God is now leading them by another road, which is that of contemplation'.[19]

In these respects, the purgation of the understanding is, like the purgation of the will, integrally connected to the ideal of humility in the spiritual life: the person who is in this condition cannot find any satisfaction in their intellectual accomplishments, both because they no longer have the capacity to 'think of any particular thing' and because they have lost even the desire to do so; and we might infer that the person who is in this state is incapable of taking satisfaction even in former achievements of this kind, such is their loss of interest in such things. Here again, so far as there is a practice that is fitted for this phase of the spiritual life, it is a kind of negative practice, the practice of 'letting go', or of learning not to 'overwork one's nature'. And as with the purgation of the will, so here, we can represent the purging of the understanding as a movement into 'darkness' or 'nothingness': the mind is evacuated of imagistic and abstractly conceptual kinds of content, so that the cognitive as well as the conative forms of activity by which the self was formerly defined are brought to nothing.

The intellectual and appetitive spheres are alike in a further respect in so far as growth in the spiritual life involves in both cases not just 'darkness' but pain. Following a long-established tradition, John makes

[17] Ibid., p. 393.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., p. 395.

this point for the intellectual sphere by supposing that development in the spiritual life can be likened to progressive exposure to light. As he says, 'because the light and wisdom of this contemplation is most bright and pure ... it follows that the soul suffers great pain when it receives it in itself, just as, when the eyes are dimmed by humours ... the assault made upon them by a bright light causes them pain.'[20] From his further development of this theme in this passage, it is clear that this pain is not just mental or psychological, but also has a physical dimension. However, while he follows the Platonic tradition in representing intellectual progress in the spiritual life in terms of exposure to light, it is notable that John's handling of this motif is rather different from Plato's. Plato's story of the cave has its climax in the adept's vision of the sun; and once his eyes have adjusted to its brightness, the seer is able to look directly at the sun, without being dazzled or pained by it.[21] The seer then returns, of course, to the cave, whereupon he is plunged once again into 'darkness'. Indeed, on returning to the cave, the 'enlightened' person finds that, for a time, his experience is one of deepened obscurity: he finds it harder to orient himself in the realm of the shadows than do those who remained there all along.[22] John seems to differ on these points.

In the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night*, John is mostly occupied with the purgative phase of the spiritual life, but in other works he speaks more fully about its consummation in the experience of union with God. But even here, his emphasis appears to be mostly upon the infusion of God's love into the person, and upon the consequent change in the appearance of the sensory world, now that it is no longer structured by appetitive concerns, rather than upon the idea that the spiritually mature person

[20] Ibid., p. 417.

[21] As Socrates says of the person who has completed the ascent to the outer world and learnt to set eyes on the sun: 'Last of [all] he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.' See *The Republic*, tr. B. Jowett, Book VII, available at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.8.vii.html>, [accessed 4 Dec 2011].

[22] As Socrates says: 'Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?' He continues: 'And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous?' (*The Republic*, Book VII)

'sees' the light of the divine nature. As Rowan Williams remarks, when speaking of John's work the *Spiritual Canticle*:

> The sense of God living constantly in the soul, of God's goodness in all things, of the warmth of reciprocal love – all these things of which the *Canticle* speaks at length are described not at all in terms of revelations granted in ecstasy, but in terms of a general disposition or attitude of the soul, a regular daily mode of seeing and understanding, a new light on things.[23]

So while John does allow that the person of growing spiritual maturity can become accustomed to spiritual light, so that they no longer feel pained by it, he does not follow Plato in describing the summit of the spiritual life, ante-mortem, as fundamentally a matter of 'seeing' God or the divine Light. And no doubt he is moved here once more by his commitment to the idea that 'the difference that lies between [God's] divine being and [the being of creatures] is infinite'. So in this sense, for John, the mystery of God is a fundamental datum of the spiritual life, and this truth holds for the 'enlightened' believer as for others.

Moreover, while in Plato's story the seer is consigned to deepened obscurity on returning to the realm of the senses, or 'the cave', on John's account, the person of spiritual maturity will find, following the night, that the sensory world is not so much obscured as transfigured. The emphasis in John's thought is, then, as Williams implies, not so much upon seeing the light or the 'sun' of the divine nature, as upon seeing the world anew, once it is illuminated by that light. In the *Dark Night*, John puts this point in these terms:

> [S]ince this spiritual light is so simple, pure and general, not appropriated or restricted to any particular thing that can be understood, whether natural or Divine (since with respect to all these apprehensions the faculties of the soul are empty and annihilated), it follows that with great comprehensiveness and readiness the soul discerns and penetrates whatsoever thing presents itself to it, whether it come from above or from below.[24]

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[23] Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1991), pp. 187-188.

[24] EAP, pp. 427-8. I take it that for John God is not a 'particular thing', and that he does not intend to refer to God by the expression 'Divine thing'.

Here, it's not the light source that is viewed in the condition of 'enlightenment', but the things which 'present' themselves to the soul, in so far as they are illuminated by that source. So John's view seems to be that the sensory world can be newly experienced following the purgation of the will and the understanding: at this point, we might say, its appearance is no longer structured according to any appetitive interest in its contents.[25] The difference between John and Plato on this point is reflected in their choice of metaphors. Plato represents the sensory world as a 'cave', and caves while they remain caves are never going to be illuminated by the light of the sun: they will always be places of darkness. By contrast, when John speaks of 'darkness' he has in mind a condition of the person, rather than a condition of the sensory world in itself. Thus in his discussion, John is concerned with the person whose 'eyes are dimmed by humours', and he speaks of the soul which is 'assailed' by the divine light as 'dark and impure'.[26] In speaking in these terms, John is adhering of course to the traditional Christian affirmation of the goodness of creation, and to the associated thought that creatures constitute an 'impediment' to relationship to God not in themselves, but only in so far as we become 'attached' to them.[27] So in his development of the light motif, John is in effect setting out in an experiential idiom a distinctively Christian conception of the mystery of God, the goodness of creation, and the corruption of the will.

John provides a pithy even if rather riddling summary of the various themes that we have been examining in some remarks which he clearly intended to stand at the very beginning of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.[28] He writes:

> To come to the knowledge of all
> desire the knowledge of nothing /

[25] Compare for example the phenomenological emphasis of the following passage. Here John is talking of the passive night of the spirit: 'At ... times [the soul] wonders if it is under a charm or a spell, and it goes about marvelling at the things that it sees and hears, which seem to it very strange and rare, though they are the same that it was accustomed to experience aforetime. The reason of this is that the soul is now becoming alien and remote from common sense and knowledge of things, in order that, being annihilated in this respect, it may be informed with the Divine ...' (EAP, p. 431).

[26] Ibid., p. 417.

[27] KK, p. 66.

[28] These comments appear on his diagrammatic representation of the ascent of Mount Carmel. Kieran Kavanaugh's discusses the role of the diagram in KK, p. 43. The diagram is reproduced in KK, pp. 44-45.

To come to possess all
Desire the possession in nothing /
To arrive at being all
Desire to be nothing

The insistent repetition of 'nada, nada, nada' here hammers home the point: the precondition of spiritual awakening is, to put the same thought in varying ways, the annihilation of the faculties (both of 'knowledge' and of 'desire'), the death of the old self and its habits of believing and willing, and the bringing of the person to a felt recognition and acceptance of their own nothingness. Or to consider the matter from the other side of this transformation, once the person has reached this condition, then their will can be united with the divine will; and then they can see things according to a divinely ordered scale of values, and enter thereby a new perceptual world. Viewed from this further perspective, the person is not so much 'nothing', as 'all'. Given its location at the head of his text, it is reasonable to take the passage from which I have just quoted as an interpretive key for the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night*. So it is striking that this passage closes with these words: 'In this nakedness the spirit finds its rest, for when it covets nothing, nothing raises it up, and nothing weighs it down, because it is in the center of its humility.'[29] Here we find John professing in his own terms that the sine qua non of the spiritual life is humility.

In sum, if we were to ask John how we should understand the contribution of humility, mystery and practice to the spiritual life, then, on the evidence of these texts, we would expect him to reply in broadly these terms. First, what is the role of humility in the spiritual life? To put the point briefly, humility is a core virtue of the spiritual life because spiritual maturity requires the person to pass through an intermediate zone, wherein the old self and its habits of willing and believing have been reduced to 'nothing'; while this condition is enduring, the pain which it causes initially will cease as the adept comes to be animated by a divinely infused and divinely focused habit of willing and believing. And what, then, is the role of mystery in the spiritual life? In brief, because of the disproportion between the being of God and the being of creatures – or because of what we might call the divine 'mysteriousness' – intellectual development in relation to God cannot take the form simply of building incrementally upon our knowledge of creatures. Instead,

[29] Ibid., p. 45.

we are required to set this knowledge at nought; and this condition is registered experientially, in the intermediate phase of the spiritual life, in the breakdown of conventional forms of thinking and, once again, in the abject feeling of one's nothingness. But once this phase has passed, then it is possible to see creatures as illuminated by the divine Light – though here again there is mystery, to the extent that this condition is to be distinguished from that of seeing the divine Light itself. And finally, what is the role of practice in the spiritual life? In brief, there are various kinds of practice, each fitted for a different stage of the spiritual life. And we need therefore to distinguish between the active participation in spiritual exercises which is required in the earlier phases of the spiritual life, the 'passive' practice of 'letting go' which defines the middle phase of the spiritual life, and then the renewed activity of intellect and of ego-transcendent desire that is appropriate for the final phase of the spiritual life, once things are seen and desired in God or according to a divinely focused scheme of values.

IV. JOHN AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

To bring out the import of John's reflections on the spiritual life from another vantage point, I am going to try now, very briefly, to relate his thought to some wider themes in Christian theology. To make this a practicable task, I shall concentrate on the idea that John's reflections can be read as an experiential rendering of various motifs which appear in a more austerely analytical idiom in the work of Thomas Aquinas.

Having studied theology at the University of Salamanca, John would have been familiar with Aquinas's work.[30] And he would surely have known Thomas's remark, which stands as the preface to his treatment of the idea of divine simplicity, that 'we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not'.[31] John's discussion of the breakdown in imagistic and discursive thinking which arises in the middle phase of the spiritual life could be read as a record of this same idea in an experiential idiom. And John seems to be echoing Thomistic themes once again when he turns to consider the renewal of the senses which follows the 'night'. In *The Living Flame of Love*, he writes of this state in these terms:

[30] As Peter Tyler notes, there is some dispute about the extent to which John's work reveals the influence of Aquinas: Peter Tyler, *Saint John of the Cross* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 17. But that there is some influence is undeniable.

[31] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 3.

> Though it is true that the soul here sees that all these things are distinct from God, in that they have a created existence ... it knows also that God in His own essence is, in an infinitely preeminent way, all these things, so that it understands them better in Him, their first cause, than in themselves. This is the great joy of this awakening, namely to know creatures in God, and not God in His creatures: this is to know effects in their cause, and not the cause by its effects.[32]

In this passage, John is alluding, I take it, to the distinction which Aquinas draws, in his preamble to the Five Ways, between a demonstration 'propter quid' and a demonstration 'quia'.[33] Thomas is of course of the view that a purely philosophical approach to the question of God must begin with the observation of creatures, and move from there to the idea that there is a God, by establishing that the world stands in need of a cause. This is to take the route of a 'demonstratio quia'. Since we 'do not know what God is', we have no capacity, when we are reasoning in purely philosophical terms, to proceed in the other direction, by starting from a knowledge of God's essence, and arriving on that basis at a conception of God's effects. When he says that we can 'know creatures in God', and that 'this is to know effects in their cause, and not the cause by its effects', John is in effect saying that where the spiritual life is concerned, we can live according to the ideal of 'proper quid': that is, we can start from the divine perspective on things, and move out from there to an appreciation of the realm of creatures. But he also acknowledges of course that this is not the natural human condition, and that reaching such a perspective will be a costly process. Here John seems to echo quite deliberately Aquinas's teaching, but at the same time to extend it, by adopting, once more, an experiential standpoint: if not philosophically, then at any rate experientially, we can take the divine perspective as our starting point, once we have been brought to the later phases of the spiritual life.

When we turn to the theme of love, it appears that at times it is, on the contrary, Aquinas who begins from the divine perspective, while John's tendency is to start out from the human vantage point. In general, the emphasis in Aquinas's work is upon 'grace perfecting nature'.[34] And we

[32] *The Living Flame of Love by Saint John of the Cross with his Letters, Poems, and Minor Writings*, tr. D. Lewis (London: Thomas Baker, 1919), Commentary on Stanza IV, p. 121.

[33] *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 2. 2.

[34] See for example Thomas's idea that the powers which are 'connatural' to the sacramental elements are not displaced or annihilated but instead inserted within a larger, God-directed teleology. He makes this point for the case of baptism in *Summa*

might see this motif as one way of recording the operation of divine love: this love, like forms of love with which we are familiar from the human domain, seeks to affirm and extend or 'perfect' the beloved, rather than bring them to a sense of their own 'nothingness' or worthlessness. By contrast, John's experiential starting point means that his focus is upon the human person's experience of an emerging love for God. And for the person in the night, this developing love for God may seem to involve not so much the consolidation or extension of established habits and powers, as an overturning or eradication of those powers. A mother's emerging love for her new-born child provides perhaps a rough analogy for this sort of experience. As we all know, this love can be experienced as deeply disorienting. And we might suppose that this is not least because it can seem to require (and really can require) a radical re-ordering, and even an uprooting, of established attachments, so that the mother's sense of herself is fundamentally re-defined. For these reasons, a woman's nascent love for her child can sometimes be registered in experience as bewildering and even as 'dark' in something like John's sense. So in these matters too, John's account has a rather different cast from Aquinas's; and this reflects once again his adoption of an experiential standpoint.

John's distinction between the active and passive phases of the 'night' can also be read as an allusion, in an experiential mode, to certain ideas which Aquinas develops in his own, more analytical idiom. As is well known, Thomas thinks that if a person is to be properly oriented towards God, then they need more than simply the 'acquired' moral virtues, that is, those moral virtues which derive from human effort and a process of habituation. Along with these virtues, they also need the 'infused' moral virtues and the theological virtues, both of which are communicated to the person directly by God. So for Aquinas, there is no incremental route leading from those patterns of activity to which we are accustomed simply as human to those patterns which will fit a person, in full, for relationship to God; to make this transition, a radically new, divinely infused spring of action is required, rather than simply the further exercise of established habits of willing and action. In John's scheme, something like this idea appears in an experiential guise in his suggestion that in the later phases of the spiritual life, the person's experience is increasingly one of passivity. Old attachments and habits fall away, and in their place

Theologiae, 3a. 62. 1 ad 2, in *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 56, *The Sacraments*, tr. D. Bourke (Blackfriars: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975).

there emerges, gradually, a new, divinely infused mode of activity; and so far as it persists at all, the old self registers these developments in the felt recognition of its own passivity.

To put the point otherwise, we could say that in speaking of the 'active' phase of the 'night', John is affirming the role of the acquired virtues, and that in speaking of its 'passive' phase, he also allows a role for the 'infused' virtues. So here again, a theme which Aquinas develops by appeal to the relevant analytical distinctions finds a phenomenological counterpart in the work of John, although it is evident once more that John's thought has an antithetical cast that is lacking in Aquinas, in so far as he leads his reader to suppose that the powers which are exercised in the 'active' phase of the 'night' have to be cast aside as the person is drawn more deeply into the passive night, rather than simply being extended or supplemented in some fashion.

So in their remarks on the limits of our knowledge of God, the nature of love, and the relationship between divine and human forms of agency, John and Thomas both address the role of mystery, humility and practice in the spiritual life. But evidently, they treat these themes from rather different vantage points and in terms of their rather different idioms. Given the closeness of his relationship to Aquinas on these questions, it is clear that John is not writing as an eccentric, but as a theologian whose insights are recognisably continuous with the mainstream of Christian tradition, while at the same time he is creatively extending that tradition, above all through his adoption of an experiential standpoint.

CONCLUSION: JOHN AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE TODAY

Even allowing for the continuity between his reflections and those of a figure as central to the Christian tradition as Thomas Aquinas, we might still wonder whether John's discussion can contribute much to a contemporary, twenty-first century understanding of the spiritual life. In concluding, let me touch very briefly on this question.

John of the Cross was a spiritual director of wide experience, and the process of development which he describes in the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* was presumably one which he encountered with reasonable frequency in the lives of the friars, nuns and others who came to him seeking spiritual counsel. It is possible that the particular pattern of psychological change which he describes was in some way dependent on the specific conditions of life in the sixteenth century, or perhaps more

exactly on life as a Carmelite friar or nun in the sixteenth century. But this seems doubtful, not least because so many Christians, lay as well as ordained, in later centuries as well as in John's time, have found his account of the spiritual life to fit their own experience, or at any rate to illuminate that experience in significant respects.[35] Allowing for this, it might still be said that John's account is only going to make good sense to those who are willing to share his theistic construal of the developments which he describes. But that too may be doubted. What John is recording is, it seems, the moral and, from his point of view, the more-than-moral transformation of the human person; and his interest, in the *Dark Night* especially, is in the middle ground of this transformation, when the familiar patterns of desire and activity that sustained the old sense of self are being eroded, or have been kicked away, and have yet to be replaced by a new centre of thought and action. So he is interested in a problem of quite general significance: the problem of how to effect, or how to participate in, a pervasive re-definition of the self and its habits of desire and perception, and how to negotiate the period of disorientation that seems bound to form part of any such process of self-redefinition.

And what of God in all of this? When 'the soul' finds itself in the passive night of the spirit, John notes, it 'is unable to raise its affection or its mind to God, neither can it pray to Him...'[36] And he continues: 'In truth this is no time for the soul to speak with God; it should rather put its mouth in the dust, as Jeremias says, so that perchance there may come to it some present hope, and it may endure purgation with patience.'[37] Manifestly, in this phase of the spiritual life at least, God is not encountered as an object of experience, nor postulated as an explanation, nor even addressed in prayer, but acknowledged only, if at all, in disorientation and confusion – and in the dogged anticipation of a renewal of hope. This is not a conception of what it is to believe in God, or to keep faith in God, that is much current in discussions in the philosophy of religion. And it may be, then, that John has something to teach philosophers of religion, not only about 'spiritual' matters, but also about the variety of forms which religious belief may take, even within the span of a single life.

[35] However, it is worth remembering that according to John, the 'night of the spirit is the portion of very few', although the night of sense is 'common' (EAP, p. 389).

[36] Ibid., p. 426.

[37] Ibid.

STRUGGLING WITH EVIL: COMMENTS ON *WANDERING IN DARKNESS*

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INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARIES

This is a compendious book on the problem of evil that brings together insights from a broad range of intellectual disciplines (including not just philosophy and theology, but also psychology, neuroscience, and literature) in a beautiful and powerful way. Even if it does not ultimately succeed in providing an entirely convincing reply to the problem of evil, it is nevertheless a significant and impressive achievement. Stump offers nuanced, original, and often brilliant interpretations of central Biblical narratives about suffering, and she also lays out a comprehensive and appealing argument for the conclusion that God's existence is compatible with the nature and extent of human suffering we find in our world. The two parts of the book – the exegeses of Biblical stories and the philosophical argument – are meant to work together and to complement each other.

I have learned a great deal by reading this book. Stump has managed to write a book that is both magisterial and humane. The details are subtle and the argumentation is sometimes intricate, and one can learn much about specific philosophical and theological topics along the way. And in the end it adds up to something big: a Thomistic defence of God's existence, based on analytical argumentation (the Dominican approach) and the humanizing force of stories (Franciscan knowledge).

There is so much to this book that a reviewer must inevitably select just a relatively small portion of it on which to focus, and this is what I shall do. What is perhaps not inevitable – and yet I will succumb to the temptation – will be a selection of a few topics that are of special

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interest to me. This will leave much of this immense and rich book for other commentators and readers to explore. I commend it as both a challenging and also a deeply engaging experience.

Stump emphasizes that she seeks to provide a 'defence', rather than a 'theodicy'. This distinction was introduced by Alvin Plantinga, and although it is tolerably clear, a single, precise characterization of the distinction has not emerged in the subsequent literature.[1] Often a 'defence' is taken to be an attempt to show that the existence of God (as conceived in a certain way) is not logically incompatible with the suffering that exists in our world. But the charge that evil (or evil of the sort we find in our world) is logically inconsistent with God's existence is not often pressed these days, and it is perhaps too easy simply to establish the logical compatibility of God's existence and evil (of the sort that we find in our world). We would typically want something more than a 'defence' in this very weak sense; we would want an account in which God and also the sort of suffering that we have in the actual world exist, where the account meets certain further 'epistemic requirements'.[2] Stump suggests such a requirement in the following:

> It has to be the case that, for all we know (as distinct from all that we are committed to believing), the claims of a defense could be true. It would therefore invalidate a defense if something about what we currently know demonstrates that the possible world of the defense is not the actual world. (p. 454)

The suggestion here is that the account in which both God and the relevant sorts of evil are said to exist must be consistent with what is 'known'. Stump makes it clear that she here intends that what is known be interpreted as the uncontroversial empirical truths. This still seems to me to be a rather weak epistemic requirement. That is, the requirement here would simply be that the account be logically compatible with the uncontested empirical truths.

A somewhat stronger requirement is suggested by Van Inwagen. Instead of simply requiring that the account be compatible with the uncontested empirical truths, Van Inwagen also requires that, given theism, we have no (good or strong) reason to think that the account

[1] I am indebted to the very thoughtful and helpful critical notice of Stump's book by William Hasker: 'Light in the Darkness? Reflections on Eleonore Stump's Theodicy', *Faith and Philosophy*, 28 (4) (October 2011), pp. 432-50, esp. pp. 432-5.

[2] I am here following Hasker, 'Light in the Darkness?', p. 434.

is false.[3] In his insightful review of Stump's book, Hasker offers Van Inwagen's epistemic requirement as a friendly amendment to Stump, and he interprets her as seeking to offer a defence that would meet Van Inwagen's requirement.[4] Hasker contends that only a defence that meets this more robust epistemic requirement could be part of (or on the way to) a theodicy. As Hasker puts it, '... if we have that much, then the defense is at least a candidate for being a theodicy, a true account of the reasons that God is justified in permitting suffering.'[5]

I pause here to offer a passage from David Lewis's fascinating paper, 'Evil for Freedom's Sake?', in which Lewis also suggests that the most promising project for a theist is to offer something in between a defence (in the weak sense) and a full theodicy:

> ... Defense is too easy; knowing God's mind is too hard. I think the topic worth pursuing falls in between, and has no place in Plantinga's scheme of theodicy versus defence. *Pace* Plantinga, I'll call that topic 'theodicy', but I don't mean the know-it-all theodicy that he wisely disowns. Rather I mean tentative theodicy, even speculative theodicy. The Christian needn't hope to end by knowing for sure why God permits evil. But he can hope to advance from a predicament of not having a clue to a predicament of indecision between several not-too-unbelievable hypotheses (maybe still including the hypothesis: 'none of the above').[6]

Perhaps Lewis would agree with Hasker's proposal that what is wanted is a defence that is at least a candidate for a theodicy. In any case Lewis correctly notes that a defence in Plantinga's sense seems too weak. We can perhaps in a rough and ready way place the views about adequacy criteria for defences along a spectrum as follows. We start with the weakest constraint on what would count as an adequate defence and proceed to more stringent requirements: Plantinga (logical compatibility of God's existence and evil of the sort in the actual world); Stump (logical compatibility of God's existence and evil of the sort in the actual world, given uncontested empirical truths); and Van Inwagen/Hasker (logical compatibility of God's existence and evil of the sort in the actual world,

[3] Peter Van Inwagen, 'The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5, *Philosophy of Religions* (1991), 135-65; the quotation is from p. 156, cited by Stump on p. 16.

[4] Hasker, 'Light in the Darkness?', p. 435.

[5] Hasker, 'Light in the Darkness?', p. 435.

[6] David Lewis, 'Evil for Freedom's Sake?', *Philosophical Papers*, 22 (1993), 149-72; the quotation is from p. 151.

and no reason to think the account false, given theism). The idea behind the requirement that there be no reason to think the account false, given theism, is that God's existence should fit with the existence of evil in a plausible way. That is, we should not have a good or strong reason to think that the story of why God allows the evil in question is false.

OVERVIEW OF STUMP'S DEFENCE

At the risk of great oversimplification, I shall offer a brief summary of the philosophical argument that provides the core of the Dominican part of Stump's defence.[7] This part of Stump's defence is heavily influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas. She begins by laying out a scale of value presented by St. Thomas, according to which the best thing for a human person is to have union with God (a personal relationship of love), and the worst thing is the absence of such union. Following Paul Draper's helpful summary, we can now regiment the argument as follows; we can think of it as applying to an arbitrary human person. (1) God loves the person and so desires the relevant kind of union with her – a personal relationship of love. (2) Such union is impossible even for God, given that a person is not in a state of psychic integration around the good. (3) To achieve such integration, the person needs to undergo a process of 'justification and sanctification', which is a gradual process of harmonizing (with God's help) the person's global desire for a will that wills the good with her other desires. (4) But – and this is important – the best means available to God to promote that process is to cause or allow the individual to suffer.

On Stump's Thomistic defence, God loves us and this leads him (given that we are psychologically constituted as we are and disposed to desire and choose certain things) to cause (or allow) us to suffer; so, on this picture, human suffering is conceptualized along the lines of 'tough love' given by a parent who is guided by the best interests of the child. Perhaps it would be unfair to characterize God's role here as like a 'Tiger Mom', since such a parent has a quite expansive view of the sorts of suffering that are good for the child. It is fairer to Stump's project to acknowledge that she is onto something deep, resonant, and attractive: an interpretation of our

[7] Here, and elsewhere, I have benefited from the extremely insightful critical notice of Stump's book by Paul Draper, '"Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering", reviewed by Paul Draper', *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. Available at: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24772-wandering-in-darkness-narrative-and-the-problem-of-suffering/> [accessed: 03/09/2012].

suffering as countenanced by a powerful and well-meaning parent-like figure who is guided by our long-term flourishing. Additionally, Stump's interpretation of *The Book of Job* suggests that God's communications with Job impart via Franciscan means the message that God is there for Job, like a well-meaning (if somewhat absent, or, at least, apparently absent) parent. (It must be admitted that, even if God is there in some sense for Job, Job is still a bit of a 'latch-key kid'.) The human need for a parent-like figure to look after us is very pervasive and deep, in my view.

I am reminded of a recent conversation with my brother. Our parents had just called him on the phone, and from all appearances, the call was both short and perfunctory. They didn't really seem to me to be sharing much information at all. When I asked my brother what that was about, he replied that ever since the day he was diagnosed with a particularly nasty form of non-Hodgins' lymphoma, they had called him every day. Since the treatment had been successful and he has done well for four years, the calls have become increasingly short; but our parents have still called literally every day. At that point I understood that the call had indeed conveyed something deeply important – perhaps as much content as can ever be conveyed, although not of the Dominican sort.

My brother, sister, and I are fortunate; we have wonderful and loving parents. How even more wonderful it would be if I could believe that the whole universe – including, most notably (from my perspective), me – were looked after by an all-powerful and all-loving parent-like figure. Mark Ravizza – my philosophical collaborator and friend, who is now a Jesuit priest – once told me that he had a deep need to believe that the world is looked after by a good and powerful force. I have often wished that I could have precisely this sort of view (answering to the need); I have felt that Mark and others who can actually believe this (based on their way of evaluating the evidence) have a kind of deep consolation and comfort that I lack.

In any case, one might wonder about what exactly the relationship is between the Dominican part of the defence – the Thomistic defence – and the Franciscan part, in Stump's view. I very much like Paul Draper's suggestion here:

> Stump is acutely aware of just how alien (or medieval) the world of the defense will seem to her readers, given contemporary secular and even religious sensibilities. She recognizes that her views are at risk of being dismissed out of hand. To prevent that from happening, she must make an

> appeal to both hemispheres of our brains, not just to the left hemisphere. Thus, the defense itself must have two hemispheres, a left one consisting of a description of St. Thomas's worldview and theodicy, and a right one consisting of the Biblical narratives. ... In the case of the right hemisphere of the defense, what is needed is philosophically motivated literary analysis designed to make the defense come alive in a psychologically or interpersonally realistic way in the Biblical narratives. ... Unless the stories can show the 'Franciscan possibility' of a world in which God and human beings grow closer through suffering, all the philosophical argument in the world is unlikely to make Stump's audience take the defense seriously.[8]

As noted above, Stump is at pains to claim that her project is to provide a defence, rather than a theodicy. I also noted above that there is some unclarity about what exactly an adequate defence would involve, and even some unclarity about what Stump herself is seeking in this respect. I shall here simply point to some general concerns I have about the project of offering a mere defence, as opposed to a theodicy, and then reflect in a preliminary way on how these concerns bear on Stump's project.

SPARTAN DEFENCES AND THE NATURE OF A DEFENCE

I share David Lewis's worry that a defence doesn't really give us much – and certainly not as much as we – at least many of us – would (or should) want. One way to get at this concern is to ask about whether we couldn't have a different, much simpler 'defence' that meets the criteria of adequacy for a defence laid out by Plantinga, Stump, Van Inwagen, and Hasker. We could ask why these simpler strategies don't already give us a defence (of the indicated sort). And if they do, what exactly is added by a more elaborate defence of the sort provided by Stump? And in light of the apparent fact that these pared-down models meet the relevant adequacy criteria for defences, we can ask whether *any* defence really provides what we should want, as we struggle with the relationship between human suffering and God's existence. Further, if these minimalist stories do *not* constitute defences, then how is it that Stump's story *does indeed* count as a defence?

So here's a really spare defence. God has a certain 'matrix' he uses to apportion happiness in heaven. More specifically, and for some reason

[8] Ibid., p. 6.

unknown to us, God gives people much more happiness in heaven, or perhaps is much more likely to assign persons to heaven, insofar as they have suffered unjustly in their lives on Earth. As in Sceptical Theism, we do not have access to God's reasons for this feature of his 'matrix'. We might suggest various hypotheses for why God's matrix is as it is, but we just do not have full access to God's reasons here. Of course, we know that God has *some* reason for the relevant feature of the matrix; we just don't know what it is.

I do not see why this very abstract model is not a 'defence': here God's existence would seem to be logically compatible with suffering – at least I do not see why it would obviously not be. And it would seem that, on this model, God's existence would be compatible with human suffering, given uncontested empirical truths; further, God's existence would be logically compatible with human suffering, and there would seem to be no good or strong reason to think any aspect of the account false, given theism. Insofar as the spare model won't really help much for most people struggling with the relationship between the manifest facts of human suffering and the putative existence of God, it seems to me that merely providing a defence is too little. That is, the spare model is really unsatisfying – and yet it would seem at least arguably to be a defence, according to all of the criteria presented above.

Perhaps someone will deny that my spare model does indeed present a defence; they will contend that the picture of God it presents is not of a morally perfect being. After all, on this story God allows us to suffer and then 'makes it up to us' in the afterlife. But just because God makes it up to us does not show that allowing us to suffer on Earth was justified in the first place. The only way that this picture would be compatible with God's perfect goodness is if there is some good reason why people have to suffer on Earth, it might be urged.[9] I agree that there are mysteries here, but I am supposing – along the lines of Sceptical Theism – that there are indeed good reasons why God allows the suffering of the innocent on Earth, even if we humans don't have full access to them. Of course, various reasons might be proposed. I am simply positing that God has such reasons, even though we do not fully grasp them. While perhaps it is not *obvious* that the story I have told is logically coherent (and thus a defence), I would also claim that it is not *obvious* that the story is logically incoherent. (I will return to this point below.)

[9] I am very grateful to Patrick Todd for this point.

We could fill in the bare model a bit, along the lines suggested by Alvin Plantinga's defence. Suppose that there is an angel – with free will – who is in charge of implementing God's will with respect to the apportioning of happiness in heaven (or perhaps assigning slots in heaven). For some reason inaccessible to us, the angel in charge of such matters has decided (of his or her own free will) to apportion much more happiness in the afterlife to those who have suffered unjustly in their lives on Earth. As in Plantinga's defence, God does not intervene to supersede this angel's free will, which God prizes highly. Of course, the mechanism of apportionment of happiness in the afterlife is here filled in slightly more than in my first proposal, but it is still a very simple, pared-down defence. Again, I do not see why it doesn't meet all the adequacy criteria for defences. So, for example, this model seems to present a story in which God's existence is logically compatible with human suffering of the sort we find in the actual world, and, given theism, there is no reason to think that the story is false (or has a false element).

One might worry that the account is not logically consistent, since God could intervene to prevent the angel from implementing the angel's preferred 'function' inversely relating worldly and post-mortem flourishing. One might also worry about why God put this sort of angel in charge of these matters in the first place. But if such worries would imply that my proposed defence is logically inconsistent, it would also presumably show that Alvin Plantinga's purported defence is similarly logically inconsistent. That is, just as one would need a further account of why God would allow the angel to implement her preferred function, so Plantinga would need an account of why God would allow the relevant devils to exercise their free will. The problem with Plantinga's defence is typically not thought to be that it presents a logically inconsistent picture; rather, the problem is that it is thought to be too weak. John Perry (through the characters in his dialogue on the problem of evil) offers a defence that involves specific devils in charge of causing suffering due to specific kinds of calamities, such as fires, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and so forth. The devils freely choose their role, and God values their free will.[10] It seems to me that my proposed defence is logically on a par with those

[10] John Perry, *Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999); reprinted in Perry, Bratman, and Fischer, eds., *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 5th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 96-119.

of Plantinga and Perry; if mine is no defence, then the same fate would await the defences presented by Plantinga and Perry.

I pointed out above that one might worry that the spare story with which I began is logically inconsistent insofar as God is supposed to be morally perfect and thus would not be inclined to adopt the sort of matrix I suggested. Similarly, one might worry that God is supposed to be omnipotent and thus could adopt whatever matrix he wished or supersede any angel's freedom of the will in this matter. But I would observe that one could equally worry whether Stump's defence is logically consistent. This is because she contends that we are by our nature psychically fragmented in such a way as not to admit of union with God without the process of justification and sanctification, and further that suffering is the best means available (even to God) for achieving the desired union. But why did God, being omnipotent, create us with such a nature? And why couldn't an omnipotent God have created us such that we didn't need pain and suffering, or so much of it, to get us ready for union with God?[11] I claim that, at the very least, my stories are just as likely as Stump's to be consistent. So, for example, I claim that there is some reason, even if we do not have access to it, why God's matrix is as it is (in my story). But Stump must similarly contend that there is some reason, even if we do not have access to it, why God made us such that we need pain in order to be ready to have union with him.

Of course, I have only sketched 'defences' in the most minimal way. But even so, I think we can at least pose the question whether the spare models I have proposed are indeed defences, or core components of defences. They seem to be, in the Plantinga, Stump, and Van Inwagen/Hasker senses of 'defence'. And if so, isn't a defence just too little to offer to many sincere people struggling with the problem of evil? Further, if indeed the spare models are defences, we might ask what Stump's richer and more detailed account adds. Again: Stump emphasizes repeatedly that her project is *not* to offer a theodicy, but, rather, a defence; but if this is the project, aren't there much simpler, more straightforward defences? Clearly, there is nothing that demands that there be just one or just a few defences, or just one or a few styles of defence; Stump may

[11] Draper makes this point in his NDPR review, writing, 'There's no reason, however, why an *omnipotent* being would need to use suffering as a causal means of giving us that power [to allow God to be close or closer]. Such a being could simply directly cause us to have it or set up the world in such a way that something more benign than suffering works just as well as suffering in producing the crucial power.'

contend that she is providing *a* defence – one among many possible kinds of defences. This is obviously perfectly legitimate, but it does raise the question (again) of whether *simply* providing a defence – even a rich and elaborate one – really gets one very far (or far enough). If a detailed, rich, and elaborate story gets us to the same point as the spare accounts sketched above, what exactly is the philosophical payoff of the richer, more detailed defence?

One could say that the richer kind of story told by Stump is easier to meld with the Biblical narratives and thus can have easier or better access to the synergism of Franciscan and Dominican elements. But I am not sure that this really is the case, as it would seem that we could invoke the Franciscan knowledge on behalf of the bare stories, as well as the richer account given by Stump. The Franciscan knowledge is a way of getting in touch with the deeply resonant idea that God is like a very powerful and perfectly benevolent parent looking after us, so that, even if it may not appear this way to us, our suffering is ultimately in our interest. (Of course, the Franciscan knowledge is not *reducible* to this point, but can perhaps be understood as a distinctive and ineffable way of gaining access to it.) But if this is very roughly correct, then we could invoke Franciscan knowledge on behalf of the spare models as well. After all, a perfectly knowledgeable, powerful, and good parent would be concerned to maximize our flourishing over our entire existence (and not just our earthly existence), and such a God would arguably respect the free will of angels and devils, as well as human beings. Indeed, Stump's fascinating discussions of God's conversations with Satan (in her highly original interpretation of *Job*) indicate that, on her view, God cares about all his creatures, including refractory angels and devils; and in any case, it seems that he must respect their free will (at least if Plantinga's and Perry's defences really are defences, and, additionally, for independent reasons).

I am interested to know what Stump would say about these questions. I do think she has offered an account that captures important features of St. Thomas's worldview and theodicy, and this in itself is no small feat. Further, the richness of the detail of Stump's picture makes it helpful insofar as it can be embedded in a more complete picture of human nature, as well as a specific worldview (both philosophical and theological). My main concern, I suppose, is that, in the end, even if it is indeed a defence, her more elaborate story is *only* a defence (in the senses of Plantinga, Stump, and Hasker/Van Inwagen).

Perhaps I could put my lingering dissatisfaction as follows. The Problem of Evil is, at its fundamental level, about how to fit God with evil. A defence is one way to address this problem: one assumes that God exists, and tells a story that purports to explain how God's existence fits with evil (of the nature and extent of evil in the actual world). A defence then will be of primary interest to someone who already believes in God, or is inclined to, or who thinks that there are strong 'positive' reasons to believe in God – perhaps one of, or a combination of, the traditional arguments for the existence of God. A defence then would be a way of 'playing defence', as it were.

But there is also what is sometimes called, following William Rowe, the 'Evidential Problem of Evil'. Although (as with 'defence') there is perhaps no settled-upon meaning of 'Evidential Problem of Evil', the problem is roughly that, setting aside evidence for the existence of God, the nature and extent of evil in our world suggests that it is unlikely or implausible that God exists. This is, of course, a very different way of raising the problem of how God's existence and evil fit together; here we do not begin by assuming God's existence and seek to tell a coherent and even perhaps plausible story about evil. Rather, we bracket arguments for the existence of God, and we consider whether the evil of our world constitutes evidence that God's existence is unlikely. As far as I can see, none of the defences we have considered, including Stump's, provides any answer to the Evidential Problem of Evil. Of course, this is not to say that anyone who addresses the Problem of Evil *must* or even *should* address the Evidential Problem. Clearly, there are different parts or aspects of the Problem of Evil, and correspondently different target audiences for a response.

I myself am not antecedently inclined to accept theism, and I am gripped by the notion that the nature and extent of both human and animal suffering in our world renders it unlikely that God exists. (Note that, surprisingly, Stump does not address the issue of animal suffering, which some might find particularly troubling and difficult to reconcile with God's existence; I am not sure how Stump would extend her model to address the problem of animal suffering.)[12] Thus, I would be interested

[12] It might seem that Stump must here appeal to something more general that will in turn give a further explanation of why God allows humans to suffer, since it is implausible that being in a relationship with God is the greatest good for an animal. This explanation might then supersede the reasons she has already adduced, so her defence would not turn on God's desiring certain kinds of meaningful relationships with us, but with some

in not just a defence, but also a theodicy. And I would be interested in a response to the Evidential Problem of Evil. That is, I would like to see a bit more offence, and not just defence.[13] Again: it is not reasonable to demand that a theorist address all of these difficult issues, and this does not constitute a critique of Stump's substantial and important book. Rather, I am simply trying to situate her project and to identify the source of my lingering sense – difficult perhaps fully to articulate – that the story presented by Stump leaves some pressing and distressing challenges untouched.[14]

THEISM SHOULD NOT HANG ON A THREAD

Finally, I wish to point to what I take to be a strike against Stump's Thomistic defence. (Of course, I realize that one gets three strikes, at least in baseball.) Elsewhere, and without securing universal and enthusiastic agreement (!), I have argued that it is a strike against libertarianism that our freedom and moral responsibility 'hang on a thread'; they are held hostage to the possible empirical discovery of the truth of causal determinism. I think our moral responsibility and status as persons should not be so tenuous; it should not depend on whether or not causal determinism turns out to be true. My view is not that our moral responsibility should not depend on any empirical contentions; rather, I would argue that our moral responsibility should not depend on *this sort* of empirical thesis about the world.

Additionally, I believe that a belief in God should not depend on whether causal determinism is true. I don't think that a belief in God should hang on a thread – that it should be held hostage to the theoretical physicists in this particular way. So, for example, if a believer in God should awake to the *New York Times* headline, 'Causal Determinism is True!!!', I do not think that this should lead him to give up his theism (or

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further fact that explains that as well as why he would allow animals to suffer as they do. I am grateful to Justin Coates for this point.

[13] Vince Lombardi, the former coach of the Green Bay Packers, famously said, 'The best defense is a good offense.' This quotation can be traced back to the military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz.

[14] A defence will not be of interest *only* to someone who already believes in God. Suppose, for instance, that someone finds the arguments for the existence of God quite persuasive, but the problem of evil keeps her from being a theist (i.e., endorsing God's existence), because she thinks there is no adequate response to the problem of evil. Or suppose someone thinks theists are just crazy, as it were, given the problem of evil. A defence could move this person. I am grateful to Patrick Todd for this point.

even his subscription to the *Times*!). Just as it is awkward or dialectically infelicitous or just plain uncomfortable to have our moral responsibility and personhood hang on a thread in this way, so it would be similarly uncomfortable to have one's theism depend on the deliverances of the theoretical physicists (in this specific manner).

And yet, as Stump points out, her Thomistic defence presupposes what she calls (using a term Van Inwagen and I unite in disparaging) 'libertarian freedom'. Here what is meant is at least that agents must have freedom to do otherwise, because it is manifest that so many individuals fail to benefit in the indicated ways (through justification and sanctification) from their suffering. If we look at the world and note this, how is it not an indictment of God? The answer, according to the Thomistic defence proposed by Stump, is that even those individuals who do not benefit from their suffering and turn freely to God have the power to do so; although they fail to achieve union with God, God has provided them the required resources, and they have freely failed to take advantage of their opportunity. But it is plausible that if causal determinism were true, then no human person would have the freedom to do other than he or she actually does. For various reasons, it is plausible to suppose that causal determinism must be false, in order for individuals to have freedom to do otherwise. Thus, the defence presupposes the falsity of causal determinism, along with human freedom to do otherwise. And, on this sort of defence, we would apparently have to give up a belief in God, if causal determinism were true. Belief in God would hang on a thread. I take it that this at least counts against Stump's proposed defence.

I concede that the issues here are delicate – both in respect of my contention that our status as morally responsible agents should not hang on a thread and also that a belief in God should not similarly hang on a thread. Much more would need to be said to make the case for these claims. I simply want here to stake out a view to the effect that it is at least somewhat unfortunate – a factor that militates to some extent against a defence – that it makes our belief in God hinge on the falsity of causal determinism – an empirical doctrine that could, for all we know, turn out to be true.[15] In my view, it would be nice to have a compatibilist-friendly

[15] A proponent of theism might insist that causal determinism is necessarily false, given the existence of a God who has the power to intervene in the world, and thus the doctrine is not an empirical doctrine at all. Note that even if this is so, it would imply that a defence that posited a God that sets up the world but cannot intervene subsequently would still have the problem of rendering God's existence dependent on the falsity of

defence. This way one would not have to dig in one's heals and ignore the physicists, if they really do some day discover the truth of causal determinism, and one would not have to give up one's belief in God. As Peter Van Inwagen once said in an informal conversation in which I suggested this point, 'Yes, it would be like having a theodicy in your breast pocket, which you could pull out if causal determinism were to be shown to be true.' A compatibilist theodicy would in this respect be like an insurance policy designed to minimize one's dialectical risks, as it were. Right, and I believe that such a defence can indeed be constructed, but it is a project for another occasion – one I very much hope to pursue in the future. This project will employ the idea – that Stump herself accepts – that moral responsibility does not indeed require alternative possibilities; additionally, it will employ other compatibilist ingredients, as well as features of libertarian theodicies that can be detached from the supernumerary libertarianism.

CONCLUSION

As I wrote above, Eleonore Stump's book is truly a magisterial combination of analytical philosophy and a humane sensibility. Please allow me to say that throughout her career Professor Stump has been an exemplar of both of these qualities: a rigorous, incisive, and broadly knowledgeable analytical philosopher, as well as a warm, supportive, and thoughtful friend.[16]

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causal determinism. Further, although I do not have the space to argue for this view here, I do not think that the move in question – positing the necessary falsity of causal determinism – really helps with the problem of religious belief hanging on a thread. This is because it might be true that causal determination holds in a sequence, assuming that God does not intervene. And, I would argue, this would be bad enough, in part because the only way to sever the connection between the past and the relevant behaviour would be a via a direct intervention by God. But these matters demand a more careful and comprehensive treatment.

[16] I have benefited greatly from discussions with, and comments by, Justin Coates and Philip Swenson. I am particularly grateful to detailed, challenging, and highly insightful comments on various drafts by Patrick Todd. Finally, I found the Author-Meets-Critics Session at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, Meetings in Seattle, Washington (USA) in April, 2012 both congenial and illuminating. On that occasion David McNaughton also offered comments, and Eleonore Stump replied to both of us. In part to avoid being a moving target, and at the risk of being a 'piñata grande', I resist the temptation to revise significantly in light of the comments at this session.

FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT? REFLECTIONS ON *WANDERING IN DARKNESS*

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Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* is a magnificent achievement. It combines the acuity and rigor of analytic philosophy with a deeply and richly imaginative approach to the interpretation of literary (and especially biblical) texts, and to our understanding of human nature. There is much here with which I agree and such criticisms as I offer mainly take the form of friendly amendments. Given the length and complexity of the book I have had to ignore many issues altogether, and also to omit many subtleties in her discussion of those issues with which I do engage. In particular, I much regret not having space to discuss her illuminating remarks about the role of stories in what she dubs 'Franciscan' knowledge, and her penetrating and stimulating application of these ideas to biblical exegesis. I begin with some questions about the general nature of her project.

DEFENCE AND THEODICY

How are we to reconcile the goodness of God with the reality of suffering? Stump draws a distinction, initially introduced by Plantinga, between a defence and a theodicy. On her account, a 'defense describes a possible world that contains God and suffering and that is similar to the actual world, at least in the sense that it contains human beings, natural laws, and evils much like those in our world; and then the defense proposes a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing evil in such a possible world' (p. 19).[1] A defence does not claim that the possible world just described *is* the actual world, whereas a theodicy does. Stump

[1] All otherwise unidentified page references are to Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

claims that what she is offering in this book is 'strictly speaking' a defence rather than a theodicy (p. 19). Her strategy is to take Aquinas's theodicy – his understanding of how the world is, including God's role in allowing suffering – and offer it merely as a defence. On this understanding of the two terms, 'nothing in a defense rules out someone's accepting the defense as a theodicy.' (Indeed, I suspect she thinks Aquinas's view does describe the actual world.)

The terms 'defence' and 'theodicy' are used in rather different ways by different writers in response to rather different challenges. Her explanation of how she is using the terms left me rather unclear as to her overall strategy. I think that is because she sometimes appeals to criteria appropriate to one kind of defence when the context suggests she has a different kind of defence in mind. I begin by mapping various possibilities, and then suggest what seems to me the most plausible interpretation of Stump's enterprise.

What is a defence, and what would constitute a successful one? The answer depends on the nature of the attack. Plantinga popularized the notion of a defence, when he offered the free-will defence in response to the *logical* problem of evil put forward by, among others, John Mackie. To refute Mackie's claim that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God, the theist does not have to produce a theodicy; i.e. tell us what God's actual reason is for permitting evil. All the defender has to do is to describe some possible world in which there is reason for a good God to permit evil. It does not even matter, for these purposes, whether it is *likely* or *plausible* that this possible world is the actual one; the defender can engage in whatever metaphysically extravagant speculations he wishes. And Plantinga does so engage, one might think, in his postulation of trans-world depravity.[2] Maybe each creaturely essence would go wrong on some occasion in every possible world in which it exists, but that postulate looks remarkably *ad hoc*. This, of course, is not a defect in a defence against the logical problem of evil, since any coherent story, however unlikely, will suffice to show that no contradiction is involved in the co-existence of a good God and evil.

What has come to be known as the evidential problem of evil is both more challenging and more interesting. The evidentialist claims that the specific nature of evil in our world makes theism unlikely. There is only

[2] And, perhaps, in his postulation of very powerful evil spirits.

morally sufficient reason for any agent to bring about or allow an evil if two things are true. First, that the evil was the only means available to bring about some greater good (i.e. it was a necessary evil); second, that the evil is such that an agent would be justified in allowing it to bring about that good (call this an acceptable evil). The evidentialist may concede that the theist can explain why God would allow some bad things, but denies that there is a plausible theistic explanation of *all* the evil there is – perhaps because there is too much evil, or evils that no-one can explain, or evils so dreadful that no good being would bring them into existence. The existence of *apparently* gratuitous evils – ones that are unnecessary or unacceptable (or both) – nevertheless constitutes good evidence that God does not exist.

Van Inwagen has suggested that the strategy of defence can be extended against the evidential argument.[3] He, like Plantinga, distinguishes between theodicy and defence, but his account of the distinction differs from Plantinga's. Van Inwagen's take on the evidential argument is along the following lines.[4] Let 'S' stand for a fairly detailed description of suffering in our world. Now consider two hypotheses. The first is that neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings is the result of non-human actions. Call this naturalism. The other hypothesis is theism. The evidential argument claims that S is not at all epistemically surprising, given naturalism, but it is very surprising given theism. So we have good prima facie reason to prefer naturalism to theism. How to meet this challenge? The theist might argue that S is much less surprising (because more probable), given theism, than one might suppose. This is the strategy that Van Inwagen labels theodicy, and here his usage differs from that of Plantinga and Stump. Van Inwagen thinks the prospects for theodicy are bleak and so proposes to *adapt* Plantinga's notion of a defence in order to defend theism. Suppose one were in no 'position to assign any epistemic probability to S on theism ... then ... one is not in a position to say that the epistemic probability of S on [naturalism] is higher than the probability of S on theism'.[5] Given that degree of ignorance, S would not be surprising on theism – not because S was just what one would expect, but because one had no idea what to expect if

[3] Peter van Inwagen, 'The Problem of Evil, The Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence', *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991), pp. 135-165.

[4] I have shortened and altered it in ways that I hope do not distort it.

[5] Peter van Inwagen, 'The Problem of Evil, The Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence', pp. 140-141.

theism were true. There are thus two ways, on his view, in which some occurrence can be epistemically unsurprising. It can be what one would expect, given the evidence, or it can be not unexpected, only because one has no idea what to expect.

A defence against the evidentialist, for van Inwagen, is 'a story according to which God and suffering of the sort contained in the actual world both exist, and which is such that (given the existence of God) there is no reason to think that it is false, a story that is not surprising on the hypothesis that God exists'.[6] There is, remember, no reason to think it false, because we have no way of assessing its likelihood. What use is a defence of this kind? Van Inwagen offers a quasi-judicial analogy: suppose Jane wishes to defend the character of Richard III; how will she deal with evidence that suggest he murdered the princes in the tower? She may offer a story that accounts for all the evidence, on which Richard did not do the dastardly deed. To succeed, she does not have to show that this is what (probably) happened. Her line of defence will be successful if her auditors think 'For all I know, that's true. I shouldn't be at all surprised if that is how things happened'.[7]

In her opening chapter, Stump draws on both Plantinga and van Inwagen in setting out her position. Yet, I suspect, she is not engaged in the same enterprise as either of them. I don't think she is merely addressing the logical problem, for at least two reasons. First, she points out, rightly, that 'such a claim is much harder to support than its proponents originally supposed' (p. 3). Second, the logical problem claims that, if God exists, there cannot be *any* suffering, a claim I doubt any opponent of theism would now make. Stump's concern is with the amount and depth of the suffering we find in our world. That suggests she is addressing the evidential problem.

I also doubt, however, that her strategy is the same as van Inwagen's, although she appeals to his account of Jane's defence of Richard III in setting up her own case. His defence depends on claiming that we can assign no epistemic probability (high, low, or middling) to S, given theism. To make out that case, he appeals to the depth of our ignorance at a number of points, including large dollops of moral and modal ignorance. But Stump rejects 'skeptical theism' which rests on such assertions as that we 'cannot evaluate the intricacies of probabilistic reasoning or

[6] Ibid., p. 141.
[7] Ibid., p. 142.

cannot calculate complicated modal claims' (p. 14).[8] I think, therefore, that Stump is addressing the evidential problem of evil, but is offering something more substantial than the sort of defence van Inwagen has in mind. She is not simply claiming that we have no idea whether to expect suffering, given theism. Rather, she offers an account in which, given certain plausible claims about God's nature and purposes, we should expect God to allow the kind of suffering (of adult human beings) that we find in our world.

While, as I understand her, Stump wants her account to be plausible, she does not claim that it is true (since that would involve showing, among other things, that there is a God). How might describing a merely possible world meet the evidentialist challenge? Here is an analogy. Consider a biologist who thinks that evolution by natural selection is a well-supported theory. In response to the objection that some biological trait or characteristic appears to be inexplicable on his theory, he may offer one or more explanations of how the attribute in question could have evolved. Even though he lacks evidence to show that the trait did evolve in one of the ways he suggests, his defence will be acceptable if his explanations of how it might have done so are plausible. And they will be plausible if, given what we now reasonably believe, one of these explanations might very well be true. The biologist's speculations are stronger than a defence in van Inwagen's sense. He is not merely claiming that the adaptation is not unexpected since, in the depths of our ignorance, we have no idea what to expect. Rather, he is trying to show that such an adaptation is just what we would expect, given the truth of evolution, while acknowledging that he is not in a position to assert that his story of how the adaptation arose is in fact the correct one. I suggest this model as the best way of interpreting Stump's enterprise.

Unsurprisingly, I do not have a complete account of what makes a theory plausible, but I take it that it should not resort to ad hoc or unsupported assumptions or postulations, and it should cohere well with a large part of those of our beliefs that are well-supported. In the body of her book, Stump makes strenuous efforts to meet this standard. For example, in chapter 15, she goes to considerable lengths to support the claim that 'suffering enables [the sufferer] to grow in psychic integration'. She offers detailed evidence, not only from our own experience and that of others, but also from scientific investigations of the topic (pp. 458-460).

[8] She cites van Inwagen's article, among others, in a footnote at this point.

Her practice, then, strongly supports the view that what she is offering is a theodicy, rather than just a defence, in van Inwagen's sense.[9] (To avoid confusion, I shall, however, continue to follow her usage and talk of her 'defence'. It is the nature of her strategy that we need to clarify; the nomenclature is fairly unimportant.)

I labour this point because, although in building her case Stump tries to make her explanation of God's allowing suffering as plausible as possible, when she explicitly states her criteria for an adequate defence, she puts the epistemic bar far too low. Of the worldview she has just been laying out in great detail she writes: 'Because it is a defence and not a theodicy, it needs only to be internally consistent and not incompatible with uncontested empirical evidence' (p. 452). This standard *would* be acceptable if she were addressing only the logical problem. But as a response to the evidential problem it is woefully inadequate.[10] It is so minimal that any competent conspiracy theorist, biblical literalist, philosopher, or paranoid schizophrenic, asked to defend his crazy views, might well spin a yarn that will pass it.[11] I conclude that she understates both what she needs to do, and what she actually accomplishes; her own account of what she is doing may lead the unwary reader into thinking that her project is less ambitious (and hence less interesting) than it actually is.[12] How well, then, does it succeed?

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[9] On van Inwagen's account, the theodicist argues as follows (where h is whatever auxiliary hypothesis the theist uses to explain suffering): 'The truth of [h] is just what one would expect given theism, and S is just what one would expect (would not be all that surprising) given theism. And, therefore, we do not have a prima facie reason to prefer [naturalism] to theism, and the evidential argument from evil fails.' ibid., p. 139. Other writers offer similar accounts of the distinction. For example: 'A theodicy is intended to be a plausible or reasonable explanation as to why God permits evil. A defense, by contrast, is only intended as a possible explanation as to why God permits evil.' (Nick Trakakis, 'The Evidential Problem of Evil' in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evi/#H3> [accessed 3/9/2012]. Since writing this paper, I have found that Michael Tooley makes similar distinctions in his piece on the topic in the Stanford Encyclopedia (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/> [accessed 3/17/2012]).

[10] How inadequate will depend, of course, on how we interpret 'uncontested'. I leave that aside here.

[11] I am reminded of a remark once made by a philosopher about some of his less stable colleagues: 'Crazy logicians are impeccable reasoners when it comes to what follows from what. The problem arises when they begin with a faulty premiss – such as "Aliens are attempting to control me via my TV"'.

[12] My fellow-symposiast at the Pacific APA, John Martin Fischer, raises similar worries about the precise nature of Stump's enterprise in his comments on Stump's book.

MORAL ADEQUACY

Clearly, any defence of God's allowing suffering will have to be *morally* plausible. In this respect, Stump's defence does very well indeed. Most, perhaps all, defences justify suffering by appeal to a greater good and Stump's is no exception. However, most popular theodicies or defences try to justify the suffering of *some* people by appeal to a greater benefit given to *others.* But whether that is a sufficient moral justification is hotly contested; aren't (some of) those who suffer being *used* (in a morally objectionable way) for the benefit of others, or to increase the overall good? (Call this the using objection.) It is one of the great merits of Stump's defence that it avoids this difficulty by insisting that, for suffering to be justified, it must be a necessary means to a greater benefit for *the person whose suffering it is*.[13] Or, more accurately (since whether we receive the benefit is up to us, as well as to God) the suffering must make available to the sufferer a good that, were she fully to understand what she was being given, she would be willing to trade her suffering to receive (e.g. p. 375).

Of course, it is open to those whose defence is subject to the using objection to argue that God is not doing anything morally objectionable on their account. Even supposing they could make a reasonable case, I think Stump's account would retain two advantages. First, unlike a using account, it avoids appeal to controversial moral claims, and that increases its plausibility. Second, even if one thinks it would be acceptable for God to use some for the benefit of others, one can surely agree that it would be morally preferable if God could achieve these great goods without using anyone. It comports much better with the Christian conviction that God cares for each creature as well as for the good of the whole.

Stump draws on Aquinas's work to show how God might achieve this goal.[14] For Aquinas, love requires two interconnected desires: the desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire for union with the beloved (p. 91). Someone who lacks psychic integration cannot be close to others, and so be fully united to them in love (p. 125). According to Aquinas, 'an agent can be internally integrated only around the morally good.' (p. 138) But our condition is such (as a result of the Fall) that we cannot

[13] Stump does not explicitly consider the merits of her explanation compared with others, but she does, on occasion, draw a sharp contrast between her view and that of others (e.g. p. 408).

[14] To say that, in this brief survey, I am leaving much out would be an understatement. But space does not permit.

on our own achieve this integration and so be in a position to be united with God in love, which is by far the greatest good for humans (p. 387). Suffering will be justified if it is needed to ward off the worst thing, which would be to lose the opportunity to be united with God. For Aquinas, suffering can be medicine for the soul, purging sin and bringing us to humility (p. 398). Finally, union with God comes in degrees, and the further suffering of someone who has turned to God can make that person closer to God, and also make him more glorious – an inspiration to others (p. 401).[15] To this, Stump adds a further proviso. One who suffers often loses what is most precious in her eyes. A good God would not only ensure that that her suffering led to a great good for her, but would want to restore to her what she most desired (the 'desires of her heart'), though not, perhaps, in their original form. 'They can be lost in one way and gained in another way, much more deeply desired by that particular person.' (p. 449)

Perhaps the clearest and simplest example that she cites of having the desires of one's heart met in an unanticipated way is the case of Victor Klemperer, whose ambition to write his magnum opus on Eighteenth Century French literature was thwarted when the Nazis came to power. However, he wrote a diary of his experiences in prison which was published after his death, and which is now hailed as an important masterpiece. So he did achieve his literary ambitions after all.

Of the many concerns one might raise about her account, I mention only two.

TROUBLE DOWN THE ROAD?

Stump says, quite rightly, that in assessing the adequacy of the Christian response to the problem of suffering, we have to take as given, for the purposes of discussion, the Christian world-view. Moreover, a defence 'does not seek to establish the existence of God or to argue for the truth of a particular set of religious beliefs' (p. 415). True, but Christians do wish (and need) to defend the rationality of their beliefs as a whole, and a defence that dealt adequately with the problem of suffering would form an important plank in an evidential case for the existence of God. The worry I have is that, the more we require God to do in order for Him to be justified in allowing suffering, the less probable it may be that the

[15] The detailed account of how suffering can plausibly be supposed to achieve these ends is too complex even to summarize here.

amount and kind of suffering we find in the world is compatible with the goodness of God. Let me explain. Suppose Stump is correct. That is, that 'God is justified in allowing human beings to endure suffering ... because, through their suffering, and only by its means, God gives to each of the protagonists something that these sufferers are willing to trade their suffering to receive, once they understand the nature of what they are being given', where that must include restoring the lost desires of their hearts in some form that makes what they get back more valuable than what they lost (p. 375). Stump rightly draws our attention to the 'stunning nature of this claim' (p. 375). It certainly demands more of God's providential grace than do some of the other solutions to the problem of suffering. To achieve this goal, God is going to have his work cut out. Omnipotent though he is, he can only bring about the logically possible, and we may wonder whether, for some cases of suffering, it really *makes sense* to suppose that the desires of each person's heart can be restored, even in a post-mortem existence, especially when one considers how specific such desires can be.

Stump's way of meeting this difficulty, as we have seen, is to allow some flexibility in what counts as getting the desires of one's heart. Each sufferer may not receive back what he specifically desired in the first place. Klemperer does not get to write his great book; he gets to write a different great book. Ironically, one of the themes of his diary is that he has been prevented from writing his magnum opus. But Klemperer may not be the best judge of such matters; Stump claims that 'there is no transparency as regards flourishing, or one's heart's desires' (p. 13). So Klemperer may, after all, have achieved his heart's desire and could have been (or can be, in a post-mortem existence) brought to see this. (And it might be part of God's mercy to enable him to see this.)

Perhaps this response of Stump's works best where what is desired are states of affairs. I may want to live in the hills of the North, but what I may really want, unknown to me, is to be close to the Maker of those hills.[16] I find it harder to see how it would work if the desire of one's heart involved love for a particular person. Suppose you have one child, whom you love deeply. The child goes to the bad and rejects not only your love, but God's also. Assuming the child never repents, the rift in your relationship will be permanent. In that case, the longed-for union

[16] This kind of experience is a major theme in C. S. Lewis's autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (London: Collins, 1965).

with your child is forever beyond your reach. Not even God can restore it. God can remove your child's freedom and force him to love you but what he cannot do, of course, is to make the child freely return your love. And only the child's freely reciprocating your love can satisfy this particular desire of the heart. Stump has suggested to me (in correspondence) that in such a case you would cease to desire union and your love would alter its nature so that it became merely a desire for your child's welfare. I don't think this answers the worry for two reasons. First, though I might sensibly give up hoping that my child will have a change of heart, my deepest desire has not been satisfied. Union with my child was and remains what I most want, though I recognize its unattainability. Second, if my child has irrevocably rejected both good and God, then my desire for his welfare is also frustrated.

I think there is a general point here. In any world in which agents have freedom and people have a deep love for others there is the possibility that there will be irrevocable disappointment of people's deepest desires. Freedom entails that people can reject the love on offer, and that must lead to the frustration of the desires of those who love them. If we can make sense of God having desires of the heart, and I think we can, then plausibly one of these will be a desire that all his creatures should freely respond to his love.[17] Since some may nevertheless reject him, then even God will suffer uncompensated loss.

I hope it is by now clear how raising the bar for what God would have to bring about to justify his allowing suffering may also make it harder to believe that there really is a good God. Consider agnostic Maria who finds the problem of suffering the chief stumbling block to Christian belief. If it were not for that problem, she would think it more probable than not that God exists to a degree that would make her adopt theism. As it is, she thinks that, because of the problem of suffering, the evidence is too equally balanced to warrant a move to either theism or atheism. She is familiar with some solutions to this problem, in which God uses the suffering of some to bring about the greater good. She has no problem in seeing *how* God could achieve such good ends; what she doubts is whether the proffered explanation is sufficient to *vindicate* his goodness, since it seems to involve using others. Suppose she now reads *Wandering in Darkness*, and for the first time finds a solution that

[17] 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!' (Luke 13:34; see also Matt. 23:37).

is morally satisfying. If there is a good God, he should care for each of his creatures individually in the way Stump describes. If things were as Stump says they might be, then God would be justified in allowing the amount and kind of suffering we find in the world. But now a new doubt assails her. *How* can even God bring it about that *no* person *ever* permanently loses what is of deep importance to her? She acknowledges, of course, that God may do this in many cases, as Stump so movingly shows in her case studies. But, as we have seen, it does not seem to make sense in every kind of case.[18] So Maria has reason to doubt that God could have so organized the world that no one ever permanently loses their heart's desire. And that lowers her (reasonable) estimate of the probability that God exists, and so she remains agnostic.[19]

AN EPISTEMIC CIRCLE?

So far I have acknowledged that someone in Maria's position might have good grounds for accepting Stump's solution as a morally satisfying one. Each sufferer will, as a result of their suffering, achieve a good for which, if they were reasonable, they would willingly accept that suffering. The central good (leaving to one side the issue of satisfying the desires of each heart) that suffering can bring, on Aquinas's and Stump's picture, is closer union with God. But now I wish to raise an epistemic problem about whether an agnostic, like Maria, can have good grounds for believing that such union would be a great good, and so sufficient to justify the suffering. Let us accept that union with the creator and ruler of the universe, *if he were perfectly good*, would be such a good. But union with the creator and ruler of the universe would not be so good if he were morally flawed; if he were jealous, vengeful, capricious, callous, or just indifferent to suffering. I should stress that there is no metaphysical problem here: the universe could be as Aquinas describes it. But I think Maria, and other agnostics like her, are faced with an epistemic circle, since the problem of evil raises precisely the issue of whether the ruler of the universe, if he exists, is wholly good. She would have grounds for believing that the ruler of the

[18] Stump rightly says that no defence or theodicy can tell us what specifically justifies each particular case of suffering, since we do not know enough of that person's story; we can only give a generic account. But if Stump is right, there must be some such story for each person (as indeed she insists).

[19] Put in van Inwagen's terms: Stump may have raised the probability of S, given God, but lowered the probability of God, given S. I am grateful to Piers Rawling for pressing this objection on me.

universe is wholly good if she had grounds for believing that the ruler gives each sufferer a benefit that outweighs the suffering. Since, however, the good the sufferer is said to obtain is union with that ruler, she cannot have grounds for believing the benefit is sufficiently good unless she has grounds for believing he is good. And she cannot have grounds for believing he is wholly good unless she has grounds for believing that the benefit is sufficiently great to justify the suffering.[20]

One possible response to this worry is to claim that defences are meant to address only theists. The sole purpose of a defence is to show that theists are within their epistemic rights in believing in God. Defences are not meant to give any grounds for belief to non-believers. But that would seem an unduly narrow view of one's audience. Since solving the problem of evil removes one barrier to showing that the theist's belief in God is rationally defensible, one might also hope that it would enable belief in those whose way to belief is currently blocked by that barrier. But, if I am right, it seems that it cannot do so without circularity.

Is there any solution – any way in for the agnostic that avoids the circle? An epistemic solution would supply independent grounds for believing that God is good.[21] Here is a suggestion as to how that might work; it draws to some extent on a hugely important part of Stump's book that I have not yet discussed. This is the possibility of what she calls Franciscan knowledge; knowledge which is not reducible to knowledge *that*, i.e. propositional knowledge. Examples might include knowing colours, music, faces, etc. Such knowledge, though not reducible to propositional knowledge, can form the basis for propositional knowledge. An important aspect of Franciscan knowledge is knowledge of persons, knowledge we can only gain by personal interaction. One important aspect of such knowledge, I am going to suggest, is that one can have good grounds for believing something about a person, believing *that* he is kind or sincere on the basis of meeting him in person, even if that acquaintance is short, so that one cannot point to any evidence other

[20] I have used the phrase 'ruler of the universe' to avoid the objection that God, by his very nature, is essentially good, in which case the proposition, 'God is good', is necessarily true.

[21] There is an alternative pragmatic solution, of the sort advocated by William James, namely that it might not only be legitimate but prudent for the agnostic to begin to practice what the religion preaches in order to discover if there is truth in it. As Hugh McCann strikingly put it in discussion: 'if there might be gold in these hills, it would be sensible to start digging.'

than the overall impression he made. One's knowledge *of* the person, which cannot be fully communicated to those who have not met him, would be the basis for this piece of propositional knowledge.

A famous parable by Basil Mitchell illustrates this.[22] Suppose you are fighting with the partisans against the occupying forces. One night you meet a man who tells you he is a partisan leader, but who warns you that, in order to remain undetected, his behaviour will have to be ambiguous. Though you have met him only once, you find him utterly trustworthy. His behaviour is indeed ambiguous; sometimes he is seen helping partisans, but sometimes he appears to cooperate with the occupiers. Other people, who have not met him, are sceptical. How can we know if he is really on our side? You, however, having met him, continue to trust, in virtue of that personal experience, and you are justified in so doing.

Stump considers four biblical narratives in which she illustrates how suffering can be redeemed. In three of them – Job, Abraham, and Mary of Bethany – a central issue is trust. One main point of the suffering of each of these people is to test and strengthen their trust in God, so as to enable closer union with him. It is essential to such tests, of course, that God's behaviour is perplexing; if those tested knew what was going on, it would not be the same sort of test. Take Job. Job's beef with God concerns God's justice; how can a good God let him suffer in this way? When he meets God, God *tells* Job that he has a caring relationship with all his creation, but cites no evidence for these claims. Nevertheless, Job is convinced. Why? One answer would be that when he meets God face to face he knows that God is caring and trustworthy though, as Stump remarks, '*[h]ow* Job knows ... that his suffering is at the hands of a good and loving God ... is hard to explain to someone who was not part of the same second-person experience.' (p. 224)

How might this get the agnostic out of the epistemic circle? If the agnostic could have a personal experience of God, then she might find him to be wholly good. Since this encounter gives her good reason to trust that God is good, then she can justifiably see union with him as a supreme good for her. In the words of the Psalmist, 'O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' (Psalm 34:8)[23]

[22] Basil Mitchell, 'Theology and Falsification' in A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (eds), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 104-8.

[23] I am grateful to a number of people for helpful comments on earlier drafts: Justin Capes, Randy Clarke, Matt Flummer, Eve Garrard, Ben Kimmell, Brian Leftow, Hugh McCann, Al Mele, Dan Miller, Jay Quigley, Piers Rawling, and Tina Talsma.

WORLDVIEWS, THE PROBLEM OF EVIL, AND RATIONAL DISCOURSE: THOUGHTS ON THE FRAMEWORK OF STUMP'S DEFENCE

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A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Most Christian traditions embrace the view that our world was created and is governed by an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect God. Undeniably, our world is also a place full of heart breaking human and non-human suffering. The extensive amount of suffering and its apparently random distribution make it hard to believe that the world was created and is governed by an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect God.

There are different versions of the problem of evil. The contemporary debate prominently features the distinction between the *Logical Problem of Evil* and the *Evidential Problem of Evil*. The former claims that the existence of God is logically incompatible with a world full of apparently gratuitous suffering. The latter claims that, although the existence of suffering and God are not logically incompatible, there is little reason to believe in God in light of all the suffering in the world. The idea is that the vast amount of suffering in our world makes it very unlikely that there is a plausible explanation for why God would create such a world. Rather, suffering provides strong evidence that there is no God.

Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* (*WID*) is primarily concerned with the second problem. As she states at the outset, it is highly debatable whether God has morally sufficient reasons to allow suffering (*WID*, p. 4). Her book is an attempt to defend the claim that God has morally sufficient reasons for doing so.

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In this paper I deal with the *explanatory scope* of Stump's defence as laid out in *WID*. I focus on two worries which Stump's critics might raise:

(i) The first worry is that a defence is too explanatorily weak. A more 'offensive' account would be needed to persuade an atheist that theism might be a viable and not just a consistent position in the light of the suffering in the world.

(ii) The second worry is that a defence appears to be directed foremost at believers by rebutting an attack on certain claims of their faith, instead of at persuading non-believers that their view is false.

I will discuss these worries in the following way: With the aid of the notion of *worldview*, first I clarify the argumentative context of Stump's defence. After that I explain why hardly more can be expected than a defence when it comes to a discussion among adherents of different worldviews about issues such as the problem of evil; this addresses the first worry. This conclusion might disappoint some, but my discussion should show, in answer to the second worry, that the main purpose of a defence is not to produce conversions. The main aim of a defence is to illustrate that the Christian understanding of God is intellectually defensible – despite all the suffering in the world. I conclude that Stump's defence fulfils this explanatory purpose. There is hope that our wandering in darkness once will end up in light.

WHAT A DEFENCE IS ABOUT

Stump is deliberate about noting that her account is a defence, not a theodicy (*WID*, pp. 19-20). Generally a defence is understood to be a theory which describes a possible world similar to ours containing God and suffering and which presents morally sufficient reasons for God's allowing suffering in the possible world in question. A defence differs from a theodicy in that it does not claim that the possible world is identical to the actual one. Thus, on the one hand, a defence does not claim to present God's *real reasons* for allowing suffering in the world. On the other hand, however, it does not exclude the possibility of doing so either. The possible world of a defence, by being similar to ours, might coincide with the latter. Hence, a defence aims at offering a story at least about God's *possible reasons* for allowing suffering in our world, thereby rebutting the attack from the evidential problem of evil. Ideally this story should not be merely coherent but also *plausible*; that is, someone hearing the story should have good reasons to think that the story might be true.

It is important to keep in mind that a defence provides a general explanatory theory about God's possible sufficient reasons for allowing suffering in the world. It does not aim to explain particular instances of the suffering of any real person. A defence accounts for rational belief in God and not for a causal explanation of particular instances of suffering.

IS STUMP'S DEFENCE A FAILURE?

A critic of defences might demur that a defence does not quite give us what most people would expect because it gives us *too little*. In his paper, Fischer, for instance, presents a story which he calls a 'spare defence'. It is a story about God's using a certain 'matrix' to apportion happiness in heaven in relation to the evil suffered on earth. The more someone suffers unjustly in his earthly life, the more happiness is assigned to him in the afterlife (one might think of the biblical story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16: 14-31). The compatibility of God's existence with human suffering is secured and there is no strong reason to think that Fischer's account is false or incompatible with uncontested empirical evidence of the actual world. Assuming that Fischer's account fulfils the adequacy criteria for being a defence, such as logical consistency, coherence, and compatibility with empirical evidence, it nevertheless appears to be a 'really unsatisfying' story.[1]

One reason for Fischer's dissatisfaction is that, if his spare defence is a defence, then probably many more stories would qualify as defences as well. If this is the case, one might wonder what Stump's 'richer and more detailed account adds'[2] to simpler and more straightforward defences such as Fischer's. His suspicion is that the quality bar for a defence is set too low as long as it merely has to fulfil the adequacy criteria mentioned above.

A similar worry also appears to be raised by Paul Draper in his review of Stump's book.[3] According to him, certain instances of suffering remain hard to explain even if one accepts the general thrust of Stump's argument. Amongst others, Draper refers to worse psychological health due to suffering, animal suffering, and forms of trivial suffering with no

[1] John Martin Fischer, 'Struggling With Evil: Comments on *Wandering in Darkness*', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4/3 (2012), p. 115.

[2] Fischer, 'Struggling With Evil', p. 117.

[3] Paul Draper, 'Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering', *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24772-wandering-in-darkness-narrative-and-the-problem-of-suffering/> [accessed 03/09/2012]

apparent psychological impact. I don't want to discuss these points here. Crucial for the present discussion, however, is Draper's emphasis that Stump's defence becomes less and less likely to be true if these instances of suffering cannot be accommodated within her account – even if it cannot be shown that they are inconsistent with it. For dismissing a defence it is not required to prove it is false; it suffices to show that it cannot solve various challenging aspects of the evidential problem of evil.

Both critiques boil down to the claim that it is one thing to come up with a story about a possible world containing God and suffering which apparently is not false. It is another thing, however, to come up with a story about a possible world containing God and suffering which probably is also true. As long as a defence merely fulfils adequacy criteria such as internal and external consistency, developing one seems to be more an endeavour of creative storytelling and theory construction in the light of present empirical knowledge than the well-grounded business of providing good reasons for belief to non-believers. A quite improbable but consistent story is not enough for showing that her advocates face no evidential problem of evil. Hence, according to this line of thought, a defence should be considered to be a failure if it does not offer enough evidence to remove major obstacles to believing (such as the evidential problem of evil) and to convince a non-believer that theism really is a serious alternative to a non-theistic understanding of reality.

If this reading is correct, then I take it that this critique advocates making defences into something closer to what Stephen T. Davis once called a hard apologetic argument. For Davis, this is an argument that attempts to demonstrate that it is more rational to hold a given belief than not holding it in its modest form, and that it is irrational not holding it in its strong form. A soft apologetic argument, instead, attempts to demonstrate that one is within his intellectual rights in holding a given belief.[4]

I'll argue in the next section, however, that a version of a hard apologetic argument or anything close to it is difficult or almost impossible to put forward successfully, for reasons pertaining to the worldview of the person to whom the argument is presented. If this is the case, then the proponent of a defence shouldn't be overly concerned with the worry raised by Fischer and Draper, because, though well intentioned, it misses the mark.

[4] See Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed. Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 1.

THE CONCEPT OF A 'WORLDVIEW'

Stump suggests that the problem of suffering is embedded in a larger conflict over divergent interpretations of our world, one theistic, the other atheistic. She writes:

> The picture theodicy paints is meant to show us God and human beings in such a light that we can begin to see the compatibility of God and human suffering in our world. The picture offered by opponents of theodicy, on the other hand, presents the world in such a way that some defect of mind or character (or both) would be required to believe that the world included God as well as suffering. (*WID*, p. 18)

Unfortunately, Stump does not develop this remark further. Her quote suggests, however, that the 'natural place' for the problem of suffering is in a dialogue between adherents of different worldviews. In this section I develop this point by elaborating on the notion of a worldview and reflecting on its role in a person's life.

Sometimes philosophers refer to different metaphysical worldviews as a source of disagreement about a specific claim. Davis, for instance, underlines that a vital factor for an adequate understanding of the discussion about the possibility of the resurrection is to take into consideration the different basic metaphysical claims typically held by those who believe and those who do not believe in the resurrection. The non-believer's worldview can be circumscribed roughly as a naturalistic understanding of reality whereas the believer's worldview contains at least one additional item to the naturalist's worldview, namely God (and as a consequence God's interaction with the world).[5]

Davis's suggestion definitely goes in the right direction but I would like to supplement it additionally. Not only are basic metaphysical beliefs crucial for understanding a person's worldview,[6] but rather all those beliefs which play a determining role in how we understand and interact with reality, be they anthropological, ethical, religious, aesthetic and so on.

Examples of such beliefs might be: 'All human beings have the same value.' 'The world can be best explained by the natural sciences.' 'Nothing that happens is meaningless.' 'Material entities do not suddenly dissolve

[5] Davis, *Risen Indeed*, pp. 17-18.

[6] The notion of worldview used here draws particularly on the work of Otto Muck. See, for instance, Otto Muck, *Rationalität und Weltanschauung* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1999) and Otto Muck, 'J. M. Bochenski on the Rational Aspect of Weltanschauung', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 52 (2012), 63-78.

into air.' 'We continue to persist through time without interruption.' 'There is no afterlife.' 'Do not kill is the most important ethical imperative.' 'God is our father and we are all his beloved children.'

A person's worldview constitutes the framework, so to say, within which the person understands the world and interprets her existence and her individual experiences in a certain way: She may take reality to be a teleologically structured whole or a mere random collection of particles, she may interpret certain situations as meaningful or as meaningless, and she may emphasize certain experiences and de-emphasize others.

The beliefs a worldview consists of are operative at a rather global level for they interpret and integrate the single area-specific beliefs which a person holds into a structured whole. Against the background of her worldview, a person attempts to order and integrate her specific experiences and her individual area-specific beliefs into a more or less coherent system of beliefs, thus providing meaning and orientation for her as cognizer, decider, and agent. It should be clear by now that the beliefs a worldview consists of play a fundamental life-orienting role.[7] They are not incidental beliefs which a person might change or abandon easily, for instance, in the light of new discoveries and facts.

The imagery of a web of beliefs might help us grasp more precisely the structure of a worldview. This imagery highlights that the more central a belief is, the more confident the person holding it is that it is true. As a consequence, the more central a belief is, the less inclined the person in question will be to reject or revise it if she discovers it to be inconsistent or in tension with her other less central beliefs.

Imagine two people, John and Mary. For Mary the belief that the Christian God exists (belief B, for short) is central to her worldview. She holds B with great confidence (and she has also reasons for holding this belief). The centre of John's worldview, instead, includes the belief that there is no God but that reality consists only of physical matter. If John confronts Mary with the belief that people do not rise from the dead because our scientific knowledge and common sense rules out such a possibility (belief C, for short), and Mary realizes that C is in tension with B, then it is very likely that she will not accept C, because it is less central for her than B, and because she has also reasons to believe B. Mary might find John's arguments in favour of C persuasive, if considered in

[7] See also Patrick Riordan, 'Religion as Weltanschauung: A Solution to a Problem in the Philosophy of Religion', *Aquinas*, 34 (1991), 519-534. He refers to 'life-carrying convictions' for the underlying of this insight.

itself, but might nevertheless maintain B because the strength of her belief that B outweighs her confidence in C. She might say: 'John is most likely right if we consider his claim from a purely scientific perspective. Then dead people do not come back to life. I am a theist, however, and given what I take myself to know about God, and given my personal belief, I am confident and have good reasons to believe that God will raise us from the dead.'

The upshot of this discussion is that all people interpret their beliefs and experiences within a certain framework, that is, their worldview. Depending on which beliefs are found at the centre of a person's worldview, other beliefs are found more or less plausible. Mary is convinced of her position not primarily because the arguments in favour of B are stronger than the arguments in favour of C but because her theistic worldview entails also the belief that God can raise people from the dead, that is, not-C. Whether Mary rejects C relies, at least in part, on how central B is in her overall belief set. What is consistent with one's most central beliefs is regarded by a person as a valid guiding principle for determining what is true and hence for guiding one's life.

It is important to note that this characterization of worldview is not committed to relativism about worldviews. A worldview is not merely an accumulation of subjective opinions, nor is it immune to rational criticism. Rather, a worldview is a system of beliefs which are subject to rational assessment and reconstruction. Muck distinguishes four criteria for assessing worldviews. The first two criteria refer to the internal structure of a worldview, the last two criteria to the 'material' at which a worldview is directed.[8]

The first criterion is *consistency*, that is, a worldview has to be free of contradiction. The second criterion is *coherence*, that is, a worldview should be a unified and coordinated interpretative system and not merely be a loose collection of rather independent subsystems. Thirdly, a worldview must *refer to experience* in general because it has to interpret and evaluate the various experiences of a person. Finally, a worldview has to be *open to new experiences and facts*, that is, it has to consider all possibly relevant data in principle and exclude nothing arbitrarily – for instance, because it might count as evidence against one's actual worldview.[9]

[8] He adopts these criteria from Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

[9] These criteria are not exclusively pertaining to worldviews. The quality of scientific theory can also be examined along these lines.

The crucial point is that these criteria make it possible to compare and contrast people's worldviews, and to rationally assess any needs for changes and adaptions. An intellectually honest dialogue partner will aim at observing these criteria in order to recognize errors and deficiencies in her own worldview which would impair its overall structuring and integrative function.

ARGUING ABOUT SPECIFIC CLAIMS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DIVERGENT WORLDVIEWS

Stump notes that there are at least two possibilities for proceeding in a situation of conflict among adherents of different worldviews:

> Sometimes the thing to do with such a divergence of views is to try to adjudicate the truth or falsity of the claims particularly important to it. [...] In other words, we could argue through each claim [...], in order to try to establish the truth of our position. But another thing we could do would be to describe [...] our own worldview [...]. In presenting these views [...], we would not be arguing for the truth of our own claims [...] but rather showing [...] the worldview within which those claims are embedded. (*WID*, p. 18)

Stump's first suggestion is to assess the truth of each controversial claim. Her second suggestion is to explain in detail one's worldview so that an 'empathic understanding' becomes possible for the discussion partner. I will discuss both possibilities in turn.

Generally a rational person will accept a claim on the basis of a good argument, because she aims to have true beliefs and to avoid false ones. Certain psychological attitudes like indolence, fear, or stubbornness might prevent a person from doing so, but this person is presumably not acting like a fully rational or epistemically virtuous agent.

Psychological barriers, however, are not the only reasons which might prevent a person from accepting a claim on the basis of a good argument. If the foregoing reflections about the role of a person's worldview are correct, then a person might reject the conclusion drawn from a good argument because she is already strongly convinced in virtue of her worldview that the conclusion is false.[10]

[10] My argumentation is to a large extent congenial to Davis's *Risen Indeed*, pp. 15-20. I found also Jennifer Faust's discussion on these issues very helpful and illuminating. See Jennifer Faust, 'Can religious arguments persuade?', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 63 (2008), 71-86. Both authors' work complements Muck's thoughts nicely.

Unlike the person with psychological barriers, the latter person's conclusion is not irrational. Rather, it makes perfect sense given her worldview. Because her worldview determines what she takes to be good evidence, an argument which might strike someone else as persuasive might lack any force for a person whose worldview does not recognize the force of this argument. As mentioned above, the confidence which one has in one's worldview is likely to outweigh one's confidence in a specific claim which is in tension with or even contradicting one's worldview. The person is rational in case it does because, given her worldview, she has reasons to assume that the specific claim in question is most probably wrong.

If Mary's worldview includes 'God exists' as a central belief, then the problem of suffering must not rationally compel Mary to change her mind. Mary will continue to believe in God, if this belief frames her understanding of the arguments put forward by her opponents. The problem of suffering combined with scientific knowledge about cosmology and evolutionary biology, taken by itself, might provide a strong case against theism. Mary can see this point put forward by her atheist interlocutor. But once this argument is placed within Mary's theistic worldview, it loses much of its force, because this evidence against theism is undermined by the other evidence with which Mary's theistic worldview provides her. The standard for evaluating the evidence against theism changes, so to speak, because it is not viewed from a neutral perspective anymore but rooted in her theistic worldview. The reason why Mary rejects the conclusion of the evidential problem of suffering is not that she thinks that the evidence for it is weak. Rather, her theistic worldview prevents the problem of suffering from undermining her belief in God by providing evidence in favour of theism which is stronger than the evidence, provided by suffering, against theism.

For someone without a theistic worldview, by contrast, the problem of suffering has great force indeed against the claim that God exists. For such a person all the suffering in the world provides strong evidence that there is no morally perfect supreme being. And there is nothing wrong if a non-believer is reasoning in this way. Hence, from the same facts ('There is much suffering in the world.') and experiences ('I suffered in my life a lot.') can be drawn rather different conclusions in the light of divergent worldviews.

Of course, the firmness of one's worldview should not be overstated. As indicated in the discussion about the criteria of rationality for worldviews,

Mary might undergo unexpected experiences which affect her so profoundly that she cannot integrate them in her worldview anymore and as a consequence loses her faith. Or she might be confronted with so much persuasive counter-evidence to her worldview that this leads her to think that it is rational to give it up. In a less extreme case Mary might feel the need to re-evaluate her prevalent belief system. At the end of this process she might become more receptive to arguments she did not consider before and certain claims of her atheistic interlocutors may be more convincing to her than they were before. Certain beliefs which were at the outer periphery of her web of beliefs now move closer towards the centre, so to speak, and hence play a greater role in impacting any new beliefs which she may form. The above mentioned discussion of Mary with John might be either of such a case.

The conclusion drawn from these reflections is that single claims and arguments, even if probable in themselves, will generally fail to convince a person if these claims are incompatible with the central beliefs of her worldview. This attitude becomes understandable once we realize that a person's worldview determines how plausible she finds counter-arguments to be. Jennifer Faust underlines this point and argues that many arguments for religious claims are likely to commit what she calls 'begging the doxastic question'. On Faust's account a person begs the doxastic question just in case she 'would find the argument persuasive only if she antecedently believes the argument's conclusion'.[11]

Thus, a person's worldview affects how plausible a person finds arguments against her worldview: if she finds them implausible, it is because her worldview does not incorporate them. If this argumentation is correct, then it does not seem to be a very promising way to assess the truth and soundness of individual arguments against a person's worldview. Since a theist and an atheist interlocutor have, in a fundamental sense, a different understanding of reality, they attribute different argumentative force to the specific arguments pertaining to the problem of suffering. As a consequence, there is no neutral ground available where an 'objective' evaluation of these arguments detached from one's worldview can be undertaken and weighed up against one another.

[11] Faust, 'Can Religious Arguments Persuade?', p. 80.

THE ROLE OF A DEFENCE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DIVERGENT WORLDVIEWS

According to the second possibility Stump mentions, one can describe one's worldview in great detail, to help one's interlocutor understand it. Stump adopts this approach for her defence. The primary aim of this procedure is to explain one's worldview. The question of truth and falsehood might come in later but does not play a primary role in this account.

The basic idea is that Mary communicates to her interlocutor not just that she holds certain central beliefs, but also her reasons for believing them; how her worldview structures and guides her life; and what biographically brought her to believe it. If Mary describes her worldview in this way, then her interlocutor has the chance to see the world, so to speak, through Mary's eyes. The worldview is not an abstract set of beliefs anymore but it becomes 'experiencable' from the interlocutor's subjective perspective.[12]

The objective of this imagined dialogue is neither a conversion of Mary's interlocutor nor a demonstration that the interlocutor's view is ill-founded. Rather, it is to enable the interlocutor to gain an empathic access to Mary's worldview, as well as to elucidate the various interconnections within it. Ideally this results in a second-personal and holistic access to the *Lebenswelt* of one's interlocutor. The primary objective is for the discussion to result in a deepening of mutual understanding between both parties. Stump writes:

> [...] the defense will deepen the discussion between the proponents of the argument from evil and the presenters of the defense, because the defense will show the difference in worldview between the two groups, so that the discussion can be more fruitfully focused on the underlying sources of disagreement. (*WID*, p. 20)

In addition, this procedure is helpful for the person describing her worldview, because it helps her to explicate it and to see more clearly her reasons and experiences supporting the issue under debate (as well as any which may not support it, of course). Hence, a defence gives Mary the opportunity to uncover reasons for her view which she might have missed before, and it might also show some of her reasons to be bad ones. Thanks to the defence, she might move from a belief based on weak

[12] This second-person account of knowledge is crucial for Stump's defence. See, for instance, *WID*, pp. 48-63.

evidence to a belief based upon strong evidence and feel more justified in her belief that God and suffering can coexist. Finally, she might see more clearly than before connections and tensions within her worldview. One might say that the more precisely a person can articulate her own worldview, the less she needs a defence to back it up, and the less clearly she can articulate it, the more a defence can help make it more robust and well-grounded.

One might see now why it comes as no surprise that the main impact of a defence of theism is directed at people holding a theistic worldview. Whether someone finds a defence plausible depends very much on her own worldview. An atheist might consider a defence such as Stump's as an interesting just-so story but she will not find it very plausible because her worldview does not contain the crucial premise that an omnibenevolent God exists.

As indicated already at the end of the former paragraph, it is likely, however, that the defence might sensitize the atheist to certain issues she was not aware of so far. The defence might initiate a thought process which could result in some restructuring of the atheist's worldview at the end. Thus, the conversion of the atheist interlocutor is an objective which extends beyond the direct aim for a defence. This is not to say that a defence cannot produce a conversion but any such result should be considered as an exception rather than the rule. It is probably more accurate to say that, in such a case, hearing a defence is a sort of trigger for the conversion of a person in whom the soil has already been prepared. On the level of the person's worldview this means that some peripheral beliefs in her worldview are moving more closely to the centre, and formerly central beliefs are losing confidence for the person.

Someone might object that this argumentation runs into an epistemic circle.[13] The question is either whether God exists and hence no gratuitous evil exists or whether gratuitous evil exists and therefore God does not exist. Since a non-believer will hardly have any reasons to believe in God, she also has no reasons to interpret suffering in the world as purposeful. Since there is no such thing as a bare, non-interpreted, and objective stance for assessing our experiences, the way in which the atheist assesses suffering will inevitably depend largely on her worldview – that is, in our case, on whether she thinks there is a God or not.

[13] David McNaughton, 'From Darkness into Light? Reflections on *Wandering in Darkness*', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4/3 (2012), p. 133-134.

In his paper, McNaughton suggests that one way out of this epistemic circle would be, for instance, for a person to acquire some independent grounds for believing in God and His goodness. One possibility would be to have a personal experience of God's omnibenevolence. If such an experience takes place, however, then this does not constitute one more piece of evidence for or against the existence of God, but shifts the evaluation of one's evidence clearly towards a theistic understanding of reality. Given that the framing of the debate about the problem of suffering impinges directly on issues concerning one's worldview, and assuming that the role of worldviews is more or less as indicated, then there is no use in looking for a neutral ground within the sphere of pure reason for starting the discussion or coming to a well-grounded conclusion.

This brings me back to the end of Draper's critique. There he asks how we should decide whether or not to believe a defence if it cannot be tested by objective evidence like a scientific theory or criminal case. In the light of the aforesaid, my suggestion is that one's personal worldview is the decisive factor for belief or non-belief. And at this point, as McNaughton indicates, one's personal experience of God's presence and goodness becomes essential. If a person makes such an experience, then in virtue of it an otherwise merely intellectually interesting and even beautifully narrated story turns, to a certain extent, into her own *personal* story. This might be reason enough for believing it is true – even if certain challenging questions remain unanswered.

No doubt, there is a sort of circularity involved here. The question is whether it is vicious. It is not an instance of committing the fallacy of circular reasoning in the sense of reasoning p is true because q is true and the truth of q is established on the basis of p. Rather, it is closer to certain forms of circularity which appear to be unavoidable: We might define a person as a friend if he has good reasons to care for us and to take part in our life. It is not the case that a person first has reasons to care for me and then, in a second step, she becomes my friend. It seems more appropriate to say that by having these reasons to care for me she is my friend. Being a friend of mine consists in having good reasons to care for me. So we have circularity here, but it seems to be a benign form.

It should be noted, however, that circularity is not a feature pertaining exclusively to a religious point of view. It pertains to all issues being directly related to one's worldview, religious or not. I assume this helps to explain the starting point of our discussion – why non-believers worry

that a defence such as Stump's does not provide enough evidence for coming to believe in God. The reasons are first, that non-believers do not share the central belief that there is a benevolent and caring God, and second, that there is no objective evidence available which would make it more rational to believe in than not believing in God.

Once we understand the role of a worldview for a person's understanding and interpretation of reality, however, we are also in a position to more thoroughly appreciate the virtues and limits of a defence along Stump's lines. A defence aiming at more than showing the coherence, rational defensibility, and plausibility of a believer's perspective on reality would miss the fundamental role which the worldview plays for the participants in this debate. Stump notes, that the 'plausibility is very much in the eye of the beholder' (*WID*, p. 20). I suggest that is as it should be when it comes to issues so tightly bound up with one's worldview.

TWO ISSUES AT THE VERY END

There are two issues I would like to raise at the end. They can be seen as examples of how a defence can acquire the function of sensitizing the person reading it to certain problems. Stump's defence encouraged me to think more thoroughly about these issues, and I would thus like briefly to present them here.

Here is the first issue: Stump formulates two constraints which must be in place for suffering to be justified. First, there must be a benefit in terms of justification and/or sanctification, which outweighs the suffering. Second, this benefit could not have been achieved just as well in another way, that is, without this specific process of suffering. Stump writes:

> A morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering must therefore be something that somehow defeats the badness of suffering so understood. [...] On the Thomistic defense, the benefit defeating a person's suffering has to do either with enabling a person to have the best thing for human beings or with enabling him to ward off the worst thing for human beings; [...]. (*WID*, p. 455)

The protagonists in the biblical narratives examined by Stump illustrate this point. According to Stump their suffering is redeemed because '[w]hat one cares about and loses becomes the best means available in the circumstances for finding and having what is infinitely more worth caring about than what is lost'. (*WID*, p. 478)

If suffering turns out to be a necessary means for achieving a great good which could not be achieved without this specific suffering, then, one wonders, what happens to people who do not undergo experiences of deep suffering? This is not to say that these people will not experience such suffering as broken relationships, being disappointed by close friends, losing a loved one, etc. Such experiences are an integral part of the human condition. However, they might not have the deeply disturbing sort of suffering which touches the very centre of a person's existence, like the sufferings of the biblical figures Stump analyses. Consequently, it might be less likely that these 'more ordinary' forms of suffering yield a benefit such as justification and/or sanctification.

One immediate answer comes to mind: One could argue that there is no reason to think that these 'more mundane' forms of suffering are insufficient for entering into a process of justification and sanctification. They suffice because they are serious forms of suffering. What is decisive is that the sufferer allows herself to be refined through them and feels the need for redemption through God's salvific action. Someone enjoying her life and closing her heart to suffering will have a harder time recognizing that she is in need of redemption. If so, Stump's account can be read as a variation of the reminder of the biblical warning: 'Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' (Luke 18: 25) Suffering is, so to speak, an essential feature of one's way towards a deep relationship to God. The relationship to God does not take our suffering away; rather it makes our suffering not pointless.

At this point the other issue becomes virulent: One might claim that this understanding of suffering from a theistic view involves a form of bad faith. It aims at finding a rationale for something where no mitigating answer can be given because the universe is blind and deaf to the cries of the afflicted.

What can a theist say about this? First, a theist should underline that her worldview does not gloss over suffering at all. Rather, it takes human suffering as seriously as it can be taken. This becomes particularly clear if one considers Christianity. At the very centre of the Christian worldview stands the passion and death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself. His passion can be interpreted as the most profound and extensive suffering which eclipses any other instance of human suffering

throughout history.[14] Thus, it would be a deep misconception and unfair to accuse (Christian) theism of being callous towards the suffering of human beings.

However, taking suffering seriously is just one side of the story. The other side refers to the hope for reparation and justice for those suffering through God's salvific acts, albeit not in full until in the afterlife. This leads to the following thought: There is reason to think that the hope for healing and justice is not merely the expression of a religious attitude but it seems to be internal to the moral point of view. Innocent suffering cries out for restoration, healing and justice. The moral point of view says that this *should* be so. Of course, this internal disposition in human beings for justice does not entail that there *will be* any justice at the end. But if one embraces the view that the universe is indifferent to justice then one might wonder whether it is rational to care less about morality. Recently, Mark Johnston made this point.[15] He is no theist, but he is aware that a theistic worldview contains the resources to argue that justice will be achieved one day because each human being matters so much to God that no instance of suffering will pass unheeded. This makes it rational to choose the good and to shun the evil because the universe we inhabit is morally coherent.

An atheist, however, appears to remain empty handed: Interpreting the human race as a mere by-product of a series of cosmic accidents which occupies an infinitesimally small section of the vast cosmos does not make it reasonable at all to consider our fate as important as we usually are inclined to do. Within the universe we are so miniscule that the pursuit of our own and our fellow human beings' welfare does not matter because our very existence does not matter. This line of reasoning suggests that the importance of our moral reasons derives not merely from the moral point of view itself but is also dependent upon the interpretation of the universe and our position in it. Johnston writes that man 'should hope that it is a universe in which the cries of great injustice to be punished, and the cries of great sacrifice in the name of the good

[14] See e. g. Stump's interpretation of Jesus' cry of dereliction. Eleonore Stump, 'Atonement and the Cry of Dereliction from the Cross', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 4/1 (2012), 1-17.

[15] See Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 8-12. Johnston considers this as a worrisome feature of atheistic naturalism, which was one of the main motivations for writing this book.

to be rewarded, do not just echo in the void.'[16] Atheism, however, seems to be unable to argue for such a universe where moral coherence exists.

Someone might reply that this hope is nothing but an expression of wishful thinking, and that if someone believes in such a universe, then fantasy is beating reason. Maybe this is true. But how can we know? What seems to be true, however, is that it is not so much a theistic but an atheistic attitude adding to the burden of the sufferers for the latter crushes any hope for ultimate justice and consolation.

Wandering in Darkness contributes to assuage the burden of sufferers. It presents a world where God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing human suffering – at least of mentally fully functional human adults. Of course, this illuminates only one segment of the panoply of human suffering. It raises the hope, however, that the wandering in darkness of all of us will end up in light – with no suffering anymore but pure joy instead.

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[16] Ibid., p. 10.

KNOWLEDGE BY NARRATIVES: ON THE METHODOLOGY OF STUMP'S DEFENCE

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Eleonore Stump claims in her book *Wandering in Darkness* that the problem of evil – better: 'the problem of suffering' – can be solved best by the help of narratives (p. xviii). Narratives are according to her view very important for solving this problem, because they allow one to get a more general view about relevant parts of the discussion of suffering. In this context she distinguishes the more detailed view of the discussion from a more general one by two different modes of cognition: the mode of gathering *Dominican knowledge that* and the mode of gathering *Franciscan knowledge how*. Stump thinks that this distinction is crucial for a solution to the problem of suffering:

> If we can learn from the narratives the Franciscan knowledge [*how*], we can then use that knowledge in the (Dominican) philosophical project of formulating a defense and spelling out the nature of a possible morally sufficient reason for God to allow human suffering. (p. 61)

I'm doubting this thesis and will try to argue against it by unfolding a distinction of *knowledge that* and *knowledge how* in the sense of Stump (i), summarizing her solution (ii) and showing that within this solution the distinction is not essential (iii).

I. DOMINICUS VS. FRANCIS

The distinction of *knowing that* and *knowing how* in contemporary epistemology traces back to Gilbert Ryle (Ryle 1971). One can distinguish roughly *knowing that* from *knowing how* by a distinction

of the domains of the operations: the first is knowledge of propositions whereas the second is knowledge of something other than propositions. So, e.g., we usually distinguish the mode of knowing that Hannah rides a bicycle, i.e. knowing the proposition 'Hannah rides a bicycle.', from the mode of knowing how it is to ride a bicycle. Note that sometimes also such a distinction is made by distinguishing along the line of Bertrand Russell's proposal to differentiate between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance (e.g., endnote 24, pp. 498f and p. 61: 'Knowledge by acquaintance as philosophers have discussed it is thus just one species of knowledge in the Franciscan mode.'). Note also that our distinction according to the domains of the operations is in fact very rough and is convincingly criticised, e.g., in (Fumerton 2008: sect. 1, par. 6–8). But for the purpose of our argumentation our coarse-grained distinction seems to be subtle enough.

It is natural to ask which relations hold between these two modes. Ryle for himself thinks that there is no relevant relation between them. He thinks especially that there is no – as, e.g., stipulated by the so-called *intellectualist legend* ('knowing-that is taken as the ideal model of all operations of intelligence', (see Ryle 1971: 215)) – relation of reduction between *knowing that* and *knowing how*. Ryle argues for this claim by trying to show that if *knowing how* could be reduced to *knowing that*, then knowledge about how things are wouldn't manifest ever and so there wouldn't exist any *knowing how* at all (for a short summary of Ryle's argumentation see Stanley & Williamson 2001: 413). Contrary to Ryle's point of view there are two alternatives. One can claim in accordance with the intellectualist legend that *knowing how* is reducible to *knowing that* as, e.g., Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson do. According to them the truth conditions for a sentence like 'Hannah knows how to ride a bicycle.' are expressible exactly by the truth condition of the sentence 'For some contextually relevant way *w* for Hannah to ride a bicycle, Hannah knows that *w* is a way for Hannah to ride a bicycle.'. But one can also claim that the reduction goes the other way round by arguing for the thesis that *knowing that* is fully reducible to *knowing how*. Such a position is, e.g., expressed by Stephen Hetherington and is argued for by the claim that *knowing that* is commonly characterized as justified true belief and that in being justified in a proposition, one also knows how to apply correctly the reasons for believing in that proposition (Hetherington 2008: 316). Also along this line of argumentation, Hilary Putnam claims that 'knowing the meaning of the word "gold" or of the

word "elm" is not a matter of knowing that at all, but a matter of knowing how [to find experts]' (Putnam 1996: xvi).

Stump agrees with the position of Ryle, although she uses another line of argumentation. She thinks that the main difference between both modes of cognition lies in a different point of view. Whereas the mode of *knowing that* is much more detail oriented, technical, and by this sometimes narrow and restricted, the mode of *knowing how* is much more general and by this broad (see pp. 23, 27, 62). For distinguishing these modes she gives a prototypic and eponymous example: A Dominican wanted Francis to explain God's claim that if he (the Dominican) doesn't warn the wicked man about his wickedness, God will hold him (the Dominican) responsible for the wicked man's sins. The Dominican's interpretation of this claim was very straightforward and so he thought that he will be held responsible for many sins of many wicked men he hadn't instructed. In opposition to the narrow view of the Dominican, Francis' answer was much more generalizing. He proposed to interpret this claim as: 'a servant of God should be burning with life and holiness so brightly that by the light of example and the tongue of his conduct, he will rebuke all the wicked. In that way [... he] will proclaim their wickedness to all of them.' The example ends 'with the Dominican's going away very impressed' (pp. 44f). Our identification of the Franciscan mode of knowledge with *knowledge how* can be justified in the following way: the classical phenomena of *knowing how* as, e.g., 'knowledge of redness', 'knowing a colour' and more generally knowledge of 'various other first-person experiences' are according to Stump not reducible to *knowledge that* (cf. pp. 50f). Since she stipulates: 'I will call knowledge which cannot be reduced to knowledge *that* "Franciscan knowledge"; I will call the other, more philosophically ordinary kind of knowledge "Dominican knowledge"' (p. 51), the classical phenomena of *knowing how* is Franciscan knowledge.

According to this identification and the example about the Dominican and the Franciscan above, one can distinguish the Dominican mode of *knowing that* from the Franciscan mode of *knowing how* by distinguishing the way of interpreting a text. To adhere to the general distinction of *knowing that* from *knowing how* by a distinction of the domain of these operations, one may say that Francis' knowledge seems to be not about a single proposition, but about a whole text in some context, or yet more abstract about something intended by God, etc. The relevant part of this distinction is the fact that in the Dominican mode there was only

one interpretation of the expression 'proclaim to the wicked man his wickedness', whereas in the Franciscan mode there were several such interpretations under consideration. Stump thinks that the Franciscan mode of knowing something – e.g., knowing how to warn the wicked man about his wickedness – is sometimes more adequate than the Dominican mode of knowing something – e.g., knowing that the wicked man has to be warned (whereby 'warned' is understood literally) about his wickedness – because the Franciscan mode is sometimes more appropriate than the Dominican mode by the fact that it is vague:

> [...] in cases where necessary and sufficient conditions for something are hard to find or in the nature of things not available (for example, because what we are attempting to define is irreducibly vague), then Franciscan categorization or typology may in fact be more accurate, or at least more true to the phenomena, than Dominican categorization, which misrepresents the thing it seeks to describe. (Stump 2010: 47)

This fact can be illustrated in a simplified way by mapping the expression 'proclaim to the wicked man his wickedness' Dominicanly to the order *Tell the wicked man that he is wicked!* and Franciscanly to the, e.g., three orders *Tell the wicked man that he is wicked!*, *Burn with life and holiness so brightly that by the light of example and the tongue of conduct you rebuke all the wicked!* (p. 44) and, e.g., *Show the wicked man that he is wicked by your exemplary life and awake the desire in him to change his wicked life!* which is to state that 'proclaim to the wicked man his wickedness' is vague (note that by an illustration with such a mapping vagueness is understood in the sense of an 'ambiguity on a grand and systematic scale' (Fine 1975: 282)). Under the assumption that someone who burns with life and holiness very brightly and who does not tell the wicked man that he is wicked is nevertheless not responsible for the wicked man's sins, the Dominican interpretation is false or inaccurate whereas the Franciscan interpretation is more accurate inasmuch as it is true in two out of three cases.

This distinction of *knowing that* and *knowing how* is not complete, because there seem to be some other relevant forms of *knowing how* than those acquired by (vague) re-interpretation. Stump says that she is 'not able to say what all these cases [of irreducible Franciscan knowledge] have in common' (p. 47). But since the third part of her book is a re-interpretation of biblical stories, this distinction of *knowing that* and

knowing how or *knowing by narratives* seem to be one of the most relevant ones for Stump's defence.

Sometimes, as, e.g., in Stump's argumentation, it is also useful or necessary to speak about the fact that someone knows some person. Since persons are not propositions, this mode of knowing is – according to the given basic criterion for a distinction – also a mode of *knowing how* and by this Franciscan knowledge. So, in Stump's view, also for this mode of knowledge holds what was said above: to know a person is not reducible to knowing some propositions about this person. More precisely speaking, the claim that Hannah knows Paula, e.g., cannot be reduced to some claim of the sort: Hannah knows that Paula has black hair, that she is a student, that she is in love with Jerome, etc. To give such an interpretation of 'Hannah knows Paula.' would be too narrow and would be thinking in the Dominican mode. Also knowing other things like countries – e.g., knowing China – is not reducible to a set of claims about the countries (cf. Stump 2010: 373f), which, again, would be knowledge in the Dominican mode. According to Stump there is something missing in that mode, and that there is something missing is not due to the fact that in the Dominican mode a list of propositions about Paula or China will always be incomplete. The difference appears according to her because, e.g., knowing a person includes also having some second-person and not only a third-person experience with that person (cf. p. 56). So, in order to understand that someone knows a person it is necessary to get second-person experience with that person. And here the role of narratives come into play. According to Stump, second person experience 'can be made available to others who lack the second-person experiences in question by means of a story that represents the experience' (p. 81).

What is true of cognition is, in Stump's view, also true of desires and wishes and so one can also distinguish two different optative modes, a Dominican mode of *desiring that* and a Franciscan mode of *desiring how*, e.g., desiring a person (cf. p. 57). The cognitive and the optative mode are according to her fully available only in the Franciscan mode and so an adequate understanding of a person's *knowing how* and *desiring how* is possible not by arguments (alone), but by a consideration of stories.

II. STUMP'S RECONSTRUCTION OF THE AQUINEAN DEFENCE

Stump aims with her book to give a solution to the problem of suffering by providing a framework for designing a possible world wherein for every suffering of a mentally fully functional adult human being there is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow this suffering which is to allow the undermining of a person's flourishing or to allow the depriving of her desires of the heart (cf. pp. 4, 8). The possible world she characterizes is the one designed by Thomas Aquinas.

Preliminary to the defence is Aquinas' theory of love, which will be sketched first: there are, according to Aquinas, two necessary conditions for some x in order for that x to be in love with some y (cf. p. 91):

- x desires the (objectively) good for y, and
- x desires union with y

Furthermore, there are two necessary conditions for x's being in union with y, namely personal presence and mutual closeness (cf. p. 109). And there are again two necessary conditions for y's being personally present to x, namely: x has second-person experience with y, and x and y have shared attention, where shared attention is the common triadic relation (of *triangulation*): x and y join attention ('are meeting in minds') with respect to some entity z (cf. pp. 112f). Stump also gives a necessary condition for mutual closeness between x and y: 'A person alienated from himself cannot have someone else close to him.' (p. 125) So, a necessary condition for being in mutual closeness with someone is to be personally integrated. Personal integration is defined in an expanded Frankfurtean sense: the desires of a person x can be distinguished according to the iteration of the operation of desiring within the desires. Let's call the operation of desiring 'D_x'. Then, e.g., x's desiring of a proposition p, i.e. D_xp, is a first-order desire, whereas, e.g., x's desiring of desiring p, i.e. D_xD_xp, is a second-order desire (cf. p. 138). According to Stump, a person x lacks personal integration iff at least one of the following two conditions is satisfied (cf. p. 139):

- there is some p such that x desires p and x desires $\sim p$ on the same level, i.e. e.g., $D_xp \& D_x\sim p$, or
- there is some p such that p is objectively wrong and x desires p, i.e. D_xp where p is objectively wrong

Aquinas, so Stump, thinks that an anthropic property of a human's web of desire is that every person has a will 'which is strong enough to enable him to form the first-order volition to ask God to strengthen his will' (p. 159),

so it holds for every person x that it's possible for her to generate $D_x D_x p$, where p represents 'God helps x'.

With this preliminary claims about love at hand, we can now sketch the Aquinean theory of functional suffering, i.e. Stump's defence! According to the given theory of love, a person x loves God only in case that x desires the objectively good for God (which is according to Stump, since God does not lack any good, to desire what God desires as good – cf. p. 101) and x desires union with God. By the definitions given above, union with God can be thought of as 'meeting in mind' with God in a situation of triangulation. For being able to get united with God in such a situation, it is, as sketched above, necessary to be personally integrated. And exactly here, so Stump says, the morally sufficient reason of God's allowing suffering has to be sought: since union is a necessary condition for loving God and since personal integration is a necessary condition for union, God may allow suffering in order to support personal integration (some scientific investigations show that sometimes a person's suffering can enable her to grow in psychic integration, e.g., in the situation of posttraumatic growth – cf. p. 458). Since personal integration is of so much importance in loving God, it's natural to give the following scale of values (cf. p. 387):

(-) fragmentation < partly fragmentation < ... < partly integration < full integration/glory (+)

On Aquinas' view, it is fair (morally sufficiently reasonable) only to allow suffering in one of the following two situations:

- Case M1: suffering involuntarily simpliciter
  suffering_1 is necessary to avoid suffering_2 whereby
  $|\text{suffering}_1| < |\text{suffering}_2|$
- Case M2: suffering secundum quid (without giving up one's heart desires – cf. p. 383)
  suffering_1 is necessary to achieve benefit_1 whereby
  $|\text{suffering}_1| < |\text{benefit}_1|$

Since absolute fragmentation (the worst thing, i.e. hell – cf. p. 404) is very negative, according to M1 it is morally sufficiently reasonable for God to allow suffering to some extent for the avoidance of absolute fragmentation. And since full personal integration or glory is very positive (cf. p. 404), according to M2 it is morally sufficiently reasonable for God to allow – of course only in full accordance with the 'real desires' of the sufferer – suffering for glorification in such model situations to some extent also.

This is a very brief sketch of the general framework wherein discussions of the problem of suffering should be embedded according to Aquinas and Stump. In the next section we are going to indicate how Stump embeds in this framework the discussion of the suffering of Job, Samson, Abraham and Mary of Bethany. We will then try to show that the result of her embedding is an understanding of that suffering in the Dominican mode.

III. A MARRIAGE OF THE TWO APPROACHES

Stump has established the methodology of her investigation in the first part of the book. In the second part she established Aquinas' theory of love. In the third part she considered some biblical stories on the suffering of the four biblical characters Job, Samson, Abraham and Mary of Bethany. And in the final part she established her defence. According to her own evaluation, the first two parts are in the Dominican mode, the third part is in the Franciscan mode and in the fourth part she tries 'to marry the two approaches' (p. 63). My aim here is to show that the marriage is very one-sided and that it is Dominic who is on the mighty side.

The problem of suffering in the discussion of the biblical stories of the four mentioned characters may be described as follows: Job is a good man, cares about his family, is responsible with his holdings, and praises God. Nevertheless God allows that misery comes upon him. So we naturally ask why God allows this and what the morally sufficient reason for letting Job suffer could be. At first glance, i.e. from a Dominican perspective, we are not able to find such a reason because the 'real desires' of Job are not visible to us. We don't know, e.g., whether $D_{\text{Job}}p$ – where p represents '*Job* has the most extensive and powerful conversation with God.' – or not. But by taking a Franciscan perspective, i.e. by widening the ways of interpreting the story, we may come to an affirmative answer to the question. And by applying model M2 (suffering in order to achieve a great benefit), we may be satisfied in finding a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing the suffering of Job.

In a similar way one may posit a problem with the stories of Samson, Abraham, and Mary, then reconsider their stories, after that apply the models of functional suffering, and finally end up with the following results (cf. pp. 401f):

– Sanctification (M2): 'Job begins by losing all that apparently constitutes flourishing in his society. But at the end of his story

God comes to talk to him face to face in the most extensive and powerful conversation.'
- Sanctification (M2): 'Abraham [...] has struggled his way to a deep trust in God that makes him a father of faith.'
- Sanctification (M2): 'Mary is heartbroken when her beloved brother dies [...] but at the end of her story she has come closer to Jesus than even the apostle on whom Jesus founds his church [which is indicated by the feet washing scene].'
- Justification (M1): 'Samson's [...] suffering is justified in virtue of its contribution to warding off for Samson the worst thing for human beings.'
- Sanctification (M2): 'Because Samson reacts passionately [...], his suffering also contributes to making him glorious.'

As one can clearly see, for embedding the discussions of the various sufferings one always has to switch into the Dominican mode. Only a clear (non-vague) understanding of the desires of the different persons ($D_{\text{Abraham}}p$, where p represents '*Abraham* is the father of faith.', etc.) allows one to find a morally sufficient reason for each suffering. Think on the example of proclaiming the wicked man his wickedness! By Franciscan knowledge one may get several possible interpretations of some expressions. But for understanding what to do, one has to make a decision for a specific interpretation. Something similar holds also for the defence: in order to embed discussions of suffering into the framework provided by Aquinas and Stump, one also has to make a decision for a specific interpretation. It seems to me obvious that the application of the defence (which is to embed the discussion into the provided framework) starts from a clear and non-vague description of the problematic situation under consideration. Similar observations can be made in general in discussions where one uses narratives or a parable for illustrating relations of analogy: in such a discussion people usually ask for a more detailed description until they end up with an exact non-vague description of the similarities. And that is to end up with knowledge in a Dominican and not a Franciscan mode.

The only part where Franciscan empathy seems to be of relevance with respect to the provided defence is not in the application of Aquinas' and Stump's general framework to the single stories, but in a reconsideration and preparation of the stories. Although the, by Stump re-told, stories of Job, Samson, Abraham and Mary of Bethany may be accepted as adequate reformulations by many philosophers of religion,

etc., an argumentation for the adequacy of such reformulations and preparations seems to be very incomplete, prone to problems and by this excluded from an elaborated defence. So, regarding the acquirement of knowledge or beliefs, both modes may be adequate, but regarding justification of one's beliefs, only the Dominican mode seems to be adequate (cf. for this claim also the usual distinction of methods in the philosophy of science between methods within the context of discovery and methods within the context of justification). Let me make this point more clear by summing up the argumentation:

(1) One may distinguish, as Stump does, two modes of knowledge, namely Dominican and Franciscan knowledge.
(2) Dominican knowledge is characterized as propositional knowledge (*knowing that*). Franciscan knowledge is characterized as non-propositional knowledge (*knowing how*).
(3) One – for the defence very relevant – kind of non-propositional knowledge is knowledge by narratives, that is, e.g., not only having in mind a very detailed description of the situation of Job's suffering, but taking also a more general and vague point of view about his suffering (which can be expressed technically as ambiguous mapping of descriptions to situations, facts or orders).
(4) The defence of Aquinas and Stump is applicable only in case of a non-vague or non-ambiguous description of a situation of suffering.
(5) Hence, the defence is applicable only in the Dominican mode.

Because of this reason I think that the 'convincing power' of Franciscan story telling may be doubted.

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TRANSPARENCY AND THE DESIRES OF THE HEART: A CONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE OF STUMP'S THEODICY

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For many, Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* represents not only a major work on the problem of evil but a profoundly human and orthodox one as well.[1] To give the briefest of summaries, Stump defends the claim that the purpose of life is eternal, loving communion with the divine and that, in His providence, God uses the suffering of His creatures to promote interpersonal closeness with Himself and to minimize distance with His creatures. Suffering is not a matter solely of what is absolutely necessary for human flourishing but also a matter of what one sets one's heart on, one's 'desires of the heart', and the good to which divine providence is ordered enfolds the desires of our hearts as well.

In what follows, I will bring out a theme that pervades the background of Stump's book. She claims that the nature of suffering and the benefits that can defeat suffering each fail to be transparent to human beings. She uses this claim to negotiate a kind of truce with the proponents of sceptical theism and to defend her otherwise controversial claims about God's commitment to giving us the desires of our heart. I will argue that a more nuanced view of transparency is called for than Stump utilizes in her book and that a more nuanced view has importance both for the purposes to which she puts her claims about transparency as well as the content of her theodicy.

I.

Stump says that we should 'understand suffering in terms of what we care about' (p. 10). Suffering is not identical with pain (pp. 5ff.) or the violation

[1] Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

of one's will (p. 8). Following Aristotle's view that every human being seeks after eudaimonia, even if he or she doesn't know what makes for eudaimonia, Stump says that we all care about our objective flourishing but, in addition to that, she points out that we also care about 'what has great value for [us] in virtue of [our] commitment to it' (p. 10). In other words, we also care about the desires of our heart whether or not those desires are related to objective flourishing. Suffering occurs whenever either one's flourishing or one's heart's desires are damaged or undercut.

Stump points out that '[n]othing guarantees that a person will be consciously aware of what constitutes his own flourishing or of what the desires of his heart are' (p. 11). Furthermore, one cannot guarantee that one will recognize when either is fulfilled. By way of analogy, Stump draws our attention to the way in which someone who appears healthy may actually have cancer and someone who has gone through treatment for cancer might look very sick while being free of disease (p. 12). Valuing health does not imply that one can discern its presence. Stump goes so far as to suppose that someone could receive what he cares most about without recognizing that fact. Stump uses the example of Victor Klemperer who was passionately committed to writing an academic book on French literature which Klemperer thought would be very important (p. 12). His efforts were stymied by the repressions of the Nazis. Klemperer's diaries, in which he vents his anguish at being deprived of his life's work, would become highly regarded literary works themselves. Stump claims that the right way to view this case is that Klemperer received his heart's desire, the desire to write a great book, but he was not aware of this fact.

Stump concludes that, since one can be ignorant about whether one is flourishing and whether one has one's heart's desire, 'the account of suffering I have argued for here implies that a human being can suffer without knowing that she is suffering, and that she can think that she suffers when she does not.' (p. 12) Stump recognizes that this claim will be counterintuitive. She argues that the counterintuitiveness arises from conflating pain and suffering (p. 5). Pain is often thought to be transparent, but suffering is not transparent.[2] When one is in pain, one is aware that one is in pain. Stump never argues that the things that defeat pain are transparent, but it is not hard to argue that they have at

[2] It is worth noting that Stump repeatedly puts a reference in her footnotes to Timothy Williamson's denial of the transparency of pain as well, cf. p. 625, n. 131.

least a derived transparency. Since pain is transparent, one can often tell whether it is still there 'just by looking' as it were. Since suffering is not transparent, however, benefits that remove suffering will not have derived transparency. Thus, Stump takes it to be established that 'neither suffering nor the benefits defeating suffering are transparent' (p. 413), and, in the second half of her book, she makes clear that she thinks not being transparent is equivalent to being 'opaque' (pp. 373, 408, 409, 413, 468).

Stump's claims about the transparency of suffering and its defeat show up in a number of places in her book. Notably, she uses her claim about transparency to maintain a nuanced relationship with sceptical theism. Sceptical theism is a position on the problem of evil that an increasing number of theists in academia are taking, according to which human beings are not in a position to tell whether a good God and the evils of this world could coexist.[3] God is a being of another magnitude. As the Bible says, 'His ways are higher than our ways' and 'His ways are not our ways' (Isa 55:8-9). Human beings, the sceptical theist maintains, are not in a position to tell what reasons such a being might have to allow evil anymore than an infant might understand why its mother consents to its having a painful medical treatment. Sceptical theism comes in stronger and weaker varieties. A weaker version could claim, for instance, that the evils we find in the world are significant but insufficient evidence that God doesn't exist, and a strong version could go so far as to claim that the evils of this world do not constitute any evidence whatsoever as to whether a good and loving God exists.

At first glance, Stump's theodicy does not fit very well with the sceptical trend in theistic treatments of the problem of evil. She says a lot about what reasons a good and loving God has for allowing evils on the Christian story. Moreover, she requires that God be in the business of defeating evils and these evils that need defeating are largely determined by what we care about. Even worse, what we care about is partly a function of what we freely choose to care about and not simply a matter of what God has programmed us to care about. Whereas the ethos of sceptical theism is to stress the transcendence and ineffability of God, Stump's theodicy stresses the desire of God to be intimate with us.

[3] For an overview of sceptical theist positions, see Justin McBrayer, 'Skeptical Theism', *Philosophy Compass*, 5(7) (2010), 1-13. The highest concentration of seminal papers on the topic can perhaps be found in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Despite the prima facie tension between Stump's theodicy and sceptical theism, she thinks the two are complementary. Stump claims that sceptical theism can be 'a fallback position for theodicists' such as herself (p. 15). The theodicist performs the equivalent of a thought experiment that may, in fact, fail to prove anything about the actual world due to sceptical considerations while nonetheless being useful. Moreover, insofar as it derives its content from revelation in the form of biblical source material, her theodicy is consistent with taking a sceptical approach to attempts to reconstruct God's reasons for allowing evil apart from revelation (pp. 14-15).

These considerations alone might not be enough to assuage the sceptical theist, however. Thought experiments are judged successful or not based on human intuition. A human being must make a judgment about what she thinks is possible or plausible. A sceptical theist will be inclined to deny that a human being has any such power to judge possible worlds when it comes to the divine and evil. Likewise, though sceptical theists are not likely to object to a distinction between revelation and natural reason, they will object to the idea that what is revealed in revelation is the sort of thing that human beings can measure against the evils of the world so as to judge whether or not the God as putatively revealed is likely to exist or not.

What does count as a true peace-making move on Stump's part, however, is her claim that 'there is a much more mundane reason for being doubtful about our ability to discern the morally sufficient reason justifying any particular case of human suffering [than that provided by skeptical theism]'. And what reason is that? '[N]either the suffering nor the benefits that could defeat it are transparent to us.' (p. 14) It is unsurprising that Stump spends much more space emphasizing this part of her view when comparing her view to sceptical theism than she spends on revelation or the status of theodical thought experiments. The transparency claim allows her to agree with the sceptical theist on his most basic conviction, that human beings aren't in a position to tell that God doesn't exist given the evils they experience. For, if one cannot tell who is suffering and whose suffering is defeated, one cannot reason from particular evils to the likelihood of God's nonexistence.

Stump also uses transparency to defend her claim that God is in the business of giving us the desires of our heart. Return to the example of Victor Klemperer. Klemperer seems to think that the desire of his heart is to write a great book about French literature. He is pained that the

ascent of the Nazis to power deprives him of his desire. If desires of the heart were transparent, then he would surely be right. He was being deprived of what he surely seems to care greatly about. Furthermore, Klemperer's situation is by no means anomalous. It often happens that people don't get what they appear to care the most about, even when such deprivation is not a consequence of some wrongful action on their part. Every parent who's lost a child, every victim of a debilitating and shameful illness, everyone who finds themselves bored and listless in life can bear witness to the universality of the suffering borne of caring about things that never happen or are taken away. The supposed existence of a superlatively great afterlife doesn't make sense of why one must live day to day without the thing one wants most in *this* life.

The existence of the Klemperers of the world poses a significant obstacle to a theodicy that wants to affirm not just that the righteous 'get theirs in the end', but that God is desirous of the closest intimacy with every human being here and now. As we know, Stump actually claims the case of Klemperer as an example of how God does providently work so as to provide the desires of the heart. Klemperer's diary, in which he records his despair at not being able to produce his book, becomes a great work of literature itself. Stump says,

> Presumably, if Klemperer had been offered the choice of writing a book that added to the existing secondary literature on a limited period in French literary history or writing a book that is one of the greatest German works of any kind, he would have wanted the latter much more than the former; and he would have recognized the desire for the latter as a version of the desire for the former. (p. 436)

These are bold claims about the true nature of Klemperer's desires, but notice that they would make no sense if the nature of Klemperer's suffering and the necessary means of defeating it were transparent. If Klemperer's desire was transparent, we would have no choice but to accept that Klemperer suffers the loss of a desire of his heart that is not defeated. The same would hold for the myriad other cases of frustrated desire. If the desires of the heart and their fulfilment are not transparent, this creates the possibility that God really is in the business of providing our hearts' desires despite the prevalence of people who seem deprived of those desires for no good reason.[4]

[4] Stump also uses her claims about transparency to block an objection having to do with the ethical implications of her theodicy (pp. 412-413) as well as to defend limiting her treatment of evil to fully functional adults (p. 477).

II.

Having explicated Stump's claims about the lack of transparency of one's suffering and the benefits that could defeat that suffering, this section will show that transparency is not quite what Stump makes it out to be.

Transparency is a degreed property. Something can be more transparent or less, and more opaque or less. One does sometimes speak as if transparency or opacity are not degreed. One might assert without qualification that a piece of obsidian is opaque or that a windowpane is transparent. Nevertheless, it is equally sensible to ask how transparent something is. When used without qualification, it is often understood that there is some standard against which something counts as transparent or opaque. For a piece of glass, the key may be whether one can see through it. For a comment, it may be whether one can discern what the comment means without having to think much about it. The degreed nature of transparency is only drawn attention to when it makes some practical difference. If the queen is visiting, it might matter how transparent the glass is and whether a little more polish might make it more so. Likewise, if one wants to communicate a message to one's spouse and not one's child, one will pay attention to just how opaque one's comment is.

In the context of Stump's work, it is worthy of note that she makes rather extensive claims about what is not transparent, but it is not plausible that things like suffering and desire are completely opaque either, certainly not in normal cases. It is one thing to claim that one can be wrong about what one truly cares about, or for one to claim that it is possible for one not to know what it is that one desires. It is quite another to claim that one has no clue. In other words, it does not follow from something's not being transparent to one that one's subjective perception of the matter does not constrain what may be claimed about it. A lack of transparency of even a high degree does not entail that something is completely opaque.

Suppose, for instance, that Tommy the teenager thinks he's in love with Betty, the school nurse. It could well be that whether Tommy is really in love with Betty is not transparent to Tommy. In fact, let us suppose that Tommy is not really in love but instead has a youthful crush that falls short of love for some reason. Despite his confusion on the question of whether or not he loves Betty, the nature of his attitude toward Betty is not completely opaque to Tommy. If Freddy the friendly neighbourhood Freudian gives Tommy impressive sounding reasons for

thinking Tommy actually hates Betty, Tommy might well trump Freddy's assertions on the basis of Tommy's awareness of his own internal states. Tommy tells Freddy that he knows that Freddy is wrong, and Tommy does know this. The exact nature of Tommy's feeling is not transparent to him, but he has some grasp of what his feelings are and what they are not.

Thus, one complication for Stump's account is that one cannot assume that our suffering, our cares, our desires, and so on are opaque, even if we accept that they are not transparent. At best, they may be opaque relative to some standard. One wonders, however, what the standard is against which Stump judges various items to be not transparent and thus opaque. One can return to the contrast between pain and suffering to make progress here. One can tell whether one is in pain 'just by looking' as it were. Perhaps the claim is that one cannot tell by looking exactly what one desires or suffers and, thus, that suffering and its defeaters aren't transparent in whatever way that pain is.

One finds, upon closer inspection, that the comparison between pain and states related to suffering is more complicated than it may at first appear. No doubt one cannot fail to recognize one's pain for what it is when the pain is quite strong, one is undistracted, and the task at hand does not require one to identify the specific kind of pain or its cause. Relax any of these parameters, however, and the degree of transparency goes down. A slight pain to which one is not paying attention may fail to be identified at all or be mistaken for an itch. Someone with a motivation to believe that he is not in pain may be able to fool himself into believing that he is not so long as the pain is not of so acute or chronic a kind as to wear out his delusions. Furthermore, it may be transparent to one *that* one is in pain even though one cannot identify what kind of pain one is experiencing, cannot reliably compare that pain with other kinds of pain, or makes other mistakes about the pain's properties. These complications regarding pain narrow the gap between the transparency of pain and the lack of transparency of suffering and desire.

Just as pain is not completely transparent, so desire is not completely opaque. No doubt there are times when we make mistakes about what exactly it is that we care about or desire. We might not be able to tell exactly how much we care about something or exactly why we care about something. Being in the dark on some aspects of conative states is completely consistent with there being other features that are transparent. To return to the example of Tommy the teenager, it surely seems that there are a number of things that can be transparent to Tommy such as

that he has a desire, that the object of this desire is Betty, and that the desire is of the romantic ilk. Desire contrasts with pain not in whether it is transparent but rather in how and to what extent it is transparent.

Instead of labelling types of mental state as transparent or opaque, it would be more apt to say that any given internal state has a transparency profile. The pain that one feels in one's toe upon stubbing it on the door jam scores high in the transparency of its cause and of the scope of the pain. The pattern of one's experience is such that the sudden onset of that kind of pain in those circumstances makes both the extent and the cause of the pain immediately apparent. The pain that comes from stubbing a toe may score high in the transparency of these features while scoring low in one's ability to know what 'defeats' the injury. The pain may go away gradually without one's being aware of the healing process internal to the toe. Thus, the cause and location of the pain is highly transparent for toe-stubbing, but the healing of the pain is more opaque. In contrast, it may be completely opaque to someone suffering from anxiety what the scope and cause of the anxiety is in a case where the defeat of the anxiety is transparent. Perhaps taking a certain medication or talking to one's child on the phone allays the anxiety in a way that is transparent despite the fact that the cause and scope of the anxiety had been fairly opaque.

The same holds true of our desires and what we care about. If Mary finds herself with a desire to have pecan praline ice cream, then some features of the desire may be more transparent and others may be more opaque. Perhaps she has no idea why she desires some ice cream at this particular time, but she might be aware that she values this ice cream because it reminds her of her mother. The desire for pecan praline ice cream may be less transparent to her the weaker the desire is and more clear as the desire increases in strength. In contrast, Mary's desire that her father give his toolkit to her instead of her brother might have a very different transparency profile. This desire might be more transparent to her if it is only a desire of moderate strength. She might be bemused to find that she really wants to get that toolkit and really wants her brother not to get it. The desire might become more opaque in some ways as this desire increases in strength. Perhaps when she feels the desire strongly she will lose conscious access to the contrastive nature of the desire, not being aware that she wants to best her brother in her father's attentions in the matter of the toolkit.

Consequently, the important question for Stump's theodicy is not whether suffering and the benefits that defeat it are completely transparent.

Precious little is *completely* transparent. The important question rather is whether there are any general trends in the transparency profiles of suffering and defeaters of suffering that are relevant to Stump's project. With this background, let us take another look at Stump's theodicy and the purposes to which Stump puts her claims about transparency in the following two sections.

III.

In this section, I will argue that a nuanced version of transparency fits better into the worldview that forms the backdrop for Stump's theodicy.

For Aquinas and for Stump, goodness, truth, beauty, and being are all interconnected. In fact, they are all different ways for talking about the same thing.[5] Beauty, for instance, is goodness made perceptible.[6] The growth of a human being, the kind of growth that can defeat suffering, is a growth in integration around the good. On the assumption that one cannot have one of the transcendentals without having the others, however, growth in goodness must also be growth in truth and beauty. The growth of a human being in integration around the good is one from a fragmentation of mind and will into a unified whole. Because of the intimate connections between these transcendentals and because both truth and beauty have epistemic import, the telos of a human being includes a journey of mind as well as heart. One would expect the fragmentation of a soul to affect what truths one can reach and what goodness one is able to see.

It may be logically possible for a soul to go directly from a state of deep fragmentation to a state of complete union with God and thus with Goodness. Some have thought that such a transition will occur upon entrance into heaven. It seems undeniable, however, that this is not the case in this world. Growth in goodness is a gradual and treacherous affair. One would expect the epistemic dimensions of this journey to be gradual as well. A degreed notion of transparency fits neatly into this schema. There may be points on the journey of life when whole clusters of one's experience make sense for the first time where they were hopelessly

[5] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Truth*, J. McGlynn (tr.) (Chicago: H. Regenery Co., 1952), 1.1.

[6] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.5, a.4 <www.newadvent.org/summa> [accessed April 5, 2012].

opaque previously. These moments are the exceptions, however. For the most part, clarity of perspective is something that comes on gradually. If this was the only advance that a more nuanced view of transparency brought, the gain might not be worth the effort to bring it to attention. More can be said, however.

An important question to ask is whether Stump's Thomistic theodicy has any implications for the transparency profiles of desires, beliefs about the satisfaction of our desires, and the like. Stump's picture of the psychological structure of the soul borrows heavily from Harry Frankfurt (cf. p. 132). She stresses that one's desires are hierarchical. The desires of the heart just are those desires that are most central to the web of one's desires. On Stump's account, however, human beings are deeply divided creatures. This inner alienation should show up in the hierarchy of one's desires. There are fault lines in the soul, and these fault lines should intersect the desires of the heart.

The brokenness of the human condition should manifest itself most profoundly within the desires of the heart because, from a Thomistic perspective, the human condition is one in which the soul is disordered. It is not the case that human beings desire things that should not be desired at all so much as that the hierarchy of desire fails to correspond to the hierarchy of goods that exist. The desires of the heart are, by definition, those desires most central and deeply embedded within the hierarchy of desire. Thus, these are the desires that are meant to correspond to the greatest goods. A failure of the desires of the heart to be properly ordered, then, would constitute an alienation from goodness more radical than a lack of proper order outside of this cluster of desires. On the Christian story, the human condition is one of just such a radical alienation from God and, thus, from goodness.

The structure of the soul and the way the human condition manifests itself within that structure implies that there are two competing considerations that should determine the transparency profile of our desires. One consideration is proximity to the centre of the web of desire; the other is proximity to fault lines within the soul. If all other things are equal, one would expect desires that are closer to the centre of the web to have enhanced transparency in many respects. They will command a greater portion of the intellect's attention due to their relative priority. The increased attention will be both quantitative and qualitative. Desires at the centre of one's web of desires should be more likely to be

triggered in a variety of circumstances. One should also expect desires of higher priority to be felt more strongly in general, with more vivid phenomenology. Because of the fundamentality of these desires within one's value hierarchy, one would expect that more central desires will have a cluster of peripheral desires that can indirectly activate the more central desire but more peripheral desires will less regularly be activated by a cluster of more central desires.

Moreover, when a heart's desire is appropriately aimed at a good of sufficient weight, the intellect will be attending to a source of more truth and more perceptible goodness given the nature of transcendentals. The structure of the soul, then, should be such that, all other things being equal, transparency should be generally enhanced with increasing proximity to the centre of the web of desire, and it should decrease the farther away from the centre a desire is. All other things are not equal, however.

Proximity to a fault line in the soul should increase opacity. A division of the soul decreases the being, goodness, truth, and beauty in that part of the soul. The order in the soul fails to correspond to the order of objective goods, and, when it does so, one should find corresponding impairments in one's grasp of truth and one's perception of the good.[7] To the extent that a desire is lodged in a more orderly part of the soul, the opacity caused by internal division will decrease relative to desires in less orderly parts of the soul. Once again, however, not all things are equal. The less divided parts of the soul are likely to be those parts of the soul on the outside of the web of desire, where desires are less inherently transparent under normal conditions.

These two competing considerations, proximity to the centre of the web of desire and proximity to divisions in the soul, should lead us to expect the transparency profiles of desires at different points of the web of desire to differ markedly in their properties. Desires that are farther from the centre should have more stable profiles, tending to score similarly on different dimensions of transparency. In general, the more attention one of these desires is given, the more transparent it should

[7] One might here think I am conflating the beauty of oneself with the beauty of the object of cognition. Beauty is goodness made perceptible, so a more beautiful mind will have more perceivable goodness. One might object, however, that it does not follow that the mind will perceive more goodness. The objector, however, forgets that the mind itself is the object of concern in the discussion of transparency. Because self-knowledge is at the fore here, an increase in the beauty of the mind is relevant to an increase in one's ability to perceive that beauty.

become because the primary obstacle to transparency for such a desire is distance from the centre of one's attentions.

In contrast, a desire of the heart in a fallen human being should have a very uneven transparency profile because its position near the centre of the web of desire increases transparency while its proximity to the greatest divisions in the soul increases opacity and alienation from the truth. Because internal division is not complete, some things about these desires should have a high degree of transparency where the transparency lent to a desire by its position in the web is not defeated by internal division. Other aspects of the desire should be disproportionately opaque. A desire of the heart becoming stronger will not necessarily increase its transparency on balance. Rather, one would expect greater attention to exacerbate its uneven profile, heightening the transparency of parts of the desire while putting strain on the divisions of mind and will to which the desire is attached.

One can imagine the differences in these two kinds of desires with the following analogy. Imagine a field covered by magnets with more powerful magnets in the centre of the field and less powerful ones near the edges of the field. The more powerful magnets in the centre of the field have been fused to magnets with opposite orientations. A south-north oriented magnet in the periphery would be by itself, but a more powerful south-north magnet in the centre of the field will be fused with a north-south magnet. When one passes a lodestone over the periphery of the field, the magnets tend to move weakly but uniformly due to their stable orientation and limited power. When the lodestone passes over the centre of the field, the magnets move strongly but unpredictably due to their unstable orientation and greater power. The difference between the relatively stable magnets on the periphery of the field and the more volatile magnets in the centre of the field is analogous to the way that position in the web of desire should affect the transparency profile of a desire given Stump's Thomistic metaphysics and Frankfurtian picture of psychic organization.

Position in the web of desire, then, should correspond with significant differences in the transparency profile of a desire. These differences lead to differences in how changes to the web of desire affect the transparency profiles of individual desires. Peripheral desires are less likely to change significantly in transparency as a result of one's overall growth in goodness unless growth in goodness also happens to move that desire deeper into the web. Presumably, more peripheral desires exist in more stable parts

of the web, and the determining factor in their transparency profile is proximity to the centre of the web rather than proximity to divisions in the soul. In contrast, growth in goodness should affect exactly what inhibits the transparency of desires of the heart. To the extent that divisions in the soul heal, a desire of the heart should become more transparent in general and also acquire a more stable transparency profile.

This more nuanced perspective on transparency accords well with the biblical stories that Stump uses to support and fill out her position. Take, for instance, chapter twelve of Stump's book on Mary of Bethany (pp. 308-368).

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, feels that she has lost her heart's desire when Lazarus dies and Jesus fails to show up in time to save her brother. It is transparent to Mary early in the story that being separated from Lazarus is something that goes against the desires of her heart. It is transparent to Mary that Jesus could have kept her brother from dying, and it might be transparent to Mary that she wants Jesus to save her brother at least partly out of love of her. The story would not make sense unless Mary has a clear, unmistakable grasp of some of what she desires. The journey that Mary goes through in regaining her brother allows her to have the desires of her heart at a deeper level. It does not do so, however, in a way disconnected from Mary's perspective. What explains why we find Mary at Jesus' feet later in the story is the very fact that who Jesus is and how he relates to her and her desires has become more vivid to her than it was before Lazarus' illness. There are things that were opaque to her that have become clear. She knows this and responds out of love and gratitude.

Mutatis mutandis, the very same points hold of the stories of Samson, Abraham, and Job that Stump utilizes. The story of each of them only makes sense if one draws attention to the interplay of both transparency and opacity early in the story. Each story is one of coming to a place of increased transparency at the end of the story, not simply acquiescence in the face of unilateral opacity. Thus, I take it that a nuanced view of transparency accords better with both the 'Dominican' and the 'Franciscan' parts of Stump's book than a black and white account of transparency. The nuanced account fits better and might even logically follow from a Thomistic-Frankfurtian account of the divided and hierarchical soul. And the biblical stories that are at the heart of her project, such as the story of Mary, can be made better sense of with a nuanced view on which the selective transparency of each character's

perspective at the beginning of the story blossoms into greater transparency by the end of the story.

Having made the case for amending Stump's position with a nuanced view of transparency, let us turn to the uses to which Stump had put her own claims on the topic.

IV.

As previously discussed, one use to which Stump puts her claims about transparency is diffusing tensions between sceptical theism and her theodicy. The sceptical theist wants to deny that we are in a position to assess the likelihood that God exists given the evils of this world. Stump declares some sympathy with this perspective, but she wants to make room for making substantive claims regarding what justifying reasons God actually has on the Christian story. Stump appeals to the opacity of one's suffering and defeaters of that suffering to preserve the sceptical theist's core conviction without thereby undercutting the possibility of giving a general account of some of God's reasons for allowing evil.

Moving to the more nuanced perspective on transparency would make the relationship between Stump's Thomistic theodicy and sceptical theism trickier. If it is not the case that suffering and the defeat of suffering is completely opaque, then one can be in a position to make some judgments about what evils the world contains and which ones might be defeated. If one can make some judgments about what evils are in the world and which ones might be defeated, then one can gather at least some evidence that surely seems relevant to the question of whether a good God could exist. It would not follow that one is in a position to gather sufficient evidence to be warranted in ruling out God's existence, but even this much of a concession to the autonomy of human reason would rub many sceptical theists the wrong way.

The dialectical advantage of a view on which transparency is an all or nothing affair is that one can use a lack of transparency as an impermeable barrier for one's opponent. If the form of the dialectic is such that one's opponent is attacking one's position, then having the ability to remove from the debate the evidence one's opponent wants to use is an especially useful defensive weapon. If suffering and its defeaters are completely opaque, then there is no room for the proponent of the argument from evil to haggle over the probability that God exists. The anti-theist loses the evidence needed to make an argument.

Surely, however, gaining such an advantage over the anti-theist would be a pyrrhic victory. The problem of evil is a problem not because it is possible to posit something to which we have no access that is inconsistent with God's existence. Rather, the problem is that we *are* intimately acquainted with evil, and we are aware that its existence is in tension with the claim that a good and loving God exists. In order to have the knowledge that generates the problem in the first place, suffering can't be something that's opaque to us, not completely. Stump opens her book with the statement that only 'the most naïve or tendentious among us would deny the extent and intensity of suffering in the world' (p. 3). If suffering were opaque, however, there would be no basis for this claim. The fact that we all know the claim to be true should lead one to reject the opacity of suffering.

Adopting a nuanced perspective on transparency would not require denying that the sceptical theist has a point, however. On the enhanced version of Stump's theodicy developed in the previous section, there is a reason to expect systematic obstacles to gaining a full and balanced perspective on the exact nature of one's suffering. The greater someone suffers from division in her soul, the more limited her perspective on what is happening to her. It is worth remembering, however, that on the account developed here, greater suffering should correlate with a greater increase in clarity and insight should the divisions within the soul that cause that suffering be healed. In fact, unlike a position on which no humans are in a position to judge whether God and evil could co-exist, the nuanced view of transparency in conjunction with Stump's theodicy implies that some are in a good position to make this judgment, namely, those who have come through their sufferings much more integrated around the good. They, at least, are in a much better position to make these judgments than the rest of us. Surely, this result is more in harmony with Stump's readings of the biblical stories than a blanket denial of the aptness of human cognition for making progress on such matters.

Regarding Stump's second application of transparency, adopting a nuanced view of transparency would significantly restrict claims that the desires of someone's heart could be satisfied without one's awareness that this has happened. This restriction comes from two directions, one obvious and one less obvious. The more obvious consideration is that, on the nuanced view, some features of the desires of one's heart tend to be transparent. This opens up the possibility, for example, that Victor Klemperer really, really knew that what he desired to do was to write

a book on French literature. One might tell Klemperer about what will happen to his diaries only to have him deny that this had anything to do with what he wanted, and, on the nuanced view of transparency, it's not unlikely that he is in a privileged epistemic position on the matter.

On a more general level, on the nuanced view of transparency, one has to take people's perspective on their desires more seriously than if the desires of the heart are all simply opaque to the people who have them. Attempting to explain away the heartbreak of frustrated desire by claiming that God could have secretly provided the desires of the sufferer's heart becomes a strategy of limited utility. This point accords well with Stump's biblical source material. Samson, Job, Abraham, and Mary all have problems of perspective early in their stories, but their problems do not amount to ignorance of the ways God has actually provided their heart's desire. Actually, they know that they are without their heart's desires early in the story, and, when God has satisfied those desires, they know it. This point brings us to the second and more subtle consideration.

Many of the desires of the heart should be such that the satisfaction of those desires is conditional upon some measure of healing in the soul. That inner healing, however, enhances one's epistemic position. As I argued in the last section, healing comes with increased transparency. Consequently, a soul that receives a desire of the heart should be in an improved epistemic position in relation to the status of that desire. Desires of the heart are supposed to take greater goods as objects. The greater the good, however, the more healing is necessary in order to appropriate that good. It is plausible that whatever divisions in the soul affect a desire of the heart at least overlap with the inner wounds that need healing in order for that desire to be fulfilled. Because the fulfilment of the desires of the heart should be correlated with growth in the transparency of these desires, one should expect that failures to recognize the genuine fulfilment of a desire of the heart should not often arise due to failures of self-knowledge. One might fail to know that a desire has been fulfilled for some other, extrinsic reason, but self-knowledge should not be the culprit.

One consequence of amending Stump's account in the manner I am recommending is that it opens up the possibility that the world is full of undefeated suffering from heartbreak. Many people suffer unfulfilled and deeply felt desires. If one cannot claim that these people simply have no epistemic access to whether or not their desires are fulfilled, then one is left with the question of what to do with genuine evidence for a vast amount

of undefeated heartbreak. This is a significant cost, though it would not necessarily follow that such heartbreak makes belief in God untenable.

What might follow is that the first half of the psalmist's famous claim is very important. The psalmist says, 'Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.' (Psalm 37:4) Becoming more integrated around goodness is a normal part of what is required to receive the desires of one's heart. This might be partly because it changes the desires of one's heart, but another reason is that inner healing is normally necessary to God's fulfilling one's deepest desires. Perhaps the prevalence of a lack of internal integration both in oneself and in others who are relevant to one's desires necessitates that God allow so much unresolved heartbreak in the here and now. No doubt developing the view in this way would be unpalatable to many, seeming to blame the heartbroken for their failing to receive what they desire or restricting what they may receive now due to the brokenness of others. Nonetheless, evolving the view in this way would appear to be faithful to the traditional Christian depiction of the human condition.

By way of conclusion, the characters in the biblical narratives Stump utilizes receive their heart's desire in a deeper way than they could have prior to an experience in which the object of desire seems to be taken from them. Why would this be if one's desires were opaque? How would almost losing one's deepest desire change one in the requisite way if that desire were opaque to one? I submit that it would not and could not. What actually happens in these stories is that the selective transparency of the characters' desires puts them in an uncomfortable half-light. As the story progresses, they find themselves moved towards the light, which comes with a greater ability to possess what they were searching for in the half-light. It is very important to recognize that half-light is not the light, but wandering in the half-light is also very different from wandering in total darkness.

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ON THE DESIRES OF THE HEART IN STUMP'S THEODICY

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In her recent book *Wandering in Darkness*, Eleonore Stump offers an account of the problem of human suffering which is strongly inspired by Thomas Aquinas's theodicy. Nonetheless, she argues that Aquinas's theodicy is incomplete since there is a kind of suffering which Aquinas does not deal with. Chapter 14 of her book is dedicated to filling this gap in Aquinas's theodicy.

According to Prof. Stump, a person can suffer not only by being kept from flourishing but also by losing her heart's desires. These two kinds of human suffering are distinct: A person can flourish even though some of her heart's desires are not fulfilled. Prof. Stump defines 'a person's heart's desire' as a 'particular kind of commitment on her part to something – a person or a project – that has great value for her in virtue of her care for it but that need not be essential to her flourishing' (p. 7). Reminiscent of the well-known notion of a 'web of beliefs', she assumes the existence of a 'web of desires', whereas a 'desire of a person's heart is a desire that is at or near the center of the web of desire for her' (p. 7). Losing or not having the so desired objects causes a kind of suffering which is largely ignored by Aquinas's theodicy but which must be considered in order fully to account for the problem of suffering. In completing the thomistic account in this way, Prof. Stump is at pains to distinguish her answer to the problem of suffering from a view which she calls the 'stern-minded attitude', which advises the sufferer to give up the desires of his heart in order to avoid suffering.

In this paper, I want to show that there are at least two different possible interpretations of Prof. Stump's suggested solution. One of these interpretations is quite different from the stern-minded attitude, but

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seems unsuccessful. The second interpretation is more likely to solve the problem, but it is actually very close to the stern-minded attitude.

THE PROBLEM

The main strategy of Aquinas's theodicy is to relativize suffering to the period human beings spend in this world, in their earthly life before death. Compared with the everlasting afterlife, this period is only a small portion of the entire human life. Suffering in earthly life can be defeated by gaining sufficient benefit in the afterlife. God is justified in letting humans suffer if he provides this benefit in the afterlife and if suffering is the only available means for the sufferer to gain the benefit.

If you grant that this strategy works for the first kind of suffering, does it also work for the kind of suffering stemming from the loss of the desires of the heart? According to Prof. Stump, '[g]iven Aquinas's worldview, it is possible that the loss of flourishing in this life and the loss of the desires of one's heart in this life be a means to flourishing in the afterlife.' (p. 419) If we take on board Prof. Stump's distinction between the two kinds of suffering, then a remarkable asymmetry emerges in this statement: the two kinds of suffering, loss of flourishing and loss of the heart's desires, are redeemed by just one kind of benefit: flourishing in the afterlife. One can accept that the loss of flourishing could be defeated by flourishing. But what about the loss of the desires of one's heart? Can it be defeated by something completely different from it in kind?

One possible way to deal with the problem is merely to advise people to give up the desires of their heart and to 'focus their care only on their flourishing, their ultimate, spiritual flourishing' (p. 420). Prof. Stump calls this stance 'the stern-minded attitude' and shows that it has a long and remarkable tradition in Christian thought. She characterizes it as follows: 'The stern-minded attitude is unwilling to assign a positive value to anything that is not equivalent to or essential to a person's flourishing.' (p. 423)

For the stern-minded, suffering caused by losing one's heart's desires does not have to be defeated by some benefit. It simply vanishes when one gives up all one's heart's desires.

Prof. Stump rejects the stern-minded attitude as an 'unpalatable position' (p. 431). She argues instead that 'having a desire for things that are not necessary for flourishing is necessary as a means to flourishing' (p. 431). The stern-minded attitude therefore has 'something inhuman about it' (p. 431).

For her, the question still remains open: 'what could one gain that would make it worth losing the desires of one's heart other than the desires of one's heart? But how could a person gain the desires of her heart by losing them?' (p. 433). Her ultimate answer leads to a more symmetrical version of the statement cited above: 'The suffering that stems from the loss of the heart's desire is defeated not just by flourishing but also by the gain of the heart's desires, even if in a refolded mode.' (p. 450)

So, contrary to the stern-minded attitude, one does not have to give up one's heart's desires in order to be rid of the suffering caused by the failure to attain them. Prof. Stump seems to claim that somehow one will get one's heart's desires fulfilled even if one loses them. It is dubitable that this claim can be held in a straight-forward manner. And so Prof. Stump has to try hard to argue for her view. Is she successful?

TWO DIFFERENT STRATEGIES

As I stressed before, one of the main strategies of Aquinas's theodicy is to relativize suffering to the small period of one's earthly life to the hope for a redeeming benefit in the afterlife. If the only benefit which defeats suffering stemming from the loss of one's heart's desires is to have just these desires fulfilled, then this kind of relativization is not possible. On a thomistic view, only what has a rational soul can have an afterlife and enter heaven. In heaven the rational souls will share in the fullest form of happiness which consists in a post-mortem knowledge and understanding of God (*beatitudo*). This clearly theocentric notion of happiness makes it very unlikely to have the earthly things or animals we love and have set our hearts on in heaven for this might reduce our dedication to the union with God.[1] Therefore, many desires cannot be fulfilled in the afterlife, at least if we talk about desires for material things, animals or projects typical for our earthly existence. So the problem cannot be solved by appeal to the afterlife. But in this case, the strongest argument of Aquinas's theodicy is no longer applicable. Looking at the misery of earthly life, of so many human beings who die without having their heart's desires fulfilled, it seems hopeless to find a way to see how this suffering could be redeemed in earthly life.

Yet Prof. Stump tries to find such a way. She does so by adopting and modifying Aquinas's idea of relativization, which is now not to two

[1] See also Brian Davies, 'Happiness', in Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp. 227-237.

different portions of a person's life but to 'two different layers of depth in the heart's desires themselves' (p. 449). The idea is that heart's desires can be ranked in order of subjective value. On this scale of subjective value the 'things that have deeper subjective value for a person can be the source of value for other things that have subjective value for him' (p. 437). According to Prof. Stump, 'a heart's desire can change its configuration in virtue of its being interwoven into something deeper among the desires of the heart.' (p. 446)

In the subsequent course of the argument, she seems to pursue two different strategies which she does not clearly distinguish from each other. The first strategy is based on the idea that if a desire is not fulfilled in its original form, it could be fulfilled in an altered form. A reshaped desire can be deeper on the scale of subjective value, and so the grief over the loss of it in its original form is redeemed by gaining it in its reshaped, more valuable form. The second strategy starts with the Augustinian view that there is 'a connection between other desires of the heart and the innate deepest heart's desire for God and shared union with God' (p. 442). She then claims that, by interweaving a heart's desire into that deepest heart's desire for God, in the event that this heart's desire is lost, the character of suffering generated is altered. The grief over the loss is then redeemed by having what one most deeply wants (i.e. shared union with God) and by being able to 'wait in trust' (p. 446). In the next two paragraphs, I will examine both strategies in more detail.

THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT OF THE HEART'S DESIRES

Let us begin with the first strategy, which promises a fulfilment of the heart's desires, even if in an altered form. Prof. Stump admits that she has 'no idea how to individuate heart's desires', but she insists on the possibility for a heart's desire 'to be radically reconfigured and still remain the heart's desire it was' (p. 445). In a footnote on that issue, she refers to a typological explanation which consists in comparing the reconfiguring of the heart's desires with the refolding of proteins. The refolded protein is still the same protein, even though it has altered its structure radically. Prof. Stump omits a deeper analysis of this point, but she gives several examples of cases where a refolding and the ultimate fulfilment of the heart's desires have taken place. She prominently refers to the life of Victor Klemperer, who had to give up his desire for writing a study of French literature in the years of the National-Socialistic regime in Germany and author the famous Klemperer diaries instead. She writes:

> It is hard not to believe that Klemperer would have greatly preferred being the author of the Klemperer diaries than of the critical work on French literature he thought it was his heart's desire to write. [...] in Klemperer's case [...] intuitively it seems that there are two configurations of one single heart's desire, just as there can be two configurations of one and the same protein; and one of these configurations is deeper, closer to the center of the web of desire, than the other. (p. 443)

But is it really one single heart's desire? If you look at it in a more abstract way, you can recognize that what is described falls under the same *genus*, which is in this case something like 'being the author of a great book'. But falling under the same *genus* is usually not enough to guarantee identity. The identity of a heart's desire seems to be a matter of how much detail is needed to describe the object of a heart's desire. It is surely true that you can always reach a level of description which is abstract enough to identify heart's desires which differ on a less abstract level. But this strategy looks arbitrary. You end up stating that, after a person had experienced something good in her life, it is precisely this which was her heart's desire the whole time, no matter what it was and no matter what she had thought her heart's desire was.

For me, it seems natural to individuate desires by their objects. If two desires have different objects (i.e., if they are desires for different things), then they cannot be identical. It is not enough that the things desired fall under the same *genus*. In Klemperer's case, we talk about two different things that are desired, and therefore we talk about two different desires. Klemperer only had the desire to write his study of French literature, he perhaps never had the desire to publish the diary. It was published many years after his death.[2] It is a good thing, and one can imagine that Klemperer himself would be glad to know he is the author of this book, but it has little to do with the heart's desire which Klemperer had while alive. It is important to note that Klemperer actually *did* write his study of French literature after the war.[3] Thus, his heart's desire to write this book was fulfilled! There is no need to seek a substitute in this case. If you

[2] Victor Klemperer, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten. Tagebücher 1933 – 1945* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1995). Klemperer himself used his diaries to write a study of the language of the national-socialists: Victor Klemperer, *LTI – Notitzbuch eines Philologen* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1947).

[3] Victor Klemperer, *Geschichte der französischen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1954 – 1966). Prof. Stump shortly mentions the existence of this book in an indirect citation in the first chapter (p. 12, footnote 31 [p. 488]).

still claim that his heart's desire was fulfilled by being the author of the diaries, you have to deal with the fact that this single desire was fulfilled twice. The analysis of the individuation of heart's desires becomes a very confusing task then.

What you can say is that Klemperer's grief over being kept from his literary work for so many years is redeemed by being able to write a *different* great book during those years. The two desires to write these two books are linked in this way: The suffering stemming from keeping him from his work on the literary book is a necessary condition for being able to write the diaries. So the suffering ultimately leads to something good for the sufferer in this case. The two projects are intimately related, but there is no need to identify them.

You can imagine a case in which Klemperer died before finishing his literary work but knowing that his diaries would be published after his death. In this case, you could say that the suffering stemming from not having what he desires is redeemed by being able to write this other great book instead. The suffering is not redeemed by ultimately gaining what he desires but by gaining something different that consoles him. This consolation is only possible if he finally gives up his original heart's desire, at least when he discovers that he will soon die.

There might be cases in which hearts' desires are fulfilled. And there might be cases in which the fulfilment comes in a slightly different form. But the really problematic cases are those with a great difference between the original heart's desire and what is finally gained. In these cases it is problematic to talk about the *same* desire being fulfilled. Consequently, in these cases, redemption of the suffering stemming from the loss of a heart's desire can only occur through giving something up. In my view, this means giving up the original heart's desire. And even Prof. Stump seems to draw a similar conclusion in talking about the loss of the heart's desires in their original form and the suffering stemming from that loss (p. 446). So she admits that something about the original heart's desire will never be attained. Claiming that people who suffer from heartbreak have what they wanted does not seem to be appropriate.

As far as I can see, Prof. Stump does not argue satisfactorily that suffering stemming from the loss of the heart's desires is redeemed by gaining these desires in earthly life, even if in a different form. The crucial point is the missing analysis of the individuation of the heart's desires. Without such an analysis, it is not clear what 'refolding of heart's desires' means. Stating an analogy between heart's desires and

proteins is surely not enough to explain it. And the most prominent example given, that of Klemperer, is at least problematic. So, what I identified above as a first strategy is not an acceptable solution to the problem of the loss of the heart's desires.

HOPE, AND WAIT IN TRUST

Prof. Stump does not pursue this strategy in the course of chapter 14. Instead, she initiates discussion of a different strategy. This strategy still deals with a 'refolding' of the heart's desires, but now the focus is not on what the desires are desires for. What is stressed is the function that the heart's desires have in a developing relationship between God and the person whose desires these are. Prof. Stump says:

> If a person takes God as her deepest heart's desire, all her other heart's desires, including desires for a project, can refold, can reshape without losing their identity, by being woven into that deepest desire. If that happens, then the other things she had her heart set on become gifts, gifts had or hoped for, or even gifts lost or not given. (p. 445)

It is now of no further importance whether a heart's desire is in the end attained or lost. There is only one exception: the deepest heart's desire, i.e., the desire for God and shared union with God. All the other heart's desires, considered as gifts from God, play a prominent role in the dynamic development of this relationship with God. A person who has shared union with God has her deepest heart's desire fulfilled. She will not suffer complete heartbreak: 'Things do not fall apart for her' (p. 449). But this is still not the whole story. Prof. Stump writes:

> [...] refolding the heart's desires by interweaving them with a deepest desire for God alters the character of the suffering over the loss of them in their original form. When one of those in union is a perfectly loving God, the human person in that union can wait in trust even while he is grief-stricken over the loss or absence of something he had his heart set on. In such circumstances, both the waiting and the trust become a kind of giving back which is part of the mutuality of love. (pp. 446-447)

The shared union with a perfectly loving God lets a person live in trust and hope for the fulfilment of the desires of her heart. The reason to keep up that hope is her belief in a loving God. Here Prof. Stump refers to Aquinas's account of love: if God loves that person, then he cares about what she cares about. 'The alternative is to suppose that God is unloving.' (p. 444)

Is this second strategy a satisfying solution to the problem of the lost desires of the heart? I think it is, if you grant that the original thomistic strategy, which is based on hope for flourishing in the afterlife, is successful. The reason is that what I call Prof. Stump's second strategy is also essentially based on hope for flourishing in the afterlife.

To see this, let us look more closely at the 'refolding' of the heart's desires into gifts from God. In contrast to the first strategy, the problem of individuation of desires does not arise here, because the thing desired clearly remains the same before and after the refolding. What is changed by refolding a heart's desire is the function of that desire in developing the person's relationship with God: what is desired is now desired as a gift from God. The heart's desire is intimately linked to the deepest heart's desire for God. This deepest heart's desire is equivalent to what is of highest objective value. Here Prof. Stump agrees with Aquinas and Augustine: 'For Aquinas as for Augustine, it is possible for a human person to take as her deepest heart's desire the very thing that is also her greatest flourishing – namely, God and shared union with God.' (p. 441) For a believer, union with God is ultimately reached in the afterlife. So the reason why a believer can trust that his deepest heart's desire will be fulfilled is his hope for its ultimate fulfilment in the afterlife.

Concerning the other desires of the heart, Prof. Stump gives a reason how waiting in trust for their fulfilment becomes possible: it is a consequence of the belief in a loving God. But what kind of fulfilment can be faithfully and reasonably waited for? As shown in the preceding paragraph, the fulfilment in question cannot be a literal fulfilment of the desires in their original form. What can be waited for is a fulfilment in a refolded form, i.e., as a gift from God. And gifts can be 'had or hoped for, or even [...] lost or not given' (p. 445), as cited above. Here, Prof. Stump seems to suggest that even a gift hoped for, lost, or not given is a case of gaining a heart's desire, because, whichever of these outcomes obtains, it brings the person's relationship with God to develop and therefore brings the person nearer to the state of shared union with God. And since shared union with God is equivalent to a person's greatest flourishing, what is really hoped for in waiting for the fulfilment of the heart's desires is the ultimate flourishing in shared union with God. Another reference to the link between obtaining heart's desires as gifts from God and obtaining ultimate flourishing can be found in the claim that gifts have to be 'given back' in some sense:

> Even the thing wanted as gift becomes wanted as something to be given back – not in the sense of being rejected, as the stern-minded attitude might suppose, but in the sense of being interwoven into the flowering of a life made into a gift for the person who is one's deepest heart's desire. (p. 447)

So, if every gift from God has to be given back and if 'giving back the gift' means using it for flourishing in shared union with God, it is now clear that hope for gaining a heart's desire as a gift from God is nothing but hope for flourishing in honour of God. The heart's desire itself is just a means to obtaining this object of deeper desire. And as a means it can in principle be exchanged by a different means to obtain the object of the same deeper desire. Furthermore, if the final aim of all hearts' desires is flourishing, then the loss of a heart's desire can be defeated by gaining ultimate flourishing in the afterlife. And this is exactly the way human suffering can be redeemed according to Aquinas.

If you grant that the original thomistic strategy is successful, as Prof. Stump does, then her (second) strategy concerning the suffering caused by losing the desires of one's heart is successful, too.

THE DIFFERENCE TO THE STERN-MINDED ATTITUDE

Prof. Stump goes to great lengths to distinguish her view from the stern-minded attitude. We can now see why: the view she finally advances is in fact not very far from the stern-minded view itself. What exactly is the difference between Prof. Stump's second and final account on the problem of lost desires of the heart and the view she repudiates as stern-minded?

There are two closely related ways in which the two positions differ: At first, on Prof. Stump's view, hearts' desires are not completely without value. On the contrary, considered as gifts from God, they have an 'added value' (p. 444). The second difference is the attitude of trust in the final gain of the heart's desires as gifts from God, which is said to be a consequence of believing in a loving God. The stern-minded give up their heart's desires, whereas followers of Prof. Stump's view continue waiting in trust.

Both differences between the stern-minded view and Prof. Stump's view have their roots in different views concerning the role that the objects one's heart can desire play in one's relationship with God. For the stern-minded, maintaining one's heart's desires disturbs this relationship: A person with heart's desires loves something that is not God and therefore is in danger

of committing idolatry by replacing God with that beloved object. If she does not receive the loved object, or if it is taken away from her, she has to suffer heartbreak. In consequence, to avoid suffering which cannot be redeemed, it is better not to love anything other than God. In Prof. Stump's view, hearts' desires can peacefully coexist with or even strengthen one's relationship with God – but only as long as one regards the desired objects as gifts from God. God is the first and foremost object of love, but this does not keep one from loving other persons, things, or projects. On the contrary, these other objects are loved just because they are recognized as gifts from a loving God. If the loved objects are lost, one certainly has to suffer, but this suffering is redeemed because the relationship with God remains intact or even grows.

But even in this description of the difference between Prof. Stump's view and the stern-minded view, one can recognize their remarkable similarity: On both views, all hope of redemption from suffering is ultimately based on the sufferer's relationship with God. This is the only deepest heart's desire. Choosing God as one's deepest heart's desire is the only way to avoid idolatry and complete heartbreak. If one attaches a high subjective value in earthly life to things other than God, there will be a time when one finally has to give up these good and valuable things: when one's life comes to an end. Then the hope for fulfilment of the heart's desires can change into what it has always been for a believer: the deep desire for flourishing in union with God. In this sense, it is possible to maintain hope for the fulfilment of one's heart's desires. And that is why I think a synthesis of both views is possible: realizing that most of our heart's desires have to be given up in the end, without giving up the attitude of hope and trust in God.

A prominent witness to this attitude is the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was imprisoned by the National Socialists for two years and finally executed. From prison, he managed to write letters to his family and his friends, in which he described his thoughts about his situation, and his faith and trust in God. In one of these letters, he writes: 'Es gibt erfülltes Leben trotz vieler unerfüllter Wünsche'[4] (You can find personal fulfilment in spite of many unfulfilled desires). In the same letter, Bonhoeffer emphasizes that this attitude should not be understood as resignation:

[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft* (München: Kaiser, 1964), p. 162.

> Im übrigen muß ich in notwendiger Ergänzung zu dem Vorigen sagen, daß ich mehr denn je daran glaube, daß wir auch der Erfüllung unserer Wünsche entgegengehen und wir uns keineswegs der Resignation hinzugeben haben.[5]

(In addition to what I said above, I cannot avoid stating that I believe more than ever that we are equally approaching the fulfilment of our desires and that we should not abandon ourselves to resignation.)

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[5] Ibid., p. 163.

WANDERING IN DARKNESS: FURTHER REFLECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper, which gives me the ability to say something further about the issues involved in my book *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (*WID*),[1] was made possible by a session on the book at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, centred on papers by John Martin Fischer and David McNaughton, and by a workshop on the book which was held at the University of Innsbruck (organized by Georg Gasser, under the aegis of a Templeton grant on analytic theology) and which included papers by Christian Feldbacher, Georg Gasser, Adam Green, and Lukas Kraus. I am grateful to all of these philosophers for their gracious and generous comments on my book, and for their carefully reasoned, thoughtful engagement with some of the book's central ideas. I am glad of this opportunity to respond to their stimulating comments on my work, which help me to clarify some things that matter to the book's project.

In one short paper, it is not remotely possible to do justice to all the interesting issues in their comments. With regret, therefore, I have concentrated my comment on only a very few of the issues they raise, generally those that let me clarify or defend further something that strikes me as particularly important to the project as I had originally conceived it.

[1] Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

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I. THE COMBINATION OF METHODOLOGIES

Christian Feldbacher worries that my attempt to combine the Franciscan mode and the Dominican mode leads not to a marriage of the two methodologies, but to something like an unequal partnership, with the Franciscan mode definitely on the underprivileged side. I appreciate this worry, because since I am myself an analytic philosopher, it is reasonable to expect that I might have leaned to the Dominican mode, instead of melding the two methodologies, as I had claimed I would do.

Feldbacher formulates the worry this way. He argues that the stories, and whatever Franciscan knowledge the stories provide, do not provide premises or support for premises in the central argument that constitutes the Thomistic theodicy at the heart of the book.[2] As Feldbacher sees it, the premises of that theodicy are just what they would have been if I had not brought stories into the discussion.

On this score, Feldbacher is right. But, in my view, his being right with regard to this claim is not sufficient to validate his complaint about the book's methodology.

In discussing that methodology, I argued that only certain ways of bringing narratives into philosophy in general, and into theodicy in particular, respect the role of narratives in philosophy. On my view, to bring narratives into philosophical argument either as premises or as support for premises is to wreck the value of the narratives as sources of Franciscan knowledge. Instead, I argued, narratives should be understood as contributing to Dominican argumentation roughly in the way life experience contributes to any philosophical understanding and argumentation. That experience serves as a store of insight and intuition against the background of which we understand and evaluate, consciously or subconsciously, the merits of the premises of the philosophical argument.

By way of a concrete example, I said that the narratives examined in my book should function in a way analogous to the way in which travel to a foreign country shapes one's understanding of that country. The as-it-were experience provided by a narrative will deepen one's perceptions and judgments of things, altering them in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, just as travel to a foreign country will enrich in countless inexpressible

[2] This theodicy is not identical to the defence the book argues for but is central to it, as I explain in the book's first chapter.

ways one's insights into that country. Travel to China, for example, will change a person's understandings of that country and its people in ways that he could not represent entirely or at all in propositional form. If he could represent his experience propositionally, then he could teach others by means of propositions everything he himself learned in his travel to China – and that conclusion is of course false.

So what I claimed is that, although the premises of a theodicy or defence stay the same, even after the examination of the narratives at issue, one's understanding of those premises and one's ability to evaluate them will change very substantially in consequence of the as-it-were experience provided by the stories.

I need to add, however, that this way of thinking about the Franciscan approach might have been obscured for Feldbacher because he is not entirely right about what I was trying to characterize with the label 'Franciscan'. In particular, the distinction of most importance in the book is not the distinction between knowledge *that* and knowledge *how*. Knowledge *how* does not in fact play a role in my methodology. The relevant distinction is between knowledge *that* and the knowledge of persons, which is direct, intuitive, non-propositional, and subserved by distinct brain systems designed precisely for mind-reading between conspecifics. As I was at pains to explain in the methodological section of the book, this brain system gives us a distinct kind of knowledge of persons, and I have argued that this special kind of knowledge can also be transmitted to a greater or lesser extent by stories.

II. THE DESIRES OF THE HEART

In *WID,* I also called attention to what is in my view a neglected part of the problem of evil, namely, the fact that, even when he is flourishing, a person can suffer because he has been denied the desires of his heart. In my view, this kind of suffering is redeemed when somehow, through suffering, a person receives his heart's desire *but* in the reshaped form which that desire has when and only when it is interwoven with a much deeper desire for union with God.

Adam Green focuses on my claim that neither heart's desires nor their loss or satisfaction is transparent. As he sees it, this claim of mine allies my position in some ways with sceptical theism. And he argues that the claim is too strong because, with regard to the desires of the heart, transparency and opacity come in degrees. He goes on to explore

in sensitive and stimulating detail the disparate degrees of opacity for heart's desires and the alteration in that opacity produced by suffering.

In this connection, it is important to clarify that my claim about transparency does not entail that a person *never* knows what the desires of her heart are, or whether they have been either satisfied or lost. The claim entails only that a person's views regarding his own heart's desires and their loss or satisfaction are not infallible.[3] In this regard, heart's desires are more like health than they are like pain. The state of a person's bodily health is not a matter that is invariably or infallibly known by introspection. On the other hand, as I explained in *WID,* '[i]t is no part of Aquinas's theodicy that suffering and its justifying benefits are opaque in every case or will *always* be opaque'[4]; and the same point applies as regards the desires of the heart. My position requires maintaining only that heart's desires, and their loss or satisfaction, are not always completely transparent; it does not require maintaining that they are always completely opaque.

In addition, it is important to clarify that, on Aquinas's theodicy, sceptical theism is false: human beings *are* in a position to know the morally sufficient reasons that justify God in allowing suffering. The epistemic problem for human beings, on Aquinas's theodicy, is not the inscrutability of God's mind (or of general modal claims or anything else along the same lines). The problem is the inscrutability of a human heart and the complexity of a human life, which the omniscient mind of God can comprehend, but which is frequently unknown to us. The result is that, for Aquinas, although we can know what sceptical theism claims we cannot know, namely, God's general reasons for allowing suffering, we cannot know why God allowed the particular suffering he did for any particular sufferer at any particular time. The lack of knowledge premised by the defence I constructed is therefore very different from the lack of knowledge postulated by sceptical theism.

With these things clarified, I want to say only that I welcome Green's probing investigation of an issue I left untouched, namely, the degrees of transparency a heart's desires can have, and the reasons for that divergence of degree. Although I think that there is probably more confused complexity to these degrees of transparency than his account allows for, the case he mounts for supposing that suffering

[3] *WID,* pp. 12-13.
[4] *WID,* p. 409.

adds considerably to the transparency of a person's desires seems to me insightful and helpful. Additional work along the same lines strikes me as certain to be significant for development of the Thomistic defense, and I hope that he will pursue the issue.

Lukas Kraus also raises some important questions regarding my treatment of the desires of the heart. Kraus objects that, on the defence argued for in the book, the heart's desires of a suffering person are in fact just given up, and not fulfilled.

Kraus holds this view at least in part because he believes that desires are individuated by their objects. Now it is certainly true that some mental states or powers are individuated by their objects. Vision, for example, can be distinguished from hearing by its objects. But the same thing is not true of desires, in my view. In particular, heart's desires are not individuated by their objects.

To see the reasons for this claim, consider a story where heart's desires play a central role.

In *The Gifts of the Magi,* the American author O. Henry tells a story about a wife, who had beautiful hair, and her husband, who had an heirloom pocket watch. The wife had her heart set on a pair of combs for her hair, and the husband had his heart set on a silver chain for his watch. But the two of them were very poor, and the things they wanted were very expensive. So they could not buy either the combs or the chain, and they did without these highly coveted things. At Christmas, however, in spite of their great poverty, each one of them received from the other the very marvellous, expensive, and highly desired thing. The wife received those combs from her husband, and the husband received the silver chain from his wife. And here is how the two of them found the money to buy these presents for each other. The husband sold his watch to pay for the hair combs, and the wife cut and sold her hair to pay for the silver watch chain.

O. Henry tells this story to show that the husband and the wife each got his or her heart's desire, but in a much more powerful way than either of them could have dreamt of. He finishes the story this way:

> The magi ... invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones ... And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But ... let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest.[5]

[5] O. Henry, *41 Stories* (New York: New American Library. Signet Classic, 1984), p. 70.

O. Henry takes this view of the matter because what the wife received was not only the hair combs she had so desired. Rather, she received the combs as a gift of the great, self-sacrificial love of her husband. And, mutatis mutandis, the same thing can be said about the husband. He received the silver chain he had so wanted, but he received it as a gift of the self-sacrificial love of his wife.

Now hair combs as an object of desire is very different from hair combs as the expression of a great love. Obviously, one can have hair combs which are not an expression of love. If the wife had won a sum in a lottery and bought herself the hair combs with her winnings, she would have had the hair combs, but she would not have gotten them as the expression of the great love of her husband. It is worth noticing too that, at the outset of the story, when the wife wanted the hair combs, all she had in her mind to desire was the combs themselves. As her great surprise at her Christmas present makes clear, it never entered her mind to desire the combs as a gift of great love on her husband's part. (And, mutatis mutandis, similar things can be said about the husband and the silver watch chain.)

If we had to individuate desires on the basis of their objects, as Kraus supposes, then, with regard to the O. Henry story, we would have to say that at Christmas the wife did not have the desire of her heart fulfilled, and neither did the husband. Rather, each of them failed to get his heart's desire. They may have received something else good, but they did not receive what had been their original heart's desires.

To me a conclusion of this sort seems highly counter-intuitive. On the contrary, the whole point of the O. Henry story is that a person can get her heart's desire in a way that is much deeper and better than she could ever have imagined.

So I do not think that individuating heart's desires by their objects is a good way to individuate them. In my view, this story prompts us to see that the form of any particular desire can be reshaped by the deeper desires of which it is an expression without losing its character as the desire it was. A desire can refold and still be the same desire, if the deeper desire continues to inform it.

Consider in this connection the example I used in *WID* involving Viktor Klemperer. When Klemperer wanted to write a book on French literature, no doubt, that desire was informed by deeper desires of his. These deeper desires might be describable in more abstract terms than the description of his desire to write a book on French literature, as Kraus

supposes. But there will be a limit on the abstraction and generality. So, for example, Klemperer's deeper desire might have been for the fruition of his skills and talents – but it would still have been a fruition having to do with writing a book. It would not have been for the fruition of his skills and talents by means of success in hand-to-hand armed combat, for example.

In my view, because of this relation between the deeper and the more superficial heart's desire, the more superficial desire can be altered significantly without its having been given up. And that is why it is right to hold that Klemperer did get his heart's desire when he wrote his diaries, even if the diaries were not his scholarly study of French literature.

But suppose that I were wrong on this score and Kraus were right. What would follow?

The notion of a heart's desire, as I introduced it, is the notion of a desire at the centre of the web of desire, giving energy to the other desires in the web. But, I argued, for any particular person, there will also be a connected hierarchy of such desires, with some much deeper than others. So the heart's desire D1 of a person Jerome is a desire for something Jerome really wants; but a deeper heart's desire D2 is a desire that gives the energy to the more superficial desire D1. Without desire D2, Jerome would not in fact have desire D1.

Now if Kraus were right, then it could be the case that Jerome never got what would satisfy D1, but did get what would satisfy D2 instead. Klemperer's diaries might have fulfilled some deep desire of his, but they did not fulfil the heart's desire he had when he wanted to write a book on French literature.

On this way of thinking about heart's desires, my case would then have to be restated this way. Jerome's suffering because of the loss of his heart's desire D1 would be redeemed by his getting the satisfaction of his heart's desire D2. And since the satisfaction of D2 is what Jerome *really* wanted in wanting D1, his suffering over the loss of D1 is defeated. Although, intuitively, I want to resist this restatement, nothing about this restatement will alter the major conclusions of the defence.

Finally, what Kraus sees as two strategies on my part for dealing with suffering stemming from the desires of the heart is really only one: suffering stemming from the loss of heart's desires is redeemed by the satisfaction of heart's desires only when those desires have been reconfigured into an expression of the deepest heart's desire, which is for God. Kraus thinks that this claim makes my position collapse into the stern-minded view. But, on the stern-minded view, a person should be

content with getting only God as the satisfaction of his heart's desires. My position, however, is better represented by the ending of the book of Job, in which Job gets intimacy with God *and* camels (among other things that were his heart's desires).

III. THE NATURE OF A DEFENCE

In this short paper, I cannot address all the stimulating and thoughtful remarks in the papers by John Martin Fischer, Georg Gasser, and David McNaughton; but they share a concern about the philosophical nature of a defence and the criteria for a successful defence, and I will focus my response to their papers largely on that issue. Gasser himself tries to answer some of the questions about the nature of a defence with the helpful notion of a worldview, taken in a technical sense. This is an insightful approach, in my view, and worth reflecting on further. But here I will confine myself just to some more general reflections on the nature of a defence and on the use of a defence to deal with the problem of evil.

I want to begin by highlighting what the goal of a defence is. There are plenty of arguments purporting to show the existence of God; but in the history of philosophy there have generally been just two kinds of argument purporting to show the non-existence of God. The most powerful of these is the argument from evil.[6] So the argument from evil is constructed as an attack on theism, and a defence is a response to that attack.

It is crucial to keep this point firmly in mind because it affects greatly what we ought to expect in a defence against the argument from evil. The point of a defence against an attack is warding off the attack. It is true that, insofar as the attack of the argument from evil is warded off by a defence, theism is strengthened, because one of the best arguments against theism is undermined. But a defence against an attack on theism is still not by itself an argument *for* theism. The job of a defence is to turn back an attack. It is not the job of a defence to provide an argument for the existence of God, or for the truth of any of the major theistic claims about God.

Just in case this point would benefit from belabouring, consider an analogous case from biology. In 1911, Peyton Rous argued for this thesis:

[6] The other kind of argument attempts to show some incoherence in the standard divine attributes, such as that sometimes alleged to exist between omnipotence and perfect goodness, between omnipotence and divine free will, or between omniscience and immutability.

(The Rous thesis): chicken sarcoma R is caused by a virus.

This thesis was rejected with derision by most of those working in the field at that time. They rebutted the Rous thesis with one or another sophisticated version of this argument:

(Attack on the Rous thesis):
(1) Chicken sarcoma R runs in families.
(2) No sarcoma that runs in families is caused by a virus.
(3) Therefore, chicken sarcoma R is not caused by a virus.

On the view of the attackers, that argument was sufficient to show that the Rous thesis was false.

Now, to defend his thesis against this attack, Rous did not have to mount yet another argument to show that chicken sarcoma R is caused by a virus. He did not have to rerun his original experiments or dream up new experiments to try to show his thesis true in yet another way. All Rous had to do to ward off the attack was to undermine one or more of the premises in the attackers' argument or to impugn the argument's validity. In fact, Rous argued that premiss (2) is false; that is, he denied the claim that no sarcoma that runs in families is caused by a virus. To defend his thesis against this attack, it was sufficient to show that premiss false.

But notice that there is a difference between warding off the attack and supporting the original thesis. Rous might well have been successful in warding off the attack by showing the falsity of premiss (2) of the attack without its being the case that chicken sarcoma R is caused by a virus. A successful defence against the attack on the Rous thesis is not the same as an argument for the Rous thesis. As it happens, Rous's defence against the attack was successful; the claim that no sarcoma that runs in families is caused by a virus is not true. But the success of Rous's defence does not prove that chicken sarcoma R is caused by a virus. And it does not prove anything about the nature of the Rous sarcoma virus or its mode of operation either. All that Rous's defence does is show that this particular attack will not work to rule out the Rous thesis.

There may have been people for whom this approach on Rous's part to defending his thesis was disappointing. As Fischer explains his own attitude towards a defence against the argument from evil, Fischer was anticipating that a defence would give some reason for thinking theism true. Analogously, maybe partisans to the dispute over the Rous thesis were looking to Rous's defence to help them decide whether or not to believe that chicken sarcoma R is caused by a virus. But people who

wanted Rous's defence against the attack on his thesis to give more evidence of the truth of that thesis were looking for that evidence in the wrong place. The evidence for the Rous thesis is not the same as a defence against an attack on the thesis. The enterprise of undermining an argument against some thesis is not the same as the enterprise of showing that thesis true.

In the same way, a successful defence against the argument from evil is not itself another argument for the existence of God. No matter how successful a defence is, it does not prove the existence of God or show the appropriateness of the standard divine attributes or anything else along these lines. It is not meant to do any of these things. A defence is the warding off of an attack on theism. Explanations of the divine attributes or arguments for the existence of God have to be found in different places.

Because this is what a defence is, the criteria for the success of a defence are a function of what the attack is. When Gertrude Stein was being wheeled in for surgery, she turned to her companion Alice and demanded, 'What is the answer?' When the startled Alice was silent, Gertrude said, 'Well, then, what is the question?' An analogous approach seems right when it comes to the nature of a successful defence. In the case of a defence against the argument from evil, the criteria for success in the answer depend on the way in which the existence of evil is used to question the existence of God.

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

Before Alvin Plantinga formulated the free-will defence, the most influential argument from evil tried to show that God does not exist on the basis of the claims that there is evil in the world and that God and evil are logically incompatible.[7] *No* possible world that contains suffering could also be a world that contains God. This argument is relatively

[7] For one presentation of Plantinga's free-will defence, see Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 131-155.

simple, in the sense that it does not need to consider any specific facts about suffering. It does not need to make any claims about the nature of particular kinds of suffering, the extent and distribution of suffering, the role of suffering in the lives of sufferers, or anything else that would require a lengthy and controversial presentation of evidence. But this form of the argument is also much stronger than it needs to be. It does not conclude just that God does not exist; it concludes that God could not exist in any world containing suffering. The very nature of God and of evil makes the co-existence of God and evil impossible.

But, as Plantinga pointed out, the claims

(1) there is an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God

and

(2) there is suffering

are not by themselves logically inconsistent. At the very least, to argue on the basis of the existence of suffering to the conclusion that an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God does not exist, a sound argument from evil needs to include this premiss:

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

This premiss is eminently debatable, however. To defend theism against this version of the attack requires only showing that there is some possible world in which God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing that world's suffering to exist. Plantinga's justly celebrated free-will defence was directed against this form of attack.

Plantinga was generally regarded as successful in that defence.[8] At the end of the initial debate over Plantinga's defence, most philosophers supposed that Plantinga had succeeded in defending theism against the particular attack at issue for him. And because he was widely taken to be successful with the free-will defence, the attack shifted and took new form.

[8] Fischer suggests that Plantinga's defence is more open to serious criticism than one might suppose from the admiring reception it received. Like others before him, myself included, Fischer wonders whether Plantinga's defence is in fact compatible with the claim that God is good. In my view, too, it is one thing to allow creatures free will, and another thing entirely to stand by passively while they use their free will in cruel and hateful depredations of the vulnerable and helpless. Fischer raises this point in connection with his own sparse defence, which certainly is open to criticism on this score. But whether or not Plantinga's defence is really open to attack on the grounds that it is not consistent with God's goodness, most people at the time Plantinga published his defence took the defence to be successful.

In its new form, as the evidential argument from evil, the attack attempted to reason to the non-existence of God not on the basis of a logical incompatibility between God and suffering but rather on the basis of an incompatibility between the existence of God and facts about suffering in this world. The idea was that even if there could be a God in some world containing suffering, there could not be a God in the actual world because of some facts about the suffering in the actual world.

In this version of the attack, the crucial third premiss of the argument from evil becomes something like this:

> (3') There is no morally sufficient reason for an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God to allow all of the suffering that there is in the actual world.

This version of the argument from evil is a lot harder to defend against, but then it is also a lot harder to support.

The first thing to notice in this connection is that a very sparse defence against this version of the attack is actually easy to construct. Fischer proposes for our consideration a sparse defence involving a divine matrix connecting suffering to the distribution of goods in heaven, but in fact a defence even sparser than the one Fischer constructs is readily available. All one has to do is to take as a premiss the denial of the conclusion of the argument from evil and conclude to the denial of one of its premises. Bill Rowe called attention to this possibility and labelled it 'the G.E. Moore shift',[9] after Moore's famous defence against the sceptical attack on knowledge.

The argument of this very sparse defence goes this way:

(The G.E. Moore Shift):

(1') an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God exists in the actual world.

(2') there is suffering in the actual world.

(not-3') Therefore, there is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow the suffering in the actual world.

This very sparse defence is helpful for thinking about some of the issues both McNaughton and Fischer raise. As Fischer asks, what is wrong with a sparse defence?[10] Why should one think that this very

[9] See William Rowe, 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16 (1979), 335–41.

[10] Fischer adds that any sparse defence has to be consistent with the standard divine attributes; and he wonders in this connection whether my own defence is not inconsistent

sparse defence is not successful? What are the criteria for success in the project of defence that rule out a sparse defence such as the G.E. Moore shift or that make it inadequate in some way?

The answers to these questions are implicit in William Rowe's own influential formulation of the evidential argument from evil. As Rowe constructed the evidential argument from evil in his classic article 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', there is a small ancillary argument that purports to show premiss (3') true.

On Rowe's version of the evidential argument, if it is successful, the small ancillary argument shows that the sparse defence yields a conclusion which is false. That is, if Rowe's ancillary argument is successful, then it can be shown that there is no morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering. And if that is so, then since the sparse defence is valid, it follows that at least one of the premises in the sparse defence must be false. But it has only two. Therefore, since premiss (2') is conceded to be true by all parties to the dispute, the false premiss has to be premiss (1'), the premiss claiming that an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God exists in the actual world. And so the sparse defence is shown to be unsuccessful. The conclusion of the evidential argument from evil stands: God does not exist.

In my view, any other sparse defence will be a version of the G.E. Moore shift, and it will succumb in similar ways. The matrix Fischer imagines God as using will yield a kind of morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering, insofar as that matrix is supposed to justify God in allowing suffering. And so if Rowe's small ancillary argument for premiss (3') is successful, it will undermine not just the G.E. Moore shift but any analogous sparse defence, such as Fischer's sparse defence involving God's matrix.

But notice that the all-important premiss (3') of the evidential argument from evil is a claim about the way things are in the actual world – all the suffering in the actual world is such that it is not defeated by a morally sufficient reason justifying God in allowing it – and therefore so is its denial in a defence.

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with God's goodness since it rests on the claim that God made human beings in such a way that they need healing through suffering. But here Fischer has misunderstood me. I claimed explicitly that my defence presupposes that God is not responsible for the internally alienated psychic state of human beings; and, in connection with the doctrine of original sin, I argued in detail that my account is consistent with the standard divine attributes, including omnipotence. See *WID,* pp. 153-155.

There are two ways a defence can fail then. Obviously, if the defence is itself inconsistent, then it fails. Plantinga spent a great deal of effort to show that human free will is not incompatible with divine omnipotence, in order to show that the free will defence is compatible with the standard divine attributes. But a defence will also fail if it can be shown that its claims about the way the world is are false. On one basis or another, a defence against the evidential argument from evil has to make a claim about the way the world is: according to the defence, all the suffering in the world is such that it is defeated by a morally sufficient reason justifying God in allowing it. If it can be shown that this claim about the way the world is is false, the defence will have been shown to be unsuccessful, too. For a defence to be successful, then, in addition to internally consistency in the defence, it has to be the case that its crucial empirical claims are not shown to be false.

In *WID*, in explaining this point, I said that it would take uncontested empirical evidence to show the empirical claim of a defence false. In different ways, Fischer and McNaughton are each concerned about my criteria for success in a defence. In particular, they think that my understanding of the requirement for showing false the crucial empirical claims of a defence are too demanding. On their view, this requirement sets the bar too high for those attempting to rebut a defence.[11]

But here I think we have to remember the dialectic of the debate. The attack on theism by means of the argument from evil wants to show that theism is false, that God does not exist; and it claims that it can show this on the basis of facts about suffering. But then the attack needs to use only premises that are not themselves points of dispute between theism and atheism. It would make no difference to theism if it turned out, unsurprisingly enough, that a mix of theistic beliefs with beliefs rejected by theists formed an inconsistent set. Suppose, for example, that the argument from evil included the claim that all suffering causes human beings to become more internally fragmented in psyche. This is a claim that theists will certainly find incompatible with their beliefs about God. So the mix of this empirical claim and theistic belief will in fact constitute an inconsistent set, but this fact will not trouble theists, who will simply

[11] Similar objections are raised by Paul Draper in his review of *WID* in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (July 27, 2011) <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24772-wandering-in-darkness-narrative-and-the-problem-of-suffering> [accessed 08/09/2012], and by William Hasker, 'Light in the Darkness? Reflections on Eleonore Stump's Theodicy', *Faith and Philosophy*, 28 (2011), 432-50.

reject the empirical claim about the effects of suffering in human lives. So if the argument from evil is to have a chance of being successful, it cannot itself rest on controverted empirical claims rejected by theists.

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

And that is why I claimed that a defence that is internally consistent and not in violation of uncontested empirical evidence is successful.

Is there then uncontested empirical evidence to show that the empirical claims of the defence in *WID* are false? This question brings me back to Fischer's sparse defence and Rowe's small ancillary argument that purports to refute every version of a sparse defence. What is Rowe's support for the crucial premiss (3')? Unless that support is successful, it seems that a sparse defence, such as the G.E. Moore shift, should be sufficient to rebut the evidential argument from evil, in the form Rowe gave it.

Rowe's support for premiss (3') is actually very simple. It comes essentially to this:

Rowe's ancillary argument for premiss (3'):

Premiss (P) It appears that there is no morally sufficient reason for God's allowing the suffering in the actual world.

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

A large literature has arisen around this ancillary argument for premiss (3'), and two different ways of undermining it have emerged.

On one of these ways, one can call in question the support (P) gives to (3'). It can happen, for different kinds of reason, that appearances are a very unreliable guide to reality. For example, if our perceptual or cognitive capacities are insufficient to detect the thing in question, then with regard to that thing the way things appear to our perception or cognition is not a reliable guide to the way things are. Sceptical theism is one version of this kind of response to Rowe's argument.

But a second way to respond to Rowe's argument is to try to find a morally sufficient reason that God could have to allow suffering. If one *can* give a morally sufficient reason that could justify God's allowing the suffering in the actual world, then the appearance that there is no such reason is undermined. (And if one can also explain why that morally sufficient reason would be difficult to detect, then in addition there is good reason for supposing that appearances are not an adequate guide to the way things are.)

It was widely thought that the attack on theism posed by Rowe's evidential argument from evil was irrefutable by this second way of constructing a defence against it. Like Rowe himself, promoters of this version of the argument from evil often took some real or imagined heart-breaking example of suffering and then, by way of challenge, asked explicitly or implicitly how anyone could be so shameless as to try to give a reason that could justify God's allowing that evil.

And *that* is the version of the attack on theism by means of an argument from evil that I was responding to. The defence I constructed was tailored to the sort of attack mounted by Rowe and others in the formulation of the evidential argument from evil that they gave.

The philosophical or left-brain part (as Paul Draper[12] and Fischer have called it) of the defence I constructed, shows the epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, psychology, and theology of a world within which there is a morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering of the sort found in the actual world. This part of the defence also shows why that reason is hard to see. So, without supporting sceptical theism, the left-brain part of the defence undermines Rowe's argument from evil in both the ways in which it is vulnerable.

On the other hand, the narrative or right-brain part of the defence gives detailed examples of the particular ways in which that morally sufficient reason might operate in the particular life histories of individual people. The stories prompt intuitions about the details and the particulars, and they also provide insight into why appearances are a bad guide to reality in such cases.

[12] See Paul Draper's review of *WID* in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, op. cit. Draper's review, which is the toughest review the book has received, is also in my view the deepest and most insightful of all the responses to the book. His philosophical acuity and his great personal integrity are both in evidence in his review, and I admire him greatly on both scores.

And here it is worth saying a word about the question Fischer raises: why bother with defence at all? Why not try to give a theodicy? For that matter, one might ask, why not simply say that my defence is a theodicy? The usual reason given for preferring a defence to a theodicy is that a defence does not claim to give actual reasons for God to allow evil and that there is no reason to think finite human beings could know the mind of God. Some versions of sceptical theism are expressions of this or an analogous attitude. But, in the defence I constructed, there is no reliance on sceptical theism. On the contrary, the defence is not shy about attributing to God particular reasons for allowing suffering. The defence attributes a particular set of reasons for allowing suffering to God and claims God's revelation as warrant for doing so. So why shouldn't this defence simply be taken as a theodicy?

The answer lies in the very richness of the defence, to which Fischer calls attention. As part of the defence, I adopted a particular set of views in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and moral psychology, together with a particular set of positions in psychology, and a particular Thomistic theology. *All* of this is part of the defence. If I were to claim that this is a theodicy rather than a defence, I would also have to claim that each of these views and positions is true; and then I would be responsible for giving some arguments for each of them. At that point, my book would have become a library. But because my project is only a defence, I do not have to claim that each of the philosophical, psychological, or theological positions I adopt is true. I have to make only the much more limited claim that each of them could be true in a world very much like ours as regards human beings and suffering.

So one way to think of a defence such as mine is as a conditional theodicy. *If* the actual world is the way I have described the possible world of the defence as regards metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, psychology, and theology, *then* my account is a theodicy, which rebuts the attack of the evidential argument from evil by giving the morally sufficient reasons God actually has for allowing the suffering found in the actual world.

And this brings me to the version of the argument from evil in which Fischer and McNaughton express interest. It is yet another attack on theism, and it has a form different from Rowe's evidential argument. This version of the attack on theism does not depend crucially on the claim that there is no morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil, or on support for that claim from the appearances of the world. Instead,

this attack relies on a comparison of theism and naturalism with regard to plausibility or probability or simplicity or epistemic surprise or something else along these lines. This attack is a matter of considering naturalism and theism as rival candidates for a grand unifying theory of everything, and then judging that naturalism is the better theory of the two because it gives a more plausible or more probable or more simple or less surprising explanation of the actual world, given that there is suffering in the world.[13]

I myself do not see why anyone would suppose that theism should turn to a theodicy or a defence for help with *this* attack. Evaluation of comparisons between grand unified theories of everything, and criteria for such evaluation, belong to the province of philosophy of science and epistemology, not to the realm of either theodicy or defence, as far as I can see. But whatever the area of philosophy may be that has global theory comparison as part of its domain, evaluation of competing grand unified theories (GUTs) of everything is not going to be an easy job.

Pretty clearly, comparing naturalism and theism as rival GUTs will be a much harder job than comparing competing theories of the nature of light, say, or theories of the disease-causing agent for bovine spongiform encephalitis.[14] The explananda for naturalism considered as a GUT range from physics to music, from neuroscience to consciousness, from sociology to morality, from developmental psychology to awe at beauty and self-sacrificial love. It is not an easy matter to say which GUT is a better explanation across the board of all these things. Or, as Gasser

[13] In his review of *WID*, Draper makes it clear that he too thinks the argument from evil should be understood and formulated in this way. William Hasker's claims that a defence has to be such that, given theism, we have no strong or good reason to think its claims false fall into the same family of views. (See Hasker, 'Light in the Darkness?'.) That is because, as Gasser's paper helps to make clear, what one takes to be a good or strong reason is a function of all the other things one believes.

[14] Bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE), or mad cow disease, which is a variant of a disease found in human beings and other species, is now believed to be caused by a prion, a protein only, that is, a molecule without DNA or RNA. But when Stanley Prusiner coined the term 'prion' in 1982, most researchers assumed that disease-causing agents had to be caused by some living organism and so had to be caused by something which included either DNA or RNA. The idea that a simple protein could be a disease-causing agent greatly complicated the picture of disease then widely shared, and so Prusiner's claim that BSE is caused by a prion was initially met with great scepticism and severe criticism. It was widely thought, in the 1980s, that his experiments were defective and that he had derived wrong conclusions from them. But Prusiner was right, and in 1997 he won the Nobel prize for his work on prions.

might put it, it is not so easy to give an evaluative comparison of highly differing worldviews.

In his own formulation of this version of the attack on theism, Paul Draper bases his argument from evil on the claim that, in the face of suffering in the world, naturalism is a simpler theory of the world than theism.[15] But consider the problems facing Draper in trying to make a comparison of this sort.

To begin with, what makes a theory simple? Is a theory simple in virtue of having only a small number of laws? In virtue of postulating only a small number of entities? In virtue of postulating only entities and laws that are themselves simple? And what makes an entity or a law simple? In addition, even if we could find a good set of criteria for simplicity in theories, what makes one theory simpler than another? If one theory postulates more laws but fewer entities than another theory that postulates fewer laws but more entities, which is the simpler theory? If one theory postulates many laws and many entities but leaves nothing unexplained, is it a simpler theory than one which has fewer laws and fewer entities but also has a number of unexplained brute facts?

Even if we agreed on all these issues, how are we to weigh simplicity against other virtues of a theory? A theory could be simple but dead wrong, because the phenomena it is attempting to describe are themselves complicated. Earlier competing theories of the nature of light were very simple by comparison with quantum mechanics, for example.[16] According to contemporary descriptions of quantum mechanics, quantum mechanics tells us that light is both a wave and a particle, that a particle can be both decayed and not decayed, that a cat can be both alive and dead, and that particles at opposite ends of the universe can be entangled, so that they operate in tandem even when there is no possibility of a signal passing between them. Surely, this is a very complicated theory of light, much less simple than its earlier competitors. But, according to contemporary physics, the complicated theory is right, and the earlier, simpler theories are false.

Very roughly analogous things can be said as regards probability, plausibility, and epistemic surprise. What makes one theory more

[15] I am grateful to Draper for sharing with me in advance material from his forthcoming book on this subject, which will be impressive, judging from what I have seen of it. See also his review of *WID*.

[16] I am focusing here just on the example involving light, but see footnote 14 for a similar example involving disease-causing agents.

plausible or less surprising than another will depend on very many things, difficult to evaluate. And, in addition, there will be great subjective variability. What one person finds plausible or surprising depends on the other things that person believes. Few biologically literate people now find it surprising or implausible to suppose that a virus can cause a cancer that runs in families. We understand now that a virus can hijack the genome of an organism, and that some genomes are more vulnerable than others to the onslaught of particular viruses. But a hundred years ago, when we knew very little about the nature of genes or the operation of viruses, the idea that a virus could cause a sarcoma which runs in families seemed wildly implausible, outrageously surprising, to most biologists. It seemed so improbable a notion that no one bothered even to try to replicate the experiments Rous reported in 1911. It was not until 1966 that Rous won the Nobel prize for his discoveries – which seemed so implausible and surprising in 1911.

So, for all these reasons, I do not think it will be an easy matter to show that, with naturalism and theism taken as grand unified theories of everything, naturalism is to be preferred to theism. Or, to put it in Gasser's terms, I do not think it will be easy to weigh worldviews and give a good argument that the naturalistic one is in every way preferable to the theistic one.

So this latest version of the attack on theism, with its formulation of the argument from evil depending on global theory comparison, does not look particularly promising to me. But whatever its merits may be, it is not the form of the attack my defence is meant to defend against. I am grateful to Gasser, Fischer, and McNaughton for their thoughtful comments and questions which helped me to clarify further than I had originally done what the project of my defence is.

IV. THE HARDEST CASES

Finally, McNaughton and I agree about which cases are the hardest for the defence in *WID*, and I want to finish by saying one more word about them. These cases were a special focus for me in *WID.* There I said that,

> By his choices and actions, it is possible for one creature to destroy entirely any office of love he had or might have had with another. The entire system of creation, as Aquinas sees it, is predicated on this sort of possibility, even for God. There cannot be a union of love between two persons, even if one of them is divine, unless there are *two* persons.

> Something whose will is completely determined by another cannot be united with that other; there is only one will in such a case, not the two needed for union. For God, ... to be willing to take another person, with an independent will, as the desire of the heart is to accept the possibility of being rejected instead of being loved.[17]

On these views, if Paula has her daughter Julia as the desire of her heart, then it is entirely possible for Paula to lose her heart's desire irrevocably. How, then, could it be possible for God nonetheless to provide for Paula her heart's desire, even in a refolded form, as the defence in *WID* requires? As McNaughton sees it, there is no good answer to this question.

The problem with McNaughton's position is its tacit presupposition that a person who rejects love is the same as she would be if she accepted love. But this presupposition is mistaken, in my view, and it makes a great difference to the assessment of the satisfaction of a heart's desire for that person.

On the kind of example McNaughton has in mind, Julia is the heart's desire of her mother Paula, but Julia rejects Paula's love as well as God's and goes to the bad (as McNaughton puts it). For the sake of adding concreteness to the example and thereby aiding intuition, suppose that Julia's going to the bad includes Julia's being addicted to drugs and supporting her habit by theft and drug-dealing. In the beginning of Julia's choices to continue her drug habit by dealing and stealing, Paula will do all she can for Julia; and she will hope against hope that Julia can be redeemed and restored to her mother's love. But after years of struggle, during which Paula suffers one pain, one defeat, after another because of Julia's continual betrayal of her mother's love, Paula will come to understand that Julia is what her choices have made her: a selfish thief, a callous drug-dealer, an irredeemable drug addict. At that point, Paula will no longer want Julia to live with her. At that point, *no one* will want Julia to live with her, because no one will want the kinds of depredations Julia invariably brings with her.

Even in these circumstances, at this point, it is still possible for Paula (or for anyone else) to love Julia; but, because of what Julia has become, the office of love will change from what it might have been. For example, Paula's desire to have Julia as part of her daily life (which is the form a desire for union with Julia would have had in Paula) will change in Paula to become only compassion for Julia held at a distance. And the

[17] *WID,* p. 474.

desire for Julia's good will change into a desire to give whatever care Julia will still accept.

But these changes in Paula's desires of love for Julia will not leave Paula in a state of heart-brokenness if Paula has woven her desire for Julia into a deepest heart's desire for God, as I argued in *WID*. Interwoven in that way, Paula's love for Julia will be situated within Paula's participation in union with God, shared with other persons who are also united to God in love. The loneliness Julia has willed for herself cannot take away the joy of that shared union for Paula. On the contrary, Julia's choices have changed her from the dear companion she might have been for Paula to a hard-edged destructive creature, cold-hearted to others, focused only on feeding her habit.

Seen in this way, Julia is not someone who rejects Paula; she is someone who excludes herself from the joy in which Paula's life is lived. And so what might have been an active desire on Paula's part to have Julia as an intimate part of her life will become an encompassing compassion, content to offer as much care as possible to a person who has walled herself off from love. In this shape, Paula's heart's desire for Julia *can* be satisfied.

Even in these hardest cases, then, a heart's desire can refold and be satisfied in that refolded form. If Julia rejects the love of Paula and of God, it is still open to Paula to love Julia as she can from within the joy of union with God. In that condition, even her grief over Julia's rejection of love can be encompassed in the fulfilment of Paula's deepest heart's desire to love God and be loved by him. In the face of Julia's rejection, Paula's heart's desire for Julia, like God's own desire for those of his creatures who reject him, has to refold from a desire for realized union to a desire for giving compassion and care. But, refolded in this way, it is also capable of fulfilment from within the joy of the shared union of love with God.

So I share McNaughton's sensitive judgment that such cases are the hardest ones for theodicy and defence. But, in my view, the (real or imagined) details of such cases point to a resolution of those cases, too. As I argued in *WID*, *ultimately,* one person's darkness cannot take away another person's joy. But that is what would happen if Julia's willed loneliness left Paula permanently heartbroken.

No one has put this point better than C.S. Lewis, in my view. In addressing this same issue (though under a different guise), C.S. Lewis has one of the redeemed in heaven say to her husband, who will not accept her love or God's,

> Frank, ... listen to reason. Did you think joy was created to live always ... defenceless against those who would rather be miserable than have their self-will crossed? ... You made yourself really wretched. That you can still do. But you can no longer communicate your wretchedness. ... Our light can swallow up your darkness: but your darkness cannot now infect our light.[18]

Lewis has his own character in the story comment doubtingly on this speech, 'Is it really tolerable that she should be untouched by his misery, even his self-made misery?' In response, his teacher in the story says,

> That sounds very merciful but see what lurks behind it. ... The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: till they consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy: that theirs should be the final power ... I know it has a grand sound to say ye'll accept no salvation which leaves even one creature in the dark outside. But watch that sophistry or ye'll make a Dog in a Manger the tyrant of the universe.[19]

CONCLUSION

With that final response, let me conclude by saying one more time how much I appreciate all the stimulating comments of all these papers. I am grateful for the thoughtfulness and insights which their authors have brought to bear on *Wandering in Darkness* and on the important questions about suffering that are of great concern to all of us.[20]

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[18] C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2001), pp. 132-133.

[19] C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, pp. 135-146.

[20] In addition to the authors to whose papers I am responding here, others also need to be thanked. I am particularly grateful to conversations with Paul Draper and the participants in the 2011 St. Thomas Summer Seminar in Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology, organized by Michael Rota and Dean Zimmerman, under the aegis of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. I am also grateful for the comments and questions from participants in the APA Pacific Division session held on *WID* and from participants in the workshop on *WID* held at the University of Innsbruck and organized by Georg Gasser.

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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John Hick. *Between Faith and Doubt: Dialogues on Religion and Reason*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

As one would expect, John Hick's latest book is honest, bold, lucid, down to earth and lively. With his usual clarity, Hick has produced an accessible introduction to key questions in philosophy of religion, this time suitable for A-level and undergraduate students and interested non-specialists. The book familiarises readers with subjects as wide-ranging as realism and irrealism, mind-brain identity and mind-body dualism, neuroscience, telepathy, Kabbala and Sufi mysticism, and much else besides.

Between Faith and Doubt takes the form of a dialogue between John himself, and David, an imaginary physicalist friend. Two other characters participate briefly in the dialogue: Donwi, an amalgamation of Don Cupitt and Dewi Phillips, and Grace, an 'ordinary' churchgoer whose initial questions serve as a catalyst for John's introduction to historical biblical criticism, but who later champions the integrity of religious praxis as a counterbalance to John's rationalist approach to religious belief.

Chapter one outlines religious and materialist worldviews. David provides three possible explanations for religion (Durkheim's, Marx's and Freud's). John argues that materialism is itself a form of faith because it is intensely believed but cannot be proved. The relationship between science and religion is discussed.

In addition to these topics, the discussion of *subjectivity* in this chapter may also be useful to students. John defines 'subjectivity' as occurring in our consciousness and only accessible to the experiencer, making the point (often not grasped by students) that all experience (including religious experience) is subjective, but that this does not render it erroneous or inauthentic.

In chapters two and three, John and David join forces in debunking the ontological and designs arguments and classical theism. In chapter two, John argues that even if a version of the design argument did work, it would not entail the God of religion. In chapter three, John rejects classical theism, partly due to reservations about the coherence of 'omnipotence', 'omniscience', and 'infinite person', and partly because divine intervention would render God responsible, by omission, for non-averted suffering. A distinction is made between intercessory prayer (which assumes an arbitrary God), and loving-kindness meditation on someone's behalf. (While John rightly attributes this to Buddhism, it is interesting that a similar idea is found in Hick's own Quaker tradition, expressed as 'holding someone in the light'.)

John puts forward the idea that there are many gods (also called angels or *devas)* who can influence us via the psychic or mental network through which we are all connected. When people pray they are sometimes talking to these gods, though, equally, they are sometimes simply experiencing hallucinations. John also argues that Judaism, Islam and Christianity do not describe the same deity, and are therefore three distinct but overlapping monotheisms.

Chapter four contrasts non-realism and physicalism (on the one hand) and realist religion (on the other) in their views of the afterlife. John points out that denying an afterlife is bad news for humanity as a whole since most people are prevented from fulfilling their potential in this life by oppression, poverty, lack of opportunities, and premature death. Donwi counters that even people born into the worst circumstances have 'their share of life and love and beauty' and that we should not write off any life as not worth living (p. 37).

In chapter five, John notes that his own philosophy is rooted in religious experience. Like many others', John's religious experiences involved a sense of the goodness and friendliness of, and unity with, the rest of reality. Like David, John thinks that religious experience can be illusory, but John cites Teresa of Avila's criterion of the fruits or 'jewels' of an experience for discerning whether it is real. Against this, David points out that some illusions (e.g. placebos) can have a positive effect.

In chapter six, John sets out to explain why he thinks that people are entitled to trust their religious experiences. Disagreeing with Dawkins' claim that the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis, he argues that it is rather a fundamental belief, like the belief that other people exist. The belief that others exist is based on sensory experience; religious belief

is based on religious experience. It is rational to trust our experiences unless there is reason to distrust them. David argues that religious experiences are untrustworthy because, unlike sense experiences, they are not i) compulsory; ii) universal; iii) uniform. John replies to i) and ii) by outlining the idea of epistemic distance, which, he argues, can be applied to both theistic and non-theistic traditions.

Chapter seven is about why religious experience is not uniform. John argues that critical realism provides a way by which we can see different, seemingly-contradictory, religious experiences as authentic responses to the same ultimate reality. The ultimate is unknowable, but we experience its phenomena according to our existing categories. The findings of neurological experiments on meditatives and contemplatives from different traditions are cited as evidence.

David raises the objection that pluralism is antithetical to each of the religions themselves. John concedes that pluralism is unacceptable to the leaders of the religious organisations, but argues that it is present in the religions' mystical strands.

John suggests that the authenticity of a religious tradition can be gauged by the extent to which its adherents are transformed from self-centredness to other-centredness. While this is unquantifiable, all major religions seem roughly successful (or unsuccessful), and so all are equally valid responses to the ultimate.

Chapters eight and nine concern whether neuroscientific experiments that produce religious experiences prove that religious experiences are inauthentic, or simply show that they have a neural correlate. Chapter eight looks at mind-brain identity, the mystery of consciousness, Popper's principle of falsification, and determinism. Chapter nine focuses on whether drug-induced experiences can be regarded as mystical experiences, and whether they demonstrate that religious experiences are illusory.

Chapter ten explores the implications of John's philosophy for Christianity. John outlines the historical critical problems with traditional Christianity, such as contradictions between the different resurrection narratives, suggesting that the disciples saw visions of Jesus rather than a physical appearance. Grace argues that the creed should not be seen as a list of propositions to which believers assent but, rather, as a declaration of belonging to a community that is part of a two thousand year old tradition.

John argues that rejecting the incarnation is necessary because belief in the incarnation is (he contends) linked to Christian exclusivism. This is because the incarnation 'means that Christianity alone among the religions of the world was founded by God in person.' (p. 107).

In chapter eleven, John discusses frequently ignored non-conservative movements within Islam: liberal intellectual Islam (particularly Abdulkarim Soroush) which stresses the mediated, contextualised nature of the Qur'an, and Sufi mysticism. He agrees that the majority of Muslims are less egalitarian, but points out that, globally speaking, most Muslims are poor and ill-educated, and therefore accept what the imams tell them.

Chapter twelve concerns whether religion has had a harmful or beneficial effect on the world. John distinguishes between religious organisations (which have a mixed record) and the inner experiential aspect of religion. David raises the problematic connection between right-wing religion and right-wing politics in the USA, and John agrees, citing the 'heretic trials' he underwent, and more extreme discrimination suffered by some of his friends. John argues that religious wars and terrorist attacks tend to be political rather than genuinely religious, and suggests that, of all the major religions, Buddhism has had the least violent past.

Chapter thirteen outlines the problem of evil, the free will defense, person-making theodicy, the value of epistemic distance, and the appeal to an eschatological resolution. Among other objections, David argues that there is an excess *amount* of suffering for soul-making which a good God would not allow. John responds that, in order for the world to be person-making, we must not be able to see that it is person-making.

In chapter fourteen, John says that he does not believe in life after death on the basis of evidence such as spiritual mediums, though he is open to the possibility of a 'psychic factor' that persists after someone's death, and believes in telepathy (or ESP). John's belief in life after death is rather an inference from his religious understanding of the universe: 'Human existence must be a project, not a dead end' (p. 150). John posits reincarnation (on this or other planets) as the most plausible model of afterlife for person-making, though he is sceptical of memories of previous lives. The continuant is not memory, but the dispositional structure formed by the karmic process. David points out that this means the mortality of our present conscious selves and John agrees, saying that we need to think of ourselves as 'like runners in a relay race, each passing the torch onto the next' (p. 158).

In chapter fifteen, John characterises the religious outlook as one that is pessimistic about the present, but optimistic about the future. He argues that, in being an atheist, David is missing out on having the benefit of a sense of the ultimate goodness of the universe. They conclude that the reason they disagree is not intellectual but experiential: John bases his outlook on religious experience (including but not limited to his own) while David does not have religious experience as part of his 'data'.

Between Faith and Doubt is explicitly intended for atheists and agnostics (*ix*). Equally, however, it would be of interest to people within a religious tradition who wish to think through their faith, or to people who affirm a spiritual dimension but who do not belong to a particular tradition. Despite the intended atheist/agnostic audience, the book does not seem straightforwardly to be an apologetic, as is shown by the fact that David is not converted to John's beliefs by the end. While John's beliefs and experiences receive rather more attention than David's, the overall tone is one of mutual respect combined with a recognition of the teleological ambiguity of the universe.

Between Faith and Doubt is a pedagogical treasure trove. The chapters are short, making them manageable for students and non-academics. The dialogue format draws the reader in. It also imparts Hick's approach to philosophy of religion as investigation and dialogue rather than attack and defence, setting a good exploratory tone. Individual chapters would be suitable for reading in a classroom or seminar context as a springboard for a discussion of the topic. As with all his works, Hick's enthusiasm for the subject is likely to inspire most students. This is in combination with the humility inherent in his writing, which may encourage students lacking confidence to articulate their own views. In contrast to most other accessible philosophy of religion books, the *non*-neutral stance and very personal engagement makes it difficult for apathetically inclined students to sit on the fence.

The book is primarily intended for non-specialists. At the same time, established philosophers and theologians who read it will be rewarded by an up-to-date account of Hick's ever-evolving beliefs. *Between Faith and Doubt* also shows how Hick's specific personal experiences (religious experience, being subject to a heresy trial, witnessing a spiritualist séance) have influenced his thinking.

The book is nicely produced. The quality of writing and editing is high. The cover image, a dramatic blue and yellow astrological scene, is compelling and mirrors a major theme of the book: physicalist and

religious interpretations of an ambiguous cosmos. An index and endnotes are provided. In keeping with the book's overall light touch, the index is simple to use, but more than sufficiently detailed for the general readership for which it is intended.

It would not be in the spirit of Hick's work or person to discuss his latest book without critically engaging with some of his arguments and ideas (as they are presented here).

First, John does not address David's point that an illusion (such as a placebo) can nevertheless produce a positive effect. This is a problematic omission because the same point could be applied as a criticism to John's rule that a religion is a valid response to the ultimate if its 'fruits' include transformation from self-centredness to other-centredness. Here, John seems to me to be erroneously conflating what is helpful (personally transforming) with what is true (a valid response to the ultimate, and a reflection of the religion's truth value).

Second, John sees a necessary connection between the incarnation and Christian exclusivism where, I argue, none exists (there is no contradiction in believing that Jesus is divine and that the other religions are equally valid responses to the ultimate reality). Perhaps there is a suppressed premise in John's argument (i.e. that a religion founded by a divine person is likely to be less 'mediated' and contextualised, and thus more true, than a religion founded by a non-divine person). However, this premise is not self-evident, particularly when the matter is complicated by the divine person also being fully human (and so limited and contextualised).

Third, and relatedly, John characterises incarnational Christianity as believing that 'God came down from heaven to earth in the person of Jesus to found a new religion – Christianity' (p. 107). This is a simplistic and rather Docetic caricature of Christian theology. It also overlooks the fact that most modern Christians agree that Jesus did not wish to found a religion separate to Judaism. That Paul, not Jesus, was the founder of Christianity, and that Jesus remained a Jew throughout his life, is now well recognised among most Christians.

Fourth, John offers no evidence for his claim that, in order to be person-making, we must not be able to see that the world is person-making (p. 143). The claim is not self-evidently true, and it might equally well be argued that the person-making quality of suffering would be more likely to be actualised if the sufferer were aware that that was its purpose. The claim also calls into question the person-making potential

of suffering in the case of Hick and others who accept his theodicy (since they 'see' that the suffering is soul-making, and that makes it less so).

Fifth, it seems to me that there are some unresolved issues about basing religious belief on religious experience. In John's and others' cases, the religious experience occurred once the subject already had a religious outlook. While this does not necessarily discredit the religious experience (though an interesting question is raised about whether they are 'seeing with the eyes of faith' or exhibiting a confirmation bias), it does imply that the experience cannot be the *basis* of the belief or outlook, because the belief or outlook occurred prior to it.

These and other issues mean that there is a great deal in this book for readers to get their teeth into. *Between Faith and Doubt* is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to accessible philosophy of religion literature, and a worthy addition to Hick's phenomenal corpus.

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Paul K. Moser. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology.* Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Like many other philosophers writing today, Paul Moser believes that God's existence is *hidden*, at least for some people at some times, meaning that God's existence "fails to be not only obvious but also beyond cognitively reasonable doubt" (p. 1). In this book, Moser presents an original approach to divine hiddenness and explores the implications of this approach for religious epistemology. He argues not only that hiddenness fails to rationally support a skeptical attitude to divine reality but also that a proper understanding of divine purposes in self-revelation should lead us to *expect* hiddenness. The book's central thesis is that we should expect conclusive evidence of God's existence to be *purposively available* – that is, available in a way that "accommodates the distinctive purposes of a perfectly loving God." Such purposes, says Moser, "would aim noncoercively but authoritatively to transform human purposes to agree with divine purposes, despite human resistance of various and sundry sorts" (p. 2). On Moser's account, then, God is hidden from some people at some times because such people, through their unwillingness

to be transformed by God, are not well-positioned to receive (or respond to) purposively available evidence of divine reality. According to Moser, the book marks "a Copernican Revolution in cognitive matters about God's existence" (p. 4), necessitating what he calls a seismic shift in the epistemology of religious belief. At the heart of this shift is the importance placed on the human will, over and above the human intellect, in receiving and responding to conclusive evidence of divine reality. The aim in what follows is to provide a brief summary of the book's contents, and then to try and anticipate some of the concerns that some readers may have.

In chapter one, Moser makes an important distinction between what he terms 'spectator evidence' and 'perfectly authoritative evidence'. The former is "evidence pointing to some truth but *not* demanding that its recipients yield their wills to (the will of) the source of the evidence" (p. 46). The latter is evidence which does make such a demand. Moser argues that a perfectly loving God who is interested in establishing genuinely redemptive relationships with human beings would forego spectator evidence of God's existence (which, even if conclusive, would be merely academic and would fail to challenge us in the relevant and appropriate way(s)). Instead, such a God would reveal himself purposively and authoritatively (so as to challenge our wills), in a manner that is "akin to evidence from conscience" (p. 62). The absence of a person's experience of this evidence in no way makes skepticism normative for others, says Moser, since it may be that this absence is due to the person's unwillingness to receive such purposively available authoritative evidence (hereafter PAAE).

Chapter two develops in more detail the notion of PAAE and explores the reasons for which a perfectly loving God might choose to remain hidden (at least from some people at some times). A non-exhaustive list of these reasons, Moser suggests, includes: "(a) to teach people to yearn for ... personal fellowship with God, (b) to strengthen grateful trust in God ..., (c) to remove human complacency toward God ..., (d) to shatter destructively prideful human self-reliance, and (e) to prevent people who aren't ready for fellowship with God from explicitly rejecting God" (p. 107). The third chapter explores God's invitation to set aside our selfishness and be willingly transformed so that we love others (even enemies) in a way that more closely approximates the divine unselfish love for us, exemplified so powerfully in Jesus. Of particular interest in this chapter is Moser's discussion of the underlying epistemology of his account of our

knowing God on the basis of PAAE. Moser argues that "God's intervening Spirit ... witnesses to, and thus confirms, God's reality *directly* for willingly receptive people at God's chosen time" and that this "yields firsthand foundational (that is, noninferential) evidence and knowledge of God's reality" (p. 150). Interestingly, readers may think at this point that Moser is offering us Reformed Epistemology for evidentialists (with the concept of evidence broadened to include PAAE). This characterization seems accurate enough. Moser seems to agree with reformed epistemologists that belief in God can be 'properly basic'; the main difference is that Moser wants to characterize his view as evidentialist. What is truly surprising is that Moser mentions "reformed epistemology" (and "Plantinga") in only one paragraph, in the final chapter.

Chapter four discusses the revolutionary changes that would take place in philosophy if more philosophers prepared themselves to receive PAAE and let it transform their lives, in general, and their intellectual pursuits, in particular. "[P]hilosophers," says Moser, "should actually participate eagerly in the church community of God's people, as philosophical *servants* rather than self-avowed intellectual superiors, to identify its philosophical needs for the sake of the Good News and then to serve those needs in redemptive love" (p. 232). The last chapter expands on how the epistemological shift argued for in the previous chapters (i.e. the shift from spectator evidence to PAAE) is beneficial to *all* humans, since it puts us in a better position to address two of our most fundamental problems: destructive selfishness and impending death. An appendix to the book attempts to dispel any remaining skeptical worries.

The Elusive God is an interesting, insightful, and at times highly polemical work which provides an original theistic voice in the ongoing conversation about divine hiddenness. Moser's defense of the claim that cognitive issues related to God's existence are significantly affected by whether we humans are willing to be "transformed toward God's moral character of perfect love ..., thereby obediently yielding our wills to God's authoritative will" (p. 119) represents the book's most important contribution to contemporary religious epistemology. However, controversy will likely surround the notion that this contribution amounts to (or necessitates) a "Copernican Revolution in cognitive matters of God's existence," for reasons that we'll see below.

Moser thinks that an epistemology of PAAE is the only game in town once the relevant aims of a perfectly loving God (including the aim of challenging humans to yield their wills to divine purposes) are

fully appreciated and accounted for. He launches critiques against other purportedly viable contenders such as fideism, natural theology, and a religious epistemology centering on 'numinous' or mystical experiences (Plantinga's reformed epistemology is conspicuously absent from the list). Moser argues that fideism is an epistemological non-starter, since it "implausibly entails that theistic commitment need not rest for its cognitive status on supporting evidence," thus making theism "evidentially arbitrary and thus cognitively irrational" (p. 33, italics omitted). Mystical or numinous religious experiences are, says Moser, "not only unnecessary but also dangerous for experientially well-founded theistic belief," since they divert attention from what would be the main aim of God in giving us self-revelation – namely, "the purportedly redemptive manifestation of a divine authoritatively loving character worthy of worship and thus of obedient human submission" (p. 8). Moser's aversion to this kind of epistemology of religious experience is linked to his distaste for the evidences of natural theology in that he finds both to be spectacular, disinterested, and even academic or trivial with respect to the transformative challenge God makes upon our wills. Moser faults traditional natural theology (with its focus on cosmological, teleological, and other arguments for God's existence) and much recent work in the philosophy of religion for having "simply neglected [PAAE] for the sake of more comfortable, less challenging spectator evidence" (p. 53).

For Moser to make good on his advertisement of the book's "Copernican Revolution," he needs to defend two important claims:

> (1) A perfectly loving God would offer only PAAE to accomplish God's aims in self-revelation.

And:

> (2) Other, rival religious epistemologies offer at best only spectator evidence.

But readers may find ambiguity in Moser's position with respect to whether he wants to defend (1) or:

> (1*) A perfectly loving God would offer *primarily* PAAE to accomplish God's aims in self-revelation.

(1*) may be the easier of the two to defend but would, of course, somewhat weaken Moser's position (since defenders of rival religious epistemologies could agree with (1*)). In any case, many readers familiar with the Jewish and Christian religious traditions will note that there is

warrant (in both Scripture and theology) for thinking that God employs many resources – particularly the natural order – in self-revelation. Now Moser briefly discusses the apostle Paul's remarks to this effect in Romans 1:19-20, and says (p. 48) that the evidence mentioned in this passage yields only 'casual knowledge' that God exists (which would not be adequate to bring people to reconciliation with God). But many readers might find Moser's remarks here puzzling. For, this looks like an admission that God's existence may not be 'hidden' after all, whereas the main aim of the book is to offer an account of PAAE to explain why God is hidden (at least from some people at some times).

Concerning natural theology, Moser complains that "endless disputes about probabilities involving apparent design in biology or cosmology or about the need for an inaugural cause behind any parade of contingent causes and effects" are "esoteric" and have "nothing directly at all to do with God's inherent character of perfect authoritative love" (p. 136). He goes on to suggest that these arguments don't convince anyone not already committed to certain theistic presuppositions. But of course, many philosophers won't see the presence of intractable disagreement about an argument as an index of its evidential strength. Moreover, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Moser cites selfish attitudes and willful resistance to setting aside one's autonomy as reasons for why people do not receive (or if they receive, do not respond favorably to) PAAE. But for all we know, these same considerations explain why some people are not convinced by the arguments of natural theology.

Moser's contention in (2), above (that rival religious epistemologies offer, at best, only spectator evidence), is far from obvious. For example, suppose someone (call him Bob) carefully considers anthropic, big-bang cosmological, and fine-tuning arguments which point to the universe having been delicately designed so as to support the eventual appearance of human life (the latter being either a special act of creation or the intended outcome of an evolutionary process whose requisite initial conditions were put in place by the designer). William Lane Craig and others have argued that such arguments pack with them evidence that the designer is a personal Agent. Now suppose Bob finds himself convinced in this way that a very powerful, very knowledgeable, and personal Agent intended his (and other humans') existence. This evidence may well suggest to Bob questions such as whether there are more specific purposes that this Agent has concerning him, and whether this Agent has revealed himself in any other, more specific way. In considering such

questions, Bob may already be yielding (or at least beginning to yield) his will to his Creator. (Incidentally, something similar to this scenario is empirically confirmed in the faith journeys of many noted thinkers). So it is not clear that natural theology, for example, amounts to no more than spectator evidence. Readers might also wonder (a) why a numinous experience couldn't have as its object a demanding, authoritative God (and thus involve PAAE), and (b) why Moser, in claiming that only his religious epistemology accounts for PAAE, seems to ignore all of Plantinga's work on the role of the will in religious belief formation (see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, especially chapter seven).

It should be briefly pointed out that in chapter 3, Moser argues for what he calls the 'divine manifest-offering approach to atonement' while launching an in-house critique against "some of the Christian tradition" concerning the historically popular 'penal substitution' theory (which claims that God punished the sinless Jesus in place of sinful humanity – a claim Moser finds "morally distorted" (p. 174)). Whatever readers may think about the success or failure of this polemic, it is not germane to the main argument of the book, since Moser's account of PAAE seems consistent with both the manifest-offering and the penal substitution approaches to atonement.

Finally, with all due apologies to Moser, the book is incredibly verbose. In the 278 pages of text, the reader will be struck with the realization that some of the same phrases keep popping up over and over again, as do some of the same claims (often without additional argumentation). All things considered, it is reasonable to suppose that the book could have been condensed to around 150 pages. For readers familiar with Moser's previous, crisply argued work, this will seem an odd stylistic development. That said, the essential points Moser presents in *The Elusive God* make an important contribution to the epistemology of religious belief and should be taken seriously by present and future epistemologists and philosophers of religion.

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Kerry Walters. *Atheism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Continuum, 2010. Michael Bergmann, Michael Murray and Michael Rea (eds.) *Divine Evil: The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

It is nowadays almost as common to hear ranting about the stupidity of belief in the existence of God or ridiculing of New Atheists for their lack of philosophical acumen as it is to hear someone complaining about the level of so-called God-debate. Kerry Walters belongs to the latter group, and he seeks in his book to rehabilitate the God-debate by giving philosophical arguments the attention they deserve. This, in his view, is lacking in many public debates. For him, the existence of God is a metaphysical question and it is not directly linked with how believers live their lives and how bogus their practices might be. Walter's position, and the variety of atheism presented here, is thus an instance of philosophical atheism. He admits that many people do embrace belief or disbelief for reasons that are not reasons at all. For example, disbelief is in many cases caused by an unhappy state of affairs, such as unanswered prayers, negative experiences of believers, etc. But being a real atheist should include a rigorously argued philosophical stance. Walters recognizes that arguing something rigorously cannot be undertaken in less than 200 pages. Therefore, the book is not presented as a systematic argument for atheism but rather as a guide to the existing discussions. This is an improvement on New Atheist writers who suppose that it is possible, or even preferable, for readers to abandon their basic beliefs after reading a handful of claims that seem to contradict them.

Atheism begins with a lucid and helpful introduction to worldviews and belief-formation which is unfortunately absent from much of the contemporary discussion. Walters's claims that worldviews are to a great extent axiomatic and it is extremely hard for us come up with sustained arguments for or against them. We argue *from* our worldviews, not *for* them.

In order to elucidate the difference between theism and naturalism/atheism, Walters introduces a distinction between "Spartan" (naturalist) and "Baroque" (Theist) worldviews. A Spartan worldview is metaphysically minimalist, and those trained in Spartan rigour consider it a virtue to

have as few metaphysical beliefs as possible in order to avoid possibly false beliefs. By contrast, Baroque people are flamboyant and less rigid about what they consider to be possible and worthy of consideration. This is to my view a helpful characterization up to a certain point. Walters' discussion about the general worldview differences seems to boil down to claim that theists are willing to entertain questions such as "why is there something rather than nothing" while atheists do not consider this to be a question worthy of consideration. The crux of the matter lies in the fact that we do not seem to have ways for settling the dispute concerning whether that question is worth pursuing or not. Thus theism is at least initially a possible option and cannot be ruled out *a priori*.

Walters then goes quickly through some theistic and anti-theistic arguments, in order to give a sense of what is currently under discussion at a serious philosophical level. However, none of the arguments receive thorough treatment. This is the case also with natural explanations of religion (Marx, Freud, and contemporary evolutionary by-product arguments). Walters then briefly discusses the possibility of morality and meaning in an atheistic universe. In the section on morality, Walters makes a set of interesting distinctions (131). According to him, atheistic morality can be "objective" but not "absolute". This means that values can be "rationally grounded" and "non-subjective", while still being "relative". If I think that *p* is an objective, rationally grounded and non-subjective moral statement, which claims that "it is wrong to torture innocent people", what does it mean that it is at the same time "relative rather than absolute"? Walters goes on to state that "[atheistic] values will also be flexible enough to take into consideration extenuating circumstances arising from context, agent, and situation." So does this mean that there can be extenuating circumstances where *p* is not true? But this might appear to be pushing the meaning of 'objective' basically to mean 'subjective'. Or he might take 'objective' to mean 'inter-subjectivity', which is a common move in the philosophy of science. In this case morality is a communal agreement, which is, of course, better than mere idiosyncratic subjectivity but it is not moral realism.

The book ends with a treatment of atheistic spirituality, which Walter's defines as a "sense of interconnectedness and unity with all of creation". Walters thinks that this spiritual sphere is the place where rapprochement between theism and atheism can take place. The book ends with a hopeful note that both sides of the debate could learn from each other and benefit from each other's criticisms.

Regarding the general subject matter and arguments, Walters seems to think that the evidence game ends in a stalemate, and this holds for both theistic and anti-theistic alternatives. Philosophical inquiry leaves us with multiple worldview choices: Atheists do not seem to have enough philosophical leverage to convert theists, and vice versa.

In the end atheism seems to be a lifestyle choice that involves some epistemic considerations but is not exhausted by them. Being an atheist boils down to aesthetic considerations: it is a way of keeping your belief system simple (a way that can be contested on at least relatively good grounds). One person likes vanilla, while the other prefers triple chocolate with macadamias, but it is better to stay with vanilla because it is simpler.

Walters's book is a call for respecting dialogue. And indeed, the second book considered in this review aims to further precisely that. *Divine Evil* is a collection of essays based on a conference held at the University of Notre Dame in 2009. The conference brought together leading Christian philosophers (Alvin Plantinga, Peter van Inwagen, Eleanor Stump, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Swinburne, Mark C. Murphy, John Hare) and biblical scholars (Gary Anderson, Christopher Seitz) to debate atheist/agnostic philosophers (Evan Fales, Edwin Curley, Louise Antony, Paul Draper, Wes Morriston, James L. Crenshaw) about the moral character of God as it is presented to us in the pages of Hebrew Bible. With this kind of line-up you can expect a serious and interesting confrontation. The chosen theme incited heated responses during the conference itself (at which the author of this review was present), although the written contributions by contrast are (somewhat) more toned down. When the basic text is the Hebrew Bible, and especially its goriest narratives, tempers tend to rise. After all, people are discussing the meaning of the grounding documents of tradition they deeply love – or hate.

The approach in *Divine Evil* is quite distinct from Walters's more impersonal treatment. In many of the contributions by atheists moral anger towards God is clearly visible. Interestingly, recent studies in the psychology of religion (by e.g. Julie Exline & Alyce Martin) have demonstrated that atheists and agnostics, or those who are simply undecided, report more anger toward God than openly religious people. Many interpretations of these results are possible here. Are atheists simply saner and morally more robust than theists? Does faith involve some kind of naïveté or *sacrifium intellectus* and harmonization that denies the existence of divine evil that lurks in those pages? Are atheists angry because they are atheists, or atheists because they are angry? These

questions are not, of course, addressed in the book, but they give an extra angle how to read the contributions.

Obviously, one can form an argument based on moral outrage which might argue against theism from fact that the God of the Hebrew Bible is a "sadist bastard", "abuser", "sociopath", "incompetent", "uncaring", and a "monster" (just to quote some of the non-standard divine attributes that appear in the volume). From this basis it could be said that the Bible and its subsequent traditions are simply reprehensible since the source code is corrupted to the core. As Evan Fales plainly puts it: "I have offered an argument from the moral knowledge we share to the conclusion that any sacred text that is morally depraved is either no genuine revelation at all, or reveals the character of a god unworthy of worship. Such a god is moreover not merely unworthy of worship, but deserving of moral censure. We have a duty to repudiate such a god." (107) Edwin Curley takes this is a bit further claiming, "[i]f it [the Bible] was written under divine inspiration, God must have wanted to mislead us, either about his moral nature, or about the difference between right and wrong. But that cannot be. So the Bible was not written under divine inspiration." (62)

Several of the atheist contributions concentrate on identifying the most objectionable narratives in the book and employing them in the arguments described above. The theist's responses basically follow three different forms. First, they can deny the factuality of the event, or literal interpretation of the text describing the event (e.g., Wolterstorff, Anderson). Second they may simply refer to the differing moral intuitions along the lines of skeptical theism (e.g., Stump, Plantinga). Third, they may offer some kind of reason why a certain atrocity was within the boundaries of God's goodness to perform or allow (e.g., Murphy, Swinburne).

The sequence of essays consists of main paper, comments, and short reply to the comments. This enables useful and extended exchange of thoughts, while always falling short of reaching any kind of agreement.

A significant reason for disagreement on this topic seems to be the literary genre and the degree of factitiousness of the relevant Old Testament narratives. In his essay, Wolterstorff argues that Joshua should be read as intended fiction, not as a historical account of the history of ancient Israel. The accounts of killing the Canaanites should be understood as after-the-event utterances similar to "we crushed them" –style boasting after winning a football game. Anderson and Stump, among others, suggest that these stories should be read within

a larger canonical context, which makes them to some extent more understandable from a modern perspective. However, not even the Christians seem to agree about how the 'horrors' should be understood. Still, the exegetical remarks are important in this context. It is too easy simply to cite passages, or even consistent themes, and then express moral anger because they do not seem to stand up to one's ideals of justice. The problem, however, is that an atheist does not, and cannot, recognize any kind of canonical reading or sustained narrative that might give at least some kind of meaning to the events. Thus, the general pattern is that an atheist cites a passage where something horrible happens and argues that the Bible cannot be considered as a source for any kind of moral worldview. Theists then go on to respond that the Bible should be seen as a whole and as a narrative. But from the atheist perspective this is already too much to ask for.

A word about the moral outrage: In the Hebrew Bible, Jahve seems to play according to the standard evolutionary fitness rules: protect the in-group and engage in out-group hostilities if the in-group is threatened. The garden-variety atheist can object here that the theist somehow invents a deity that claims to be perfectly loving but this deity is not the God of the Bible who is, if not perfectly, at least to a great extent morally suspicious and Janus-faced. The theists' crime is to be *more* moral than their founding documents allow them to be, and/or blind to the corruption in their own tradition. Yet, as van Inwagen points out, this moral outrage of atheists owes a great deal to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Despite the 'horrors' of the Hebrew Bible, somehow the altruistic morality we now cherish so dearly (at least outwardly, if not always in deed) grew out from this tradition. In his contribution, van Inwagen suggests that instead of as a moral sourcebook the Bible should be read as a sort of coming-of-age-story. Curley greets this as a very welcome critical attitude towards the scriptures (calling van Inwagen "an unexpected ally") but remains in doubt whether van Inwagen's co-religionists will accept his moderate views.

Generally the book serves a number of good purposes. It is one of the very few manuscripts that record extended exchange between theists and atheists on central matters of Judeo-Christian religion. This way it witnesses both to the need for this kind of exchange and the difficulties that people coming with different worldview assumptions have when they try to understand each other. In particular, seeing the (suppressed) anger and emotion, which is usually absent from purely academic exercises,

can be an eye-opener. Secondly, the book offers good treatments of the several problematic passages in the Old Testament, and, although no certain answers are given, the different examinations should give us all a lot of think about. Thirdly, several essays illustrate that the angle or narrative from which we read the text does have a great effect on how we perceive those texts. This is especially apparent in Stump's contributions, and these themes are further developed in her new monumental book on the problem of suffering (*Wandering in Darkness*, OUP 2010).

The book ends with a remarkable essay by Howard Wettstein who tries to summarize the previous exchanges. He agrees with the atheists that making apologies for Jahve might not be good idea. Still, he resists the idea that we should somehow erase those passages in the Bible that shock us. This would, in his view, be a great loss for all. For example, thinking about the story of Abraham, Wettstein's comments are worth citing in length:

> Abraham, I want to propose, does not decide to obey God; not that he decides against it. Nor is this indecision. Abraham holds in his hands two incompatible non-negotiable loves, two non-negotiable commitments–commitments do not go any deeper than these–towards God and towards his son. Nor does Abraham, I'm imagining, have any conception of what it would mean to prioritize such commitments. The idea of making such a choice boggles the mind. There is almost something obscene about it. The text, strikingly spare, invites us to imagine Abraham's reaction. How could he not have been feeling alone in the universe? It must have been a long and lonely night. As I imagine his response the next morning–all one can do is dwell in the language, letting it seep in–what he does is to proceed, to march resolutely ahead, his eyes fixed, together (the Hebrew *yachdav*, repeated several times, suggests intimate togetherness) with his beloved son. Abrahams transcendent faith is exhibited in his ability to so march forward, not knowing where the path will lead, but ready to follow it, with confidence that he will know what to do when he has to. To withstand any such an experience must be transformative. And sometimes, as the text perhaps suggests, one comes out of the other end having survived that ordeal, loves intact, having grown in ways otherwise unavailable. (329)

After reading the interpretations of the Old Testament 'horrors' from both sides, and having witnessed the failures to communicate one's

perspectives, it might seem imprudent to say that it may paradoxically be these kinds of passages where the possibility of agreement lies. I am thinking especially Wettstein's accounts of the Old Testament, and how he succeeds in seeing the existential element in those stories, which is common, if not for all, at least for many of us. (For example, I think that the story of Abraham and Isaac speaks very differently to a mother who has to send her son to war compared to a person who does not have experiences of personal loss). Here it is easy for one to find resonances with what Walters writes in his book about atheist spirituality. Yet, in the end, there can be no ultimate agreement, but hoping for understanding might not be that far-fetched, and that is something that we can experience in purely philosophical encounters between theists and atheists, where distancing oneself from the subject matter is possible. Nevertheless, there is something that haunts us, beyond the level of mere arguments. And here some atheists might agree with the note on which Wettstein ends the book: "Better to suffer in confusion about God, an appropriate state for us if not a pleasurable one, than to forgo these stories." (333)

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Vladimir K. Shokhin. *Philosophy of Religion and Its Historical Forms (From Antiquity to the End of the Eighteenth Century).* Moscow: Alpha-M, 2010 (В.К. Шохин, *Философия религии и ее исторические формы [античность – конец XVIII в.]*, Москва, АЛЬФА-М, 2010).

What exactly is philosophy of religion? Can we answer this question without considering the history of thought on the issue? These are some of the main questions that Vladimir Shokhin (the Chair of Philosophy of Religion at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Professor of Philosophy at the Moscow State University) addresses in his book. He argues that in virtue of the self-reflective character of philosophy in general, philosophy of religion, in particular, should reflect on the history of its formation.

However, historical reflection may pursue two different tasks: the archeological reconstruction of the thought of the past and the selection of philosophically relevant aspects of historical heritage. It is the second

task (which implies a polemical approach to the history of philosophy) that interests Shokhin as being properly philosophical.

The objective set by the Author is to reconstruct the historical development of the philosophy of religion and to offer its periodization; for that purpose he has to delimit the boundaries of the very concept of philosophy of religion. Therefore the method consists in retracing historical development through a conceptual prism. Having answered the question on *what* Philosophy of religion is, we can set the historical frame of its development.

The first part of the book presents different conceptions of the philosophy of religion and corresponding ways of its periodization in three philosophical realms: in the Russian, analytical and continental European contemporary thought; then the author proceeds to select those views that seem to him to be more appropriate to the range of problems that should be dealt with by philosophy of religion. After that the author suggests his own way to delimit the range of problems of the philosophy of religion and offers his periodization of its historical development based on this conception.

The first three chapters of the first part deal with the main programs of elaborating philosophy of religion and with respective methods of establishing the genesis of this discipline in Russia, in analytical philosophy and in so called continental philosophy.

The Russian philosophy of religion is still very young; as regards the delimitation of the subject-matter of the philosophy of religion, the main tendency in Russia consists in understanding the concept of philosophy of religion in two senses: taken *sensu stricto* it represents discourse on religion as such; while understood *sensu largo* it also embraces philosophical theology and religious philosophy.

The views on the genesis of philosophy of religion in analytical philosophy may be classified in three groups: 1) history of philosophy of religion is not distinct from the history of philosophy-in-religion (that is, from some philosophical aspects of religious thought). 2) The history of philosophy of religion coincides and at the same time does not coincide with philosophy-in-religion. This attitude looks for the genesis of philosophy of religion as a specialized discipline but nevertheless does not want to completely separate philosophy of religion from largely understood religious thought. 3) philosophy of religion has its own special history (for example, J. Collins derives its history from Hume, Kant and Hegel). On the whole, Anglo-American philosophy is dominated

by a tendency to identify philosophy of religion with philosophical theology and therefore it is the 1st and 2nd options that are preferred. The very expression *philosophy of religion* is thus understood first of all in the sense of *genetivus subiecti* (as philosophy-in-religion).

As for the continental philosophy of religion, it is mostly religion in itself (and not God or Christian doctrine) that is identified as the subject matter of philosophy of religion, even though there are some attempts to combine studying religion with philosophical theology (e.g. R. Scheffler or F. von Kutschera) or with the hermeneutics of "discourse on God" (I. Dalfert).

Shokhin proceeds to elaborate a systematic conception of philosophy of religion. He does this by way of eliminating those ways of understanding it that seem to distort or excessively broaden its concept. This eliminative approach is applied to pairs of concepts forming some kind of binary tree diagram. Thus between philosophies *describing* religion and those tending to *transform* it (not unlike early Marx) we have to choose the former ones, since philosophy is called to explore reality and the opposite tendency is permeated with ideology. Philosophy of religion has its own more or less neatly delimited field of studies. The broader vision of this field embraces both philosophical theology and philosophical science of religion. This broader vision combines both discourse of religion (philosophy-*in*-religion) and discourse on religion (philosophy-*on*-religion). It is as if one tried to unite writing novels and literary critique into one and the same activity. Since such a "synthetic" program confuses two levels of language (object-language and meta-language), it has to be excluded.

This leaves us with two distinct philosophical programs: philosophical theology and philosophical study of religion. However, the subject matter of the former is not essentially distinct from traditional natural theology (which was systematized in the epoch of the second scholastics) and philosophical reconstruction of religious dogmas. Therefore it is the philosophical study of the phenomenon and language of religion, of its existential, ethical and esthetical dimensions as well as that of its metaphysical and cultural aspects that should constitute the task of the philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion is thus "a set of rationally possible and justified applications of philosophical interest and methods to studying the multidimensional phenomenon of religion, as well as to related sciences ... and to its own discourse (due to the self-reflective character of philosophy)" (pp. 211-212). So, philosophical theology, far from being identical with philosophy of religion, is in fact one of the *objects*

of study of the latter. Therefore the language of philosophy of religion is placed on the meta-level with regard to that of philosophical theology.

Thus understood, philosophy of religion is called to pursue the following tasks: the study of religiosity as such; the relation of "religion" to particular religions; definition of religion (based on historical material); the exploration of the essential characteristics of religion (affecting our understanding of its history); determining the universals of religion such as "belief", "community", "tradition" etc., as opposed to concepts proper to particular religions (such as "the church", etc); classification of religious Weltanschauungen, (this task is of particular importance since many concepts such as "pantheism" have blurred boundaries); clarifying concepts also in the field of classification of religions themselves (such concepts as "world religions", etc); comparative studies of religions; thematizing philosophy-in-religion (in its two forms of rational theology and religious philosophy) as one of the objects of study of philosophy of religion; metatheoretical discourse with regard to sciences of religion discerning their various (not always conscious) philosophical presumptions and clarifying their main concepts such as "religious experience", "sacred and profane", etc.; critical self-reflection due to the self-reflective character of philosophy *tout court* . Another way of self-knowledge for Philosophy of religion is to reflect on the history of its own field of study; indeed, many important insights not to be neglected belong to the thinkers of the past; their oblivion is detrimental also to the contemporary state of knowledge.

Having delimited the field of philosophy of religion, the Author applies his eliminative method to views on the genesis of this discipline. This leads him to the conclusion that its origin remounts to the 18th century, when other *philosophies-of* ... (or, as the author calls them, philosophies of the genitive case) appeared such as philosophy of history and philosophy of law, which claimed metatheoretical competence with regard to the corresponding disciplines. However, the ground for the emerging discipline was prepared in the 17th century and by that time much experience had been accumulated since antiquity. This discipline can be defined as *religiology* (the author uses and specifies this term introduced by German theologians in the 1920-s) as distinct both from theology (since its task is to understand religion and not to work out religious beliefs) and from empirical sciences of religion (since it seeks for the essences of religion).

The second part of the book aims at demonstrating the historical development of eidetic characteristics of philosophy of religion and therefore is based on dialectics between the conceptual and historical moments. Shokhin shows in what way the conception of philosophy of religion presented by him was formed and actualized in history. It is impossible to present here even briefly this rich and well documented analysis, so we have necessarily to limit ourselves to some aspects of it.

First of all the author delineates the periods of formation of philosophy of religion which are as follows:

(1) Protoreligiology (VI-V BC - 1600 AD)
(2) Early religiology (1601-1772)
(3) Mature religiology (1773-1800)
(4) Late religiology (1801-1830)
(5) Contemporary philosophy of religion (since 1830s).

Different tasks singled out by the author were differently realized and accentuated in particular epochs; many of these tasks and problems were formulated as early as in antiquity. Cicero, for example, offered a definition of religion which is still up-to-date ("religion permits human beings to serve and worship the supreme order of nature called divine") and neatly distinguished religion from superstition (the latter being a pragmatic approach to the divine). In the patristic period, Lactance interpreted the term *religio* as derived from *religare* and thereby emphasized the interpersonal connection between man and God; this personalistic understanding of religion permitted him to argue that authentic religion is based on free choice.

In further chapters of the second part, Shokhin has gathered and analysed extremely rich historical material. As was mentioned above, he does not limit himself to mere presentation, but critically evaluates the contribution of every philosopher and of every epoch under study to the formation and self-reflection of philosophy of religion as a philosophical discipline.

In the end of the book Vl. Shokhin resumes the advancing movement towards delimiting the concept of religion and specifying the concept of philosophy of religion; the latter finally leads to Fichte who distinguished three levels of discourse of philosophy of religion: phenomenology of the religious sense, ontology of the religious relation and general philosophy-on-religion aimed in particular at studying the religious realities and defining religion (p. 700). As for the worldviews of religiologists, three patterns prevail: naturalist exposure of religion,

constructing "a self-made religion" (it has found its classical expression in the various forms of deism) and apology of real religion. The last pattern contradicts rationality less than the first one and runs counter to the ethos of religiosity less than the second one, but all the three of them, according to the author, recur nowadays and will recur in the future as long as philosophy of religion exists (pp. 752-753).

Shokhin's book is undoubtedly a significant event in the Russian philosophy of religion. Thanks to its carefully selected and critically analysed historical basis it is destined to become a book of reference in Russia. But it could also fit into the horizon of discussion of Philosophy of religion of the English speaking world since it constitutes a well-grounded and well documented argument in support of a particular vision of Philosophy of religion – indeed, if the first part provides a conceptual argument in favor of this vision, the second part constitutes a historical argument to the same effect.

This development might be reproached as being based on a judgment of taste or on a preconception. This would be so if the argument in question had exactly the form the author sometimes tends to think it has; but in fact it is more complex. Indeed, Shokhin often formulates his argument in a linear way as if the view on the historical development of philosophy of religion was unidirectionally determined by its conceptual definition. However, if we look more closely at the real logical form of the argument in the book, we will see that we deal with mutual dependence between the two concepts since the conceptual definition is itself inherited from history and has been crystallized as a result of historical development. Therefore the relation between the conceptual and historical moments takes the form of hermeneutic circle in which the conceptual definition informs the understanding of historical development but at the same time results from it. It is a process in which the historical clarifies the conceptual and is in its turn clarified by the latter. Is it a vicious circle? We can decisively affirm it is not, but in order to get convinced of that one has to read Shokhin's book.

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Joel Buenting (ed.) *The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology.* Ashgate, 2010.

This book provides a helpful way in to current debates about hell in analytical philosophical circles, focusing especially on the question of whether hell's existence is compatible with the existence of an omniperfect God. Buenting's introduction gives a summary of each paper, notes and explains shared themes and assumptions, and helpfully relates today's debates to earlier seminal works (by Marilyn Adams, Hick, Walls, Kvanvig, etc.). The papers in the volume are of uniformly high quality, but are directed mostly to professional philosophers. So I would hesitate to send an undergraduate to this book for an introduction to problems about hell, though I think graduate students or faculty could use it for that purpose.

Because the chapters are each by distinct authors and each make a different point, the bulk of this review will simply summarize the main claims of each chapter (in the order in which they occur in the book). However, I will begin by noting four views that come up for repeated discussion throughout the papers. The first is *universalism*, the view that all people are eventually united with God, so that there is no such thing as eternal damnation. Virtually all the papers discuss this possibility, and two of the papers argue for it. On the second view, *annihilationism*, some people do not go to heaven, but they do not suffer eternally because they are annihilated (cease to exist). While frequently mentioned, this view has no advocates in the volume, and chapter three argues specifically against it. The most popular view by far is the *choice model* of hell, according to which God wants all people to freely enter heaven, but the damned prefer not to. Five of the papers explicitly explore, develop, or argue for this view, and another two appear to adopt it implicitly. Finally, several of the papers explore the claim that unending conscious suffering is a just *punishment* for sin.

1) Thomas Talbott's "Grace, Character Formation, and Predestination unto Glory" presents a universalist interpretation of the Pauline doctrine of God's grace: God has predestined everyone to develop a perfectly morally virtuous character, and this character development results from divine grace, not human effort. This may sound like a determinist

picture, but Talbott is at pains to show that libertarian freedom has "an important role to play both in the emergence of independent rational agents and in the process whereby they are finally reconciled to God" (24). It seems that on Talbott's picture, God has determined our final end, but not the path we will take to get there. Our undetermined choices play a role in the formation of our character. Nevertheless, Talbott argues, we cannot take credit for our good character when it eventually develops. Often it results from our *bad* choices (we learn from mistakes). More importantly, because the long-term results of choices depend largely on factors beyond our control, we can never know for sure that our good choices will result in good character (and we would need to know this, Talbott seems to think, in order to deserve credit for our final character). This essay is notable for its realism about character formation, and its thought-provoking insistence that the most virtuous agents are least likely to take credit for their goodness.

2) Raymond VanArragon's "Is it Possible to Freely Reject God Forever?" defends a choice model of hell against arguments (raised by Talbott) to the effect that it is *impossible* to continually and eternally choose hell over heaven. As VanArragon defines it, to reject God forever is to go on sinning or acting immorally forever. Talbott's first objection is that because sin eventually produces bad consequences for the sinner, everyone would eventually lose the motivation to sin and turn to God. VanArragon nicely points out that while certain sins (say, substance abuse) may fit Talbott's model, others (say, callousness towards the poor and needy) do not obviously harm the sinner, and could probably be continued indefinitely. Talbott also objects that God would necessarily intervene to prevent anyone from damning themselves, just as a loving parent would interfere with her child's freedom if the child were about to do himself irreparable harm. In response, VanArragon denies that the damned ever make a single choice that irreparably harms them, because God would accept them if they repented, and they will always have the capacity to repent because God has good reason to preserve their freedom.

3) In "Annihilationism: A Philosophical Dead End?" Claire Brown and Jerry Walls revue the main philosophical arguments for annihilationism, and find them all lacking. They argue first that annihilation is not the inevitable and natural result of fully rejecting God, and that with respect to its implications for God's supremacy, annihilation has no advantage over eternal conscious suffering. They also respond to three arguments suggesting that eternal suffering is inconsistent with God's

moral character. They claim first, that if eternal suffering is an excessive punishment for merely finite crimes, so is eternal non-existence; second, that non-existence is not necessarily preferable to existing in hell, since the sufferings of hell may be mild (seeming bad only in comparison to the glories of heaven); and third, that God would not let the damned commit "metaphysical suicide" because God would want to give them the chance to repent.

4) On a choice or "natural consequence" model of damnation, God does not consign people to hell against their wills; rather, God gives them what they want (which is to be left alone). This model seems to conflict with the traditional claim that hell is a bad enough place to function as punishment, for how can a place truly be a prison if the inmates don't *want* to leave? In "Compatibilism, "Wantons," and the Natural Consequence Model of Hell," Justin D. Barnard argues that the punitive and choice views can fit together, if the damned are what Harry Frankfurt calls "wantons": beings who have desires, but no preferences about which of their desires should be effective. Such people would not be in hell against their wills, but they would still experience regret and have some desire to escape (a desire always overpowered by the self-love keeping them there).

5) On an "Issuant" conception of hell, it is not a place of punishment, but a place provided by God out of love for those who reject God (Choice models of hell are thus typically issuant conceptions). In "Value, Finality, and Frustration: Problems for Escapism?" Andrei Buckareff and Allen Plug discuss three objections to "escapism," an issuant view according to which the damned can repent and leave hell at any time. First, in a discussion that overlaps substantially with Barnard's previous chapter on "wantons", they argue that escapist hell would not count as unqualifiedly good for the damned. Second, they show that escapism does not conflict with the eschatological *finality* of heaven and hell (the doctrine that after a certain time, all those in either place will never leave). Finally, they argue that escapism does not allow God's plans to be frustrated, because God's purpose is not that *all* should be in heaven, but that all *who prefer to be there* should be in heaven. It is worth noting that the escapist model defended here seems to be shared by the earlier chapters by Brown and Walls, and VanArragon.

6) In "Hell, Wrath, and the Grace of God," Stephen T. Davis explores possible scriptural and theological support for the issuant choice (escapist) model of hell, and also addresses the objection that this picture of hell removes its finality. He closes with brief arguments against

annihilationism and universalism. This paper defends roughly the same position as Buckareff and Plug's paper, but situates it in a much broader context; therefore, I recommend reading chapters 4-6 in reverse order (so that each of the three papers would be further scrutinizing a suggestion made in the prior paper).

7) Davis suggests that God already knows (for the Bible predicts it) that some people will remain in hell forever (even though they could leave). But how is this foreknowledge to be understood? One possibility is Molinism: prior to creating, God knows what any possible free creature would choose to do in any possible choice situation she might face; God also knows which creatures and situations God will create; therefore, God knows ahead of time what we will do. In "Molinism and Hell," Gordon Knight elegantly argues that if Molinism is correct, then even if damnation is freely chosen by creatures, hell is incompatible with divine goodness. For a God who loves individual creatures would never create someone who (God knows) will have "an eternal life that is much worse than never having existed at all" (112).

8) In "Hell and Punishment," Stepehn Kershnar argues against the choice model of hell, suggesting that God would damn a person only if hell were a just punishment for that person. He then argues that because hell is infinite, it would be an unjust punishment for any merely finitely bad human character or action(s). Kershnar concludes with brief arguments against annihilation, escapism, and 'mild hell' views, leaving universalism as the only viable option; his argument at this point rests heavily on the type of claim that VanArragon (Ch. 2) attacks in his paper – namely, that one could reject God forever only if one's faculties were impaired so as to remove moral responsibility.

9) In contrast to the previous chapter, James Cain's "Why I Am Unconvinced by Arguments against the Existence of Hell" develops an account of hell as eternal punishment and defends it against five important objections. In response to the "excessive punishment" objection (central to the prior paper), Cain draws on the relativity of time to suggest that a punishment could be unending but still finite from the point of view of the sufferer (and hence just). He also points out that many philosophical discussions of the afterlife implicitly assume that it will be pretty much like a continuation of our current existence; but this, he rightly emphasizes, is highly questionable, and so we should draw firm conclusions about afterlife experience only with great hesitation.

10) In "Hell and Natural Atheology," Keith Yandell defends an issuant choice model of hell. He denies the common assumption that it would have been better for the damned never to have existed. Drawing on considerations of the "metaphysical" as well as moral value and dignity of human beings, Yandell argues that it is better for the damned themselves to continue in their rejection of God than it would be for them not to exist; therefore, hell is the best way for God to love them. He also emphasizes that because many very bad people die without getting their just deserts, divine justice gives theists considerable reason to believe in some kind of hell (postmortem punishment).

11) Many of the papers in this book refer at some point to C. S. Lewis, whose little book *The Great Divorce* is a powerful articulation of the issuant choice model. Bradley Sickler's "Infernal Voluntarism and 'The Courtesy of Deep Heaven'" explores Lewis' choice view of hell in more detail, relating it to questions about the ultimate fate of non-Christians: because God is fair, Lewis argues, salvation through Christ must be available to all, even those who do not acknowledge it as such. Sickler also defends the choice model against three important objections, one being the suggestion that a loving God would eventually override the freedom of especially recalcitrant sinners, *making* them choose heaven. Against this, Sickler argues that such a transformation would amount to annihilating the sinner and replacing him with a doppelgänger.

12) In "Birth as a Grave Misfortune," K. Himma argues that if (1) only Christians go to heaven, and (2) hell involves eternal suffering, then it is morally wrong to have children. By careful appeal to ordinary examples, Himma argues that it is morally wrong to have a child when the chances are sufficiently high that the child "will invariably suffer severe harm" (192). He then argues that given (1) and (2), the odds of any child going to hell seem sufficiently high to make conception wrong. Since it is intuitively *not* wrong to have children, Himma concludes that either (1) or (2) must be false.

13) "Species of Hell" by John Kronen and Eric Reitan offers a very perceptive and helpful classification of the various views of hell discussed in the book as a whole (for that reason, I think it might be best to *start* with this paper when picking up this volume). Each model of hell is shown to combine an account of the *nature* of the evil of hell with an account of the *cause* of this evil. For each of these issues, there are two basic options: the evil in hell could be purely negative – the absence of enjoying the beatific vision – or it could involve in addition some

positive conscious suffering; likewise the cause can be seen either as primarily human choice (God wants to save the damned, but they refuse to cooperate), or divine will (for some reason – e.g., justice – God doesn't will their salvation as an end). Kronen and Reitan use this classification scheme to generate six possible models of hell, and raise difficulties for all of them. Of special interest here is their point, which I have never heard before, that on some models, God responds to sin in a seemingly absurd way: by "acting to ensure that this affront to His dignity continues for all eternity" (218). While I found this to be one of the overall best papers in the volume, it was also a somewhat frustrating read: the authors abbreviated the various positions with letter and number combinations rather than name labels, and there were so many positions that I had to keep referring back to the original statements of the views in order to follow the argument.

The Problem of Hell is an important contribution to current debates about hell. Because it contains a number of genuine advances in the discussion, it is a "must read" for anyone seriously interested in these issues. I recommend it heartily.

JOHN HICK: REMEMBERING AND MOURNING

On February 12, 2012, the man who was arguably the foremost philosopher of religion and philosophical theologian of the twentieth century died. John Hick wrote or edited some thirty books, many of them highly influential, all of them highly regarded. His books have been translated into some seventeen languages and over twenty books and some fifty doctoral dissertations have been written about his thought. He made seminal contributions to such issues as religious epistemology, the existence of God, religious language, religious experience, the problem of evil, life after death, Christology, religion and science, and religious pluralism (of which he was undoubtedly the world's most distinguished defender). A highly original thinker, Hick's views were influential and often controversial.

I first met John Hick in 1964 when I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary. It had been announced that Hick would be returning to England in 1965; accordingly, I took virtually every class that he offered that year. He was in the process of writing *Evil and the God of Love* (Harper & Row, 1966), and in one of the classes – a seminar on the problem of evil – we read much of the book in manuscript form. For a budding philosopher of religion like me, it was a great adventure.

During that year, I learned that Hick was not only a great scholar but also a kind and considerate man, a person of gentility and graciousness. He cared about his students. He was a great model for me. I learned from him to strive for clarity in all that I said and wrote, to offer only fair and judicious criticisms of the arguments of others with whom I disagreed, and to accept criticisms from them graciously. He was also a man of playful humor. He loved to tell this story about one of his trips to India: on an office door in a building in (I think) Delhi Hick saw a sign that actually said, "NO ADMITTANCE, EVEN WITH PERMISSION." Hick also explained that as a divinity student, years before, he invented a wholly imaginary theologian whom he called Pandiculous. In class one day he asked the Professor (a man whom Hick considered slightly pompous) what the professor thought Pandiculous would say about the topic they were discussing. The professor hemed and hawed and

quickly changed the subject; he did not want to admit that he had never heard of Pandiculous.

Hick significantly influenced me both in philosophy and in the area of how to be a teacher and scholar. But since I tend to be more theologically orthodox than Hick, his influence on me in theology was often negative. As I half-jokingly remarked at his retirement ceremony from Claremont Graduate University in 1992, if Hick proposed a theological claim, that to me was evidence against it.

Hick's Gifford lectures, published as *An Interpretation of Religion* (Macmillan, 1989), was undoubtedly his *magnum opus*. In it, he expounds and defends with great clarity and power his well-known theory of religious pluralism. Hick has explained on numerous occasions what moved him from being a liberal (but still recognizably Christian) Presbyterian to a religious pluralist and global theologian. It was his experience in religiously and ethnically diverse Birmingham, England from 1967 to 1979. Hick was deeply involved in working against racism and for justice and equal opportunity for immigrants from British Commonwealth countries; in that capacity, he became closely acquainted with devout Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs. He found that he could no longer hold that all of them were religiously misguided and were heading for eternal hell.

There was great excitement in Claremont in 1979 when it became clear that John Hick was open to becoming our Danforth Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Claremont Graduate University. Although I was then a young scholar with little influence at our colleges, it turned out that I was the only one in Claremont who knew John personally. So it was my pleasure to play a small role in recruiting him. Hick's tenure here was a wonderful time for philosophy of religion and theology in Claremont, and I believe for John himself. When he retired in 1992, he made it clear that he loved Claremont, and that he and his wife Hazel would have stayed here in retirement except for the fact that their children were living in England. It was also a great time for me. A highlight of my career was working with John on doctoral dissertations and philosophy of religion conferences.

John Hick of course had many students over the years, at Cornell, Princeton, Cambridge, Birmingham, and Claremont. All of them whom I know loved and respected him – even those who, like William L. Craig, Harold Netland, Gavin D'Costa and myself, disagreed with him. But he once told me that he did not want to have disciples; and in fact I think he had few of them. Hick was such a great thinker that I have sometimes wondered why that was true. Here is a guess: those thinkers in philosophy

and theology who develop scores of devoted followers are usually highly technical and obscure thinkers. They are the kind of people – Kant, Schleiermacher, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida – whose writings are difficult and whom you have to study for years in order to get a firm grip on their theories. My hypothesis is that once you've gone to all that effort to understand the ideas of the Master, you then can't abide the thought that he might have been wrong. And if anybody else dares to criticize the Master in a book or article, the immediate reply is that the critic has misunderstood him. John Hick wrote far too clearly and elegantly for anything like that.

I greatly admire John Hick the person at another point too: the way he carried himself with poise, dignity, and optimism through the ups and downs of life. The ups for him included: named chairs, distinguished lectureships, prestigious awards, honorary doctorates, receiving a *Festschrift*, and having a Centre for the Philosophy of Religion named for him. The downs included: heresy charges, the death of a son, the death of Hazel, and the physical infirmities of old age.

Agree with him or not, John Hick made all of us in theology and the philosophy of religion rethink things on virtually every issue that we face. We celebrate his life with great joy and mourn his death with great sadness.

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