THEODICY AND THE INTERPERSONAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

A Thesis Submitted to the College of

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

In the Department of Philosophy

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon

By

TATE WILLIAMS

ABSTRACT

The problem of evil in its current state is an argument against the existence of God from

the existence of suffering in the world. Theistic response has developed along two lines:

theodicy, which attempts to explain suffering by appealing to overriding, justifying goods; and

skeptical theism, which calls into question the argument itself, typically on the grounds of our

limited capacity to know the reasons for suffering if they existed. In this thesis I compare the

current way of framing the problem of evil to the way it was framed by St. Thomas Aquinas, and

I find that compared to him contemporary philosophers are thinking about the problem in a very

narrow way. For Aquinas, I argue, suffering was as much a challenge to interpersonal connection

with God as it was a challenge to God's existence. I explore this broader way of framing the

issue by reformulating the problem of evil as an argument against the Christian practice of

trusting God. I conclude by surveying possible avenues of response by Christian theists to this

new formulation of the problem of evil, arguing that there are serious barriers to a successful

skeptical theistic response. As a result, I recommend theodicy as the most promising avenue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To Gregg

I hope we can discuss this some day

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of evil is the question of why, if there is a God, is there any evil or imperfection in the world? Within contemporary philosophy of religion, it is raised as an argument for atheism against the existence of God. Unlike many of the questions that philosophers ponder, it is one that is also very likely to be asked outside of the classroom or the pages of academic journals. Indeed, it is a question most alive in emergency rooms, refugee camps, or therapy sessions. For the people who ask it here, within dire circumstances, there is a lot at stake.

Over coffee I asked a young minister who had just recently completed his undergraduate degree what he had been taught about the problem of evil. The minister, who was very bright, outlined with clarity responses that theists like himself could give to the argument, responses which were similar to the ones we will examine in chapter 1 of this thesis. After sketching these responses, he remarked off-hand that, of course, none of these answers should be offered to a parishioner who is in the midst of tragedy. I was surprised by this, so I asked him why. I cannot recall his exact words, but the general point stuck with me. People who are suffering tend to find these answers dismissive of their pain. He told me it is like swimming; you need to know how before you are in thrown into the deep end. There is something about our state of mind when we are going through something arduous which makes us think there can be nothing good about what we suffer. However, if we have thought it through with a clearer head, we will be prepared to face trails when they are upon us.

Perhaps unfairly, this discussion sparked in me an intuition that theists can do a better job in answering the problem of evil.[1] This thesis is an exploration of that intuition. My guide in this exploration is the genius work of the 13ᵗʰ century philosopher Thomas Aquinas. An immersion in his writing, particularly his underappreciated biblical commentary, leads me to conclude that the way that we think about the problem of evil in contemporary analytic philosophy is too narrow. The question of meaning in suffering is one that is raised in contexts beyond the question of God's existence. Thinking about the problem of evil in these other contexts will change our view on what kind of response is successful.

In the first chapter I sketch the contemporary analytic discussion of the problem of evil. I begin with what is called the logical formulation of the problem of evil, represented by J.L. Mackie, then outline Plantinga's refutation of it, ultimately finding that Plantinga's argument successfully undermines the logical formulation. With the logical formulation defeated, I turn to outlining the more persuasive evidential formulation and theistic responses to it. I group the responses into two broad categories: theodicy, which aims to explain suffering under the framework of theism, and skeptical theism, which responds by challenging the validity of the problem of evil itself. In theodicy, I consider two influential examples: Swinburne's free will theodicy and Hick's soul-making theodicy. For skeptical theism, I outline Stephen Wykstra's trailblazing work on the condition of reasonable epistemic access.

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[1] Am I here claiming that an intellectual answer to the problem of evil is unsuccessful if it cannot be used in a pastoral context? I do not look at it as a matter of success or failure, I am looking at it as a matter of better or worse. A response to the problem of evil which is both intellectually satisfying and pastorally efficacious is a better response than one that is only intellectually appealing, convincing in the classroom but not at a funeral. Fundamentally, I am not confident that one who is in the midst of tragedy is thinking less clearly when they do not find a response satisfying. Perhaps the overwhelming emotions distort our perception - it certainly happens – but it could also be the case that proximity to suffering gives us the clearest view of its gravity. Our comfortable distance from the possible suffering to come could itself cause distortion.

All of this is to provide a contrast to the way that Aquinas approaches the problem, which I cover in chapter 2. There I find that Aquinas saw the problem of evil in two ways - as a question about God's existence and as a question about God's providence - and his response to the problem changes depending on which context it is asked. This distinction is not the result of some peculiarity of Aquinas's philosophical system, rather, it is a fundamental difference in the motivations and framework of the person who considers the problem, and it is a difference with far-reaching consequences on what kind of answer we find satisfying. The contemporary discussion outlined in Chapter 1 does not explicitly acknowledge this distinction. We have missed something important in our literature. In the process of drawing out the distinct way Aquinas views the problem of evil I summarize Aquinas's own complex and potent theodicy, a theodicy which follows the tradition set by Beothius in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. The characteristic move of this tradition is to ground a response in the fulfillment of human nature.

It is the second context – the problem as a question about providence - that is so different to the contemporary way of framing the problem, so in chapter 3 I explore how the reframing might change the discussion. There are many avenues one could take in this new framework, but I choose to focus on the effect an understanding of providence has on trusting God. After examining what trust is, I reframe the problem of evil as an argument against trusting God, as opposed to an argument against God's existence. I then explore how theists could respond to this new challenge. I argue that skeptical theism is limited as a response to the reformulated problem, and that the most promising avenue of response is theodicy.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN CONTEMPORARY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

(1.1) The Logical Argument

(1.1.1) Mackie's Logical Argument

The early days of philosophy of religion in the analytic tradition were characterized by a preoccupation with the meaningfulness of religious language, an approach that "died a quiet death" sometime in the late 1960's (Hasker 427). Critics of religion shifted smoothly into the position that religious claims were false rather than meaningless. Awaiting them was the trailblazing work of J.L. Mackie on the problem of evil, who's influential 1955 paper "Evil and Omnipotence" launched the first stage of the analytic debate over the problem.

Mackie saw his argument as a demonstration "not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational" (200). He constructed it as a mutual incompatibility between principally three propositions:

A. God is omnipotent.

B. God is wholly good.

C. Evil exists.

However, he added two more propositions to settle what is meant in propositions A and B, that is:

D. There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.

E. A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

After outlining this argument Mackie uses the rest of the paper to argue against solutions that have been proposed for the problem of evil by theologians of his time. His response to one of those solutions – that evil is due to human free will – demands our attention. However, first we must say something about the advantages of Mackie's formulation.

Long after the publishing of "Evil and Omnipotence" Mackie's formulation came to represent an entire category of formulations dubbed the *logical* problem of evil. Arguments in this category take the position that the evil in the world is logically incompatible with the existence of God. By formulating the problem in this way, one gets an argument that is maximally potent if successful, but that also must accept a heavy burden of proof to prosecute. As Mackie says, if successful his argument entails nothing less than the total irrationality of any theism which holds to the five propositions (200). The disadvantage is that even a single overlooked possibility will topple the entire argument.

The objection that would in fact shake loose Mackie's foundations and permanently alter the landscape of the problem of evil debate was the Free Will Defense, a response that Mackie foresaw but underestimated. The Free Will Defense aims to reconcile A, B, and C by positing that the evils of the world are the result of the choices of free agents. A good God, it is argued, may permit free agents to choose evil, because a world without the good of free agents would be a less good world than one with them, even if they sometimes choose to do evil.

On its face the Free Will Defense seems to be a denial of D: to say that there are goods which God cannot create without permitting some evils is to put a limit on what God can do, or so Mackie wants to argue. However, he admits that this is a controversial interpretation of D (203). Many theists hold that "no limits" (Mackie 201) does not include the limits of logical possibility, that is, that even the impossible is possible for God. It is a disagreement over where

the laws of logic fit into the ontology of theism. A minority of theists in the history of western philosophy have held that the laws of logic, like the laws of physics, are binding due to the fiat of God, whereas the majority position is that the laws of logic are simply the line between sense and nonsense.[2] In the latter view, God could not create a square circle, for example. This would not count as a limit to God's power, because a square circle is nonsense, rising not even to the level of a coherent entity. But it also is not clear that Mackie's objection is successful against the former view either. A theist who holds the former view could simply say that it is within God's omnipotence to limit himself, and that the creation of the laws of logic is such a limitation. In this view it is true that God's power transcends the logically possible, but also that he is bound of his own volition to what is logically possible. Earl Conee argues that this is Descartes' position on omnipotence (457). However, since the former view of omnipotence is a minority view among theist philosophers, I do not wish to pursue this argument further. I bring it up just to point out that the issue is more complicated then Mackie realized.

To return to the latter view, that omnipotence does not include a power to do what is not logically coherent, what Mackie realized is that a theist cannot simply appeal to logical possibility to exonerate God of the responsibility of the wicked free choices of his creations. In his own words

> If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is
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> good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they
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> always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's

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[2] Descartes famously holds to the former view (see *Meditations on First Philosophy,* Meditation I). For example of the latter view, see Aquinas, *ST* Prima Pars, question 25, article 3. For a more detailed analysis of various theistic views on divine omnipotence, see Lilli Alanen's "Descartes, Duns Scotus and Ockham on Omnipotence and Possibility," *Franciscan Studies* 1985.

freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical

impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion (209).

This objection can be raised in two different ways. First, as a question about why human beings

have a proclivity towards evil. Could not God have made persons that, while they are free to

choose evil, never desire to? And the second, it can be raised strictly as a question about logical

possibility. If it is logically possible for a free agent to choose good on every occasion, then God,

who is only limited by logical possibility, could still actualize a world where every free agent

could choose evil but never does.

If those two concerns were not enough to do in the Free Will Defense, Mackie also has

recourse to the often-used distinction between natural and moral evil. Consider the Great Lisbon

Earthquake which struck on the Feast of All Saints 1755, dramatically depicted by Voltaire in his

novelette *Candide*. Tens of thousands of people were killed by the catastrophe (speaking not of

the injured), and, if Voltaire's account is accurate, a handful more were brutally murdered in a

superstitious *auto-da-fé* (act of faith) ceremony meant to appease the wrath of God. If every free

agent involved in this grim affair had acted well there would not have been an *auto-da-fé,* but

there would still have been a deadly earthquake. The *auto-da-fé* is an evil actualized by the

choices of free agents, whereas earthquakes, volcanoes, diseases, and the like are examples of

natural evils since they are not caused by the choices of free agents. If these evils are not caused

by the choices of free agents, then an appeal to free will cannot justify them.

(1.1.2) Plantinga's Free Will Defense

Here enters Alvin Plantinga, who argued principally that Mackie misunderstands the

force of the Free Will Defense. "What is really characteristic and central to the Free Will

Defense" he says, "is the claim that God, though omnipotent, could not have actualized just any possible world He pleased" (34). Mackie's mistake is in thinking that proponents of the Free Will Defense would accept that omnipotence demands that God is able to actualize any world that is logically possible. The position of Free Will Defense advocates is rather that freedom is God's surrendering a small part of the actualization of possibilities to created agents, such that there are possible worlds God could not have actualized, namely, those possible worlds which are within the power of free agents to actualize but that they freely choose not to. This does not limit God's omnipotence any more than if God is unable to contradict himself, because not even an omnipotent being could will to surrender power to free agents without surrendering any power to them; it is logically impossible to surrender some power to actualize possible worlds to free agents and still reserve the right to actualize any possible world.

Plantinga presents this through a zany hypothetical, wherein a man, Paul, sets out on a hunting expedition for a cassowary, ends up capturing an aardvark by mistake, and sets his heart on keeping it as a pet (40). The reader offers Paul $500 for the beast and Paul refuses, condemning the reader to wonder "if I had offered $700 instead, would I be in possession of an aardvark right now?" If accepting or rejecting the offer is genuinely Paul's choice, there are two logically possible outcomes:

F. Paul accepts the offer.

G. Paul refuses the offer.

The rub is that F and G are mutually exclusive, so regardless of which obtains, the other would be a possible world which God could not actualize. The same holds for choices between good and evil as hold in this choice between a charming aardvark and $700.

While this observation does not defeat Mackie's argument on its own, it does reveal the conditions under which it would be undermined. Because there are possible worlds God could not actualize it is also possible that there is a person, *p*, for whom, in every possible world which contains *p*, *p* freely chooses to actualize evil. This state of possibility Plantinga dubs "Transworld Depravity" (48). If it is possible for any agent to suffer from Transworld Depravity then it is possible for *every* agent to suffer from it. This being possible in turn would entail that it is possible that God could not have created a world that contains free agents and also contains no evil, and this is precisely what Free Will Defense advocates hold.

Now here someone may ask, granting that it is *possible* that all agents suffer from Transworld Depravity, is it really *plausible*? Some people believe that it is. Of course, it is hard to imagine how they could know that, and for that matter how anyone could know the contrary. It seems like exactly the sort of thing which we have little to no grounds to make a judgement on. That notwithstanding, Plantinga points out that all the Free Will defender really needs is for it to be possible. Recall that Mackie's argument aims to show that theistic religious beliefs are "positively irrational" due to logical contradiction (Mackie 200). If even one *possibility*, not plausibility, is given then the logical formulation is defeated, and that there is a possibility is precisely what Plantinga demonstrates.

But what about natural evils? Could not Mackie retreat to the position that theism is incompatible with natural evils even if moral evils could in principle be possible? Here Plantinga makes a bold maneuver. Perhaps natural evils are also the result of choices made by morally free agents. It was not an uncommon belief of the past to think that earthquakes, volcanoes, and the like were the actions of ultra-powerful malevolent spirits. Here again the defender need not

believe that this is the case; its mere possibility is sufficient to defeat the claim of logical incompatibility.

Hold on though, the prosecutor might rhetorically ask if this is really answering the problem of natural evils, or is it just denying that natural evils exist, collapsing all evil into moral evil? It does not matter, the damage is already done. What Plantinga definitively showed is that the burden of demonstrating logical incompatibility is too heavy for anyone to bear. The defender could dream up any possible excuse for natural evil and the prosecutors are routed. Perhaps, as Plantinga suggests off-hand, natural evils are so related to some persons that those persons would be less good or more evil without them (57). Perhaps all creatures of the world are the same kind of perpetual soul, reincarnated into different forms each cycle, and the natural evils they suffer are their just punishment for the wrongs of past lives. These accounts are possible and that is enough.

Finally, for the sake of thoroughness, let us consider the objection that God could have made us such that, though we could choose to do evil, we never desire to. A feature of Transworld Depravity that Plantinga draws out is that every person who suffers from it is also essentially depraved, that is, there is no possible world where they do not choose some evil. Given this, it is hard for the reader not to wonder about their own state vis-à-vis Transworld Depravity: "am I the sort of person who will always choose to do evil in every possible world?" If the answer is yes, or even might be yes, then the persons Mackie envisioned in his hypothetical would not be "us," but someone else. If we were voting on what world to actualize behind the veil of ignorance, I am not sure I would cast for a perfect world, as it may not include me. To put this concern another way, we must ask whether the imperfection of flawed people

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outweighs the good of their existence, imperfect though it is. I think imperfect people are worth making too.

In summary, Plantinga's and Mackie's clash showed that the burden of the logical problem cannot be sustained. It is not as simple as pointing out that there is a possible world in which free agents never do anything evil, because free will limits what possible worlds God can make. The inscrutability of the human will prevent us from ruling definitively on what possible worlds are in fact possible to for God to actualize.

(1.2) The Evidential Argument

(1.2.1) Rowe's Evidential Argument

Plantinga's refutation of the logical argument came to be seen as decisive by specialists in the philosophy of religion; the logical argument was defeated, but new and promising formulations of the problem of evil were left to be explored. It was William L. Rowe who first presented this line of argument. Citing Plantinga's analysis, Rowe admits that "[s]ome philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim" (335). He continues to outline his own preferred formulation.

> There remains, however, what we may call the *evidential* form – as opposed to the
> *logical* form – of the problem of evil: the view that the variety and profusion of
> evil in our world, although perhaps not logically inconsistent with the existence of
> a theistic God, provides, nevertheless, *rational support* for atheism (355).

This formulation is still being explored in the present.

The details of Rowe's formulation are worth reflecting on briefly. The supposed feature of the world that Rowe sees as incompatible with theism is *pointless suffering,* this being instances of human or animal suffering which could have been prevented without the loss of some justifying greater good (Rowe 336).[3] So, an instance of pointless suffering is one no possible theodicy can explain. If there are pointless evils in the world, this puts considerable pressure on the theist who wants to maintain that God is perfectly good; they would have to hold that a perfectly good God does not eliminate evil whenever he can, but is content to allow some entirely arbitrary suffering to exist in creation. Thus, the primary difficulty is proving that pointless evils in fact exist. Rowe thinks it cannot be proved, but that it is nonetheless reasonable to believe that some of the suffering in the world is pointless. As an example, Rowe offers the scenario of a single fawn trapped in a forest fire (337). The theist is hard-pressed to deny that such an event occurs, and it seems that a fawn in this scenario really does suffer and die pointlessly. Thus, there is strong evidence for pointless suffering. Prosecutors of the problem of evil by and large have been happy to accept this new formulation. Whatever is lost in force from the weaker claim that the evidential problem of evil makes is more than made up in the strength of the defense for that claim.

In simple syllogistic form, Rowe's argument is this:

p1. God would not create a world that contains pointless evils.

p2. Pointless evils *probably* exist.

p3. Therefore, God *probably* does not exist.

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[3] Among such goods could be the avoidance of a greater evil.

What makes this argument distinct is its framing in terms of probability. This Bayesian approach is not the only way the evidential argument can be, or has been, framed (Tooley 3.1); however, it is useful to have this formulation in mind when we consider the avenues of response to the evidential argument broadly.

Following Rowe's reformulation, responses to the problem of evil forked. One prong attempted to respond directly through accounts which explain the evils of the world in terms of theism by finding necessary links between those evils and greater justifying goods. This we will call the *theodicy approach*. The second prong opted to respond indirectly by challenging the argument itself. These challenges called into question whether we are in the position to make any judgements about the probability of there being pointless evils in the world. We will call this prong the *skeptical theist approach*. We turn to exploring each prong in a little more detail below.

(1.2.2) Swinburne's Free Will Theodicy

John Milton began *Paradise Lost* with an invocation to the Holy Spirit, which ends with the petition:

"What in me is dark

Illumine, what is low raise and support;

That, to the height of this great argument,

I may assert Eternal Providence,

And justify the ways of God to men."

It is here that theodicy gets its best definition, it is an attempt to justify the ways of God to humanity. The need to justify appears within a trial, which can be seen within the word itself. 'Theodicy' stems from the conjunction of the Greek words for 'God' and 'justice.' A theodicy attempts to answer the prosecution directly by finding greater goods that are necessarily connected to the evils of the world and thus justify God allowing those evils. To represent the theodicy avenue of response we will consider two of the most widely cited theodicies: Richard Swinburne's development of the Free Will Theodicy and John Hick's Soul Making Theodicy. We will begin by outlining the former.

The central point of Swinburne's theodicy is his belief that freedom of the will comes in degrees of value (Swinburne 219-220). Put simply, a free will is more or less valuable to the degree to which morally significant choices are available to it. So, consider two free agents. The first has freedom, but only to choose what to eat for lunch, and in every other choice their will is determined. The second, on the other hand, has a wide range of moral choices available to them; they can choose to be kind or cruel, heroic or cowardly, prudent or foolish. Is the freedom possessed by these two agents equal in value? It seems not. It seems that the second agent's freedom is more valuable. Swinburne uses this intuition to build a free will theodicy which explains natural evils like Rowe's trapped fawn.

A world in which the freedom possessed by agents has significant value must have certain features. Swinburne explores these features over many pages and with many examples, but I will attempt to summarize his core principles. First, our freedom has more value if we are given actual responsibility over our environment and other creatures (Swinburne 223). This responsibility must include the possibility to do good *but also to do evil* to be genuine responsibility at all. Swinburne defends this proposition with a thought experiment. Imagine the

commonplace practice of a parent who gives their teenage son the responsibility of babysitting

his younger brother. Part of the good that comes of this is the chance for the teenager to share in

the parent's work by being genuinely responsible for his brother. But if the parent never actually

leaves the house, but rather hides and observes the teenager's every move, ready to intervene at

the slightest mistake, would that good be achieved? In Swinburne's words: "The elder son might

justly retort that, while he would be happy to share in his father's work, he could really do so

only if he was left to make his own judgements as to what to do within a significant range of the

options available to the father" (225). Let us call this the Principle of Interdependence, that to be

genuinely responsible to others we must be able to choose between good and bad outcomes for

them.

A second feature is that freedom gains value in a world that functions consistently, in

ways we can learn and predict (Swinburne 251-252). We can think of our choices as falling into

two exhaustive categories, those immediate choices of what to do in this instant, and long-term

choices, where I foresee a goal and work to achieve it. Our freedom is more valuable if both

kinds of choices are available to us. But for long-term choices the world must operate in a way

that allows us to foresee in a predictable way, according to immutable or nearly immutable laws.

Indeed, a case can be made for even immediate choices needing predictable laws. Regardless of

the time it takes to make a choice and see it through, every choice is dependent on having a goal

in mind and acting to achieve it, which demands that our actions and environment have

predictable, law-like effects. We will call this the Principle of Predictability.

We have seen that some evils are necessary for the Principle of Interdependence; if we

are to have genuine responsibility over other creatures, some level of their good or ill must be at

stake depending on our choices. It would not make sense to have responsibility over a creature

and it be impossible for our choices to affect them. The same goes for the Principle of Predictability. Swinburne explains this with a concise example:

> [A]mong the advantages of the pain caused by fire is that it leads the sufferer to escape from the fire. But the pain still occurs when the sufferer is too weak or paralysed to escape from the fire. Would it not be better if only those able to escape suffered the pain? But, if that were the case, then others would know that it mattered much less that they should help people to escape from fire and that they should prevent fire. And so the opportunities for humans to choose whether to help others and guard against their future sufferings will correspondingly diminish (252).[4]

So, Swinburne argues that the good of significant choice and genuine interdependence justifies at least some of the evils of creation.

It is not difficult to see how these two principles could be applied to explain most instances of natural evils. Let us consider the example of an earthquake again. At one level an earthquake could be justified as the necessary result of certain predictable laws. Earthquakes can also function as a catalyst for meaningful cooperative action. Over generations we demonstrate our responsibility to each other by building toward mitigating the harmful effects of earthquakes.

There is a looming problem with this defense, and it is that it seems to be binding God to natural possibility rather than logical possibility. However, there is certainly some kind of logical entailment of effects given certain laws, as we saw in the case of pain. A consistent functioning of pain entails that we will feel pain in circumstances where we cannot actually withdraw from

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[4] Although Rowe is not cited in this passage, it is hard not to think Swinburne wrote it with his example of the trapped fawn in mind.

the source of that pain. The question is thus whether earthquakes are logically entailed by crucial natural laws as pain is. It is hard to imagine that a strong case can be made either way, but this is enough. Considerations like this lower the probability of Rowe's argument, and thus raise the probability of theism. Swinburne argues that we can make enough of the arguments to cast significant doubt over the conclusion that evil is evidence that God does not exist.

(1.2.3) Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy

The second theodicy we will consider is that of John Hick. Hick is concerned with defending a broadly Christian theistic worldview, but his theodicy begins with a description of the world which he thinks undermines the plausibility of the dominant Christian explanation of evil: the Fall. The Fall includes a narrative of history where there existed at some point in the distant past a perfect state of nature and humankind. Somehow this perfect state was corrupted resulting in the imperfect world we now occupy. Hick argues that this narrative is incompatible with our best theories of the past. We must conclude that our world is one characterized by a two-part distance from God, a distance that has been a part of the human condition from the first instant. The two parts are an *epistemic distance* and a *moral distance.* By epistemic distance he means that we live in a world that is "capable both of being seen as a purely natural phenomenon and of being seen as God's creation and experienced as mediating his presence" (Hick 540). Moral distance he describes as mankind being a species in potential (Hick 539); we are very far from perfect instances of ourselves, and our lives are characterized by development, a gradual actualization of what we can become. Given that this two-part distance has always been, that it is, so to speak, baked into the nature from its very beginning, the theist must ask what good could there be in being distant from God?

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Concerning our epistemic distance, Hick suggests that it gives the freedom "to exist as finite beings" (541). By this he means that there is a freedom to reject, or even doubt God. If God's goal for humanity is to create beings which can choose to love him, they must also be able to choose not to, but without this epistemic distance that choice would be impossible.

Hick is writing in a time before the problem of divine hiddenness came to be viewed as an argument against God in its own right, separate from the problem of evil. More relevant to our inquiry is what good could come from moral distance, and this is where Hick's theodicy earned its "soul-making" moniker. Hick replies:

> The answer, I suggest, appeals to the principle that virtues which have been
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> formed within the agent as a hard won deposit of his own right decisions in
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> situations of challenge and temptation, are intrinsically more valuable than virtues
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> created within him ready made and without any effort on his own part (541).

Our world is then, if Hick is right, one where virtues are perfected, painstakingly earned by their possessor through their own efforts. Possessing something that one has labored to craft is more valuable than possessing what is given without being earned. Such a world would doubtlessly include the pains and trials of natural evils as well, as these are so often ingredients in our moral development (Hick 544). Furthermore, a world of unambiguous justice, where every bad deed was punished and every good one rewarded, would not be a world of epistemic distance from God (Hick 544).

Hick admits that the sheer amount of evil and suffering in the world is a formidable argument against his worldview, but he nevertheless believes that "this eschatological answer may well be true. Expressed in religious language it tells us to trust in God even in the midst of

deep suffering, for in the end we shall participate in his glorious kingdom" (546). We can read this as denoting how far Hick takes his theodicy to reach. It does not explain all instances of suffering, but it does provide rational space for sufferers to respond to God in faith, i.e, to trust that their suffering will turn out for good, even if they cannot see what that good is right now. However, I am interested that the question of what precisely is enough rational space for faith has not been widely explored in discussions on the problem of evil. Hick sees himself as arguing for this space, but he gives us no clear account of how much space is enough. In Chapter 3 I explore this question.

(1.2.4) Skeptical Theism

In contrast to theodicy, there developed a pattern of response to the problem of evil which eschewed searching for justifying goods, but instead argued that the problem fails as an argument, typically due to insufficiencies in our epistemic position. This pattern of response came to be called 'Skeptical Theism.'[5] There are several varieties of Skeptical Theism, distinguished by different grounds for their skepticism. For our purposes it is enough to sketch one particularly influential kind, Stephen Wykstra's CORNEA skepticism, as originally formulated in his 1984 paper "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance.'"

Recall that the second premise in Rowe's evidential argument is that pointless evils probably exist. Where does this probability come from? Simply put, it is a probability of the way things *appear.* Rowe considers the instance of the trapped fawn and looks for justifying reasons. He cannot see any, and so he says that it appears that there are none. The probability is due to

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[5] Because they are skeptical of the existence of pointless evils.

human fallibility: it appears that there are no justifying goods, but appearances can be deceiving. Nevertheless, *absent any overriding defeaters*, we ought to act and believe based on our best understanding of the world, and in this case, it appears that there are no justifying goods.

This sort of judgement of epistemic appearance is common and reliable: my wife asks me to quickly check if we are out of milk, I scan the fridge, do not see any milk, and therefore answer that we are out. Of course, some of the fridge was obscured, and perhaps we had milk, but it was left on the counter after breakfast instead of being put back in the fridge. Nonetheless, a quick scan of the fridge is enough to for me to judge that we were out of milk.

But now consider another scenario. A child is told by her mother not to suck on her thumb. The child asks why? The mother responds that her fingers are covered in germs, and if she puts those germs into her mouth, she could get sick. Skeptical, the child looks at her fingers and does not see any germs. Since there appear to be no germs, she ignores her mother's command. In this scenario there appeared to be no germs on the child's fingers the same way there appeared to be no justifying goods for the suffering of the trapped fawn. But, of course, the putative child has made a serious error in her judgement. What she failed to grasp is her own epistemic access to the presence of germs on her fingers; she looked, but germs are not the sort of thing that can be accessed by un-augmented human vision.

Scenarios like the one above led Wykstra to posit the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access, abbreviated to CORNEA. In simple language, CORNEA restricts us from making any

judgements on epistemic appearances unless we can reasonably hold that we are in the position to make those judgements accurately (85).[6]

So, does Rowe's appearance claim in the evidential problem of evil satisfy CORNEA? Wykstra answers that it does not and that it is unlikely that it could (89). The difficulty is in God's omniscience. There is much that an omniscient being would know that even the brightest human being could never know. Imagine how strange even an omniscient human being would behave. They might inexplicably wave their arms rapidly, subtly shifting the wind-currents in a way that prevents a deadly tornado thousands of years in the future. Wykstra makes a similar argument from the analogy of a one-month old infant's relationship with their parents (88). The infant is able to grasp at some level the reasons for their parent's actions, but still much of their reasons escape them. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds between us and God. We simply lack reasonable epistemic access to God's reasons for allowing suffering, and thus the evidential argument fails.

This must suffice for an overview of the contemporary discussion on the problem of evil. Broadly, it can be modeled with two phases. First, there was the defeat of the logical problem of evil and the shift towards the evidential formulation. The second phase has been a debate over the success of the evidential problem where theistic response has taken two avenues: theodicy and skeptical theism. However, by and large it has been skeptical theism that has predominated in the discussion.[7]

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[6] The more technical definition that Wykstra offers is "On the basis of cognized situation s, human H is entitled to claim "It appears that P" only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if P were not the case, s would likely be different than it is in some way" (85).

[7] For evidence of this claim, and a supplement to my regrettably sparse treatment of contemporary literature see Trent Doughertry's "Recent Work on the Problem of Evil." See also Michael Tooley's recent monograph *The Problem of Evil.*

My point in sketching this discussion is to contrast it with the approach to the problem of evil taken by Thomas Aquinas. The contemporary approach analyses the problem as, for the most part, abstracted from a particular philosophical or religious system.[8] Aquinas, we will see, does not take this approach. His own way of viewing the problem of evil and for responding to it draws heavily from the Christian Aristotelian tradition to understand key terms, terms like "good," "evil," or "meaning." Ultimately, I will argue that Aquinas does not even perceive the problem in the same way. He addresses the problem of suffering within the context of a committed Christian life: not as an argument for disbelief in God, but as an argument for disillusionment. We will turn to these developments in chapter 2.

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[8] There are some exceptions. Hick discusses the Christian concept of "the fall" but only to move past it. Swinburne's theodicy could be read as exploring the nature of good in the degrees of value for freedom, but he makes no effort to tie this exploration in to any broader philosophical system.

AQUINAS ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In this chapter I want to explain what the problem of evil is for Aquinas and how he responds to it. I will argue that what contemporary philosophers see as the problem of evil is not entirely what Aquinas saw as the problem. In other words, both we today and Aquinas recognized evil as a problem for theists, but we diverge on exactly how we see it as a problem. I will begin by outlining his understanding of God, good, and evil. I will then discuss his views on providence and suffering, moving towards an account of his theodicy. Once his theodicy has been outlined, I turn towards an analysis of the passages where Aquinas addresses the problem of evil directly. This indirect approach of drawing out his theodicy before looking at his direct responses to the problem of evil will highlight how Aquinas saw the problem of evil differently from how we see it today. Ultimately, I will argue that for Aquinas the problem of evil was just as much a question about the providence of God as it was a question about God's existence.

(2.1) The Metaphysics of Theodicy

(2.1.1) On Good and Evil

To understand the metaphysics of good and evil in Aquinas it is easiest to start with good. The fundamental definition of 'good' for Aquinas is "what all desire" (*In NE* 1.1). Elsewhere he expresses the same definition by saying "all who rightly define good put in its notion something about its status as an end" (QDV 21.1). All further conclusions that he draws about good follow from this primary conception.

Throughout the texts where Aquinas discusses good in depth, he can be seen to make a distinction between two ways that we speak about it. The first he names, in *Questiones*

Disputatio de Malo (QDM), "absolute good" (*bono absolute*). Absolute good is the good that an entity has by being the sort of thing that it is; it is the good something has "in itself" (*per se ipsam*) (*QDM* Q1 A2). This is the sense of good which is most directly convertible with being. It is worth pausing to comment on this, since this position can seem strange to those unfamiliar with medieval metaphysics.[9] To use contemporary language, Aquinas held that "being" (*esse*) and "good" (*bonum)* differ in sense but share a reference, the same way as, in Frege's famous example, "the morning star" and "the evening star" share the referent "Venus."[10] Existence is especially desirable, since in nature each thing principally desires its preservation, and the good is what all desire; therefore, existence is good (*QDM* Q1 A1).[11]

The second way we speak of good is as "a good this" (*bonum hoc*), by which Aquinas means a good instance of something. He makes the distinction clear with a neat example: "if a man is good simply, it does not follow that he is a good flute player but only when he has attained skill in the art of flute playing" (*QDM* Q1 A1). So, a human is absolutely good simply by way of possessing a human essence, and thus he shares that goodness with all humanity. However, as we all know, there are all sorts of distinctions of goodness between particular humans; there are good writers, good basketball players, some who are good looking, and so on. These are examples of when we use the word "good" to mean a good instance of something. Notice this is not exclusive to just humanity. If I were to say "the existence of this tree is good," I

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[9] For details about medieval doctrines on the trascendentals see Goris and Aertson's "Medieval Theories of Transcendentals" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

[10] See Frege, Gottlob "On Sense and Reference" in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege,* translated by Peter Geach and Max Black, 2nd edition, Basil Blackwell publishing, 1960. 56-78.

[11] This is merely one of several arguments Aquinas gives for the convertibility of being and good. In his *de Hebdomadibus* he explores an interesting one, that created goods are good absolutely due to their relation to the Highest Good that creates them (*In DH* 19-20). They acquire their goodness from God in this way via participation, the participation of effect to cause (*In DH* 7). In Aquinas's metaphysics, it is God alone who possess absolute goodness truly within himself, that is, without participation. We know that God is the Highest Good independently of any argument for the convertibility of being and good (see the fourth way in *ST I* Q2 A3).

am speaking of its absolute goodness, but if I say "this tree is good shade" I am speaking of good in the sense of "a good this."

The qualities that make an entity a good instance of something we can call its excellences; the excellences of humans are called the virtues, and here again Aquinas builds off the general framework provided by Aristotle (*In DH* 20; *QDM* Q1 A2). An excellence or virtue is a perfection proper to an entity's function. So, for example, the quality of sharpness is a perfection for a knife, but not for a cake. It is so because to be a knife just is to be directed towards a certain end, namely, cutting, and to call something sharp is to say that it is good at cutting. As a grounding for ethics we must ask, what are excellences for a human life? Aquinas, like Aristotle, believes that there is an objective purpose for human life, just as there is a purpose for knives. Indeed, for Aquinas, the purposes of any entity are built into that entity's essence.

Notice that, while it is absolute goodness which is more obviously convertible with being, possessing virtue is convertible with being too. Virtues are perfections, and to become perfect means to fully actualize what you are. The broadest understanding of goodness thus is *to be*, and *to be that to the fullest*. When put this way the convertibility of good with being is clear. This position, that being is good, is the cardinal meta-ethical doctrine in Aquinas's system.[12] With this in mind, the meta-ethical weight of Aquinas's famous conclusion that God is *actus purus* (pure actuality), and *ipsum esse subsistens* (living existence itself)[13] should begin to make

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[12] It is also the doctrine most alien to modern readers. I trust it is not controversial to say that our modern ethical research is predominantly carried out under the assumption of a gap between what is and what we ought to do. If there are facts about what we ought to do, these are facts grounded in practical, rather than theoretical, necessity. For Aquinas the theoretical and practical are grounded in the same thing: actuality. What is practical is a matter of ends and purposes, and an entity's purpose is determined by what that entity is, ie. the actuality of its essence.

[13] This is my own translation for the purpose of clarity for readers unfamiliar with scholastic jargon. The more accurate technical translation would be "subsistent being itself." The point of the phrase is the nearly paradoxical claim that "being," which is in common parlance a universal term, subsists as a particular entity, and this is God. It stands out as an exception to the Aristotelian doctrine that universals cannot be particulars. See Eleonore Stump's

sense to us. If God is existence itself, he is also goodness itself. So, for Aquinas, God is the source of all goodness regardless of which sense of good we mean. First, he affirms that things are absolutely good only insofar as they are related (via participation) with God (*In DH* 19-20).[14] Second, as we have seen, he holds that we are virtuous insofar as we actualize what God made us to be.

So far we have only spoken about good, not evil, but a theory on one necessarily informs a theory of the other; everyone understands evil as the opposite of good. For Aquinas, goodness is an aspect of being. It follows that Aquinas must hold that evil is the absence of being in some way, and this is indeed what he believes. Concerning absolute goodness, evil would be the complete negation of being. Everything that exists possess absolute goodness, but not always of the same kind. Some creatures resemble the greatest good more than others, and these creatures are better or higher (*SCG* III, chapter 71). The entities whose absolute goodness is lesser can be said to lack goodness, however, this lack of goodness could hardly be moral evil; who could be culpable for deficiencies of their essence? No, what we call moral evil and moral good belong entirely in the sphere of particular goods, that is, of good instances of something.[15] Evils in this sphere are *privations*, a technical term denoting the lack of a quality which a thing ought to have,

The God of the Bible and The God of the Philosophers; and "God's Simplicity" in *The Oxford Handbook to Aquinas*.

[14] Participation is an obscure notion. To understand it, it is useful to think of the mundane example of a game of tag. Once I worked as a substitute teacher for a first-grade physical education class. The students were playing tag, but one child stood in the corner and ignored the game. I asked them "don't you want to participate?" Tag is an abstract form, it is instantiated when particular children play it, and when they are playing, we say of those children that they are participating. This is the participation of matter in form. Other types of participation share a feature with this more common type, namely, they are all instances when a particular thing instantiates a property or state of affairs which belongs more fully to a higher cause. As we have seen, most often the causation in question is formal causation, but Aquinas thinks there is participation in efficient causes too (*In DH* 7). For example, when fire heats metal the metal participates in the heat of the fire, i.e. it instantiates the property of heat that the fire has in a fuller sense.

[15] Some readers may balk at the notion that there is a sense of 'good' and 'evil' which is not moral good and evil. Is not moral excellence or failure essential to these concepts? For Aquinas what is essential to good and evil is desirability and undesirability and that is why he is justified in speaking about non-moral goods and evils.

or in scholastic jargon, the lack of a perfection. Imagine a hole in a load-bearing wall which undermines its integrity, or a bird missing one of its wings. In both cases there is something absent which prevents or hampers the entity from performing an essential function, and this absence is a privation.[16]

Privations for which an agent is morally culpable are those that result from a person's choice, but curiously Aquinas does not believe humans can choose to aim their actions at evil (*SCG* 38-47). All actions must be aimed at a good, because to be good is to be desirable in some way, and how can one act to obtain something totally undesirable? We might conclude from this that Aquinas must hold that all actions are good, since all actions are aimed at goods. This would be a mistake. Aquinas does not think that being aimed at something good is sufficient to make an action good. What makes an action good is that it is in accord with reason,[17] the power which specifies humanity from other animals (*ST* I-II, Q18, A5).

At this point it is worth pausing to address a possible misconception. Today we think of virtue ethics as competing with two other metaethical theories: deontology and consequentialism. It is distinguished from these competitors by its focus on persons over actions. This might lead us to think that in virtue ethical theories actions are good if they would be done by a virtuous person, whereas in deontology and consequentialism a person is good if they do good actions, and that, therefore, virtue theories will avoid talking about the goodness or badness of actions in abstraction from the person doing them. This is not the case for Aquinas. He has a robust theory

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[16] More specifically, what it absent in privations is always a power (this is what is meant by a perfection). If we return to the case of the bird, positing instead that it has both wings but that one wing is hampered in its movement by the presence of a malignant tumor, this is no less a case of a privation even though it is caused by the existence of a tumor rather than the absence of a wing. It is still a privation because the bird's power of flight, a power essential to its function, is absent.

[17] I think it is right to say that this is Aquinas's second cardinal meta-ethical doctrine.

for judging the goodness and badness of human actions according as they correspond with reason.[18] It is beyond the scope of this essay to dive into the goodness of human actions in much detail. However, it is important to note that the particular goodness of human action, just like the goodness of virtue, is grounded in the essence or form of humanity:

> Now in human actions, good and evil are predicated in reference to the reason; because as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv), "the good of man is to be in accordance with reason," and evil is "to be against reason." For that is good for a thing which suits it in regard to its form; and evil, that which is against the order of its form (*ST* I.II 18.5).

Thus, for Aquinas, our knowledge of what is good to do is predicated on our knowledge of human nature, what is good for it and what specifies it from other beings. This is the material point we will need to keep in mind moving forward.

(2.1.2) Is There Space to Prosecute the Problem?

Already we have enough to consider one popular response to the problem of evil that is sometimes attributed to Aquinas. Armed now with this distinction between two types of goods (absolute good and particular goods),[19] let us ask ourselves which one of them is relevant to the problem of evil? Not the absolute sense, since God is absolutely good simply by the manner of his being, not by reference to how he acts, and it is God's supposed actions that are being questioned. We are left then with particular goodness, and this seems right, since for Aquinas a virtue is the principle of a perfect act (*Commentary on Romans* 1.6). But here we encounter a

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[18] In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas analyzes human action, human passions, and human virtues (ST I.II Q 6-70). I see these as independent and equal parts of his overall ethical theory.

[19] For the rest of the paper I will substitute the term "particular goods" for what Aquinas calls "a good that" to avoid clumsy sentences.

conundrum. Because to understand what qualities are virtuous for something, we first must know what that thing is, and it is a well-known feature of Aquinas's philosophy that the *quiddity*[20] of God is beyond our ability to know. We are then left completely unable to make judgements about what God would do or should. Thus, under this framework, the problem of evil as it is formulated in the contemporary discussion dissolves.[21] At best there are no knowable grounds by which to judge how God should or should not act, at worst there are no possible grounds.

This is a summary of the defense popularized by Brian Davies in his 2011 book *Aquinas on God and Evil.* In effect he argues that Aquinas ultimately saw the problem of evil as founded on a category error; that is, once the terms "God," "good," and "evil" are properly understood, the problem of evil dissolves. God in this reading transcends even the category of moral agent, and thus can no more be evaluated morally than the color red can. Without grounds to evaluate God morally, there are no grounds to say that God would not allow suffering without a justifying good. In Davies' own words:

> [F]or Aquinas, to ask whether God can be morally justified when it comes to the
> evils that occur is to ask a question that should never have been raised in the first
> place. For him, God is not to be thought of as a moral agent behaving either well
> or badly. I think it no exaggeration to say that, in Aquinas's view, talk of God's
> "morally sufficient reasons" should be placed on a level with talk about the
> morally sufficient reasons of my cat...His point is that God is just not the sort of

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[20] A scholastic term coined from the Latin question "quid est?" meaning literally the "what is it?" of a thing.
[21] To see exactly how this plays out, return to Chapter 1, section 2.1, and look at Rowe's formulation of the problem of evil. Premise 1 states that God **would not** create of world that contains pointless evils. This claim is grounded in an assumption about what is required for a being to qualify as perfectly good. But in Aquinas's framework, our knowledge about what makes a being morally good is predicated on our knowledge of that being's essence. We do not know God's essence; thus, we do not know what is required for God to qualify as perfectly good, and, therefore, the first premise of Rowe's argument is undermined. The supposed error is in an unjustified shift from what would be good of human action to what would be good of divine action.

thing to be evaluated as we evaluate people morally, albeit that he is perfectly

happy to say that God is good and just and merciful (114).

And in the same work he concludes confidently that "He [Aquinas] is not a theodicist" (113).[22] This conclusion makes sense given Davies' interpretation. If there are no grounds for the problem of evil to be prosecuted there are also no grounds for the conditions of theodicy, because theodicy accepts the validity of the problem of evil argument and attempts to respond, and Davies's reading of Aquinas sees him as rejecting its validity. For the sake of concision, let us call this line of defense the Category Error defense (or CE defense).

I contend that the CE defense as an interpretation of Aquinas will not survive a full examination of what he has to say about humanity and evil. We have, in fact, ample (if obscure) textual support for the thesis that Aquinas, in the first place, rejected this line of argument as a response to the problem of evil; furthermore, that he in fact accepts the conditions which make a theodicy necessary; and finally that he saw the lack of theodicy as religiously undermining. I will provide support for each of these claims in turn.

First, that Aquinas rejected the CE defense: Aquinas discusses it directly in a commentary on the Old Testament book of Job, and this discussion has, to my knowledge, gone entirely unnoticed so far:

> Consider carefully, however, that sometimes one and the same thing can be both
>
> good and evil in different natures. For a dog to become angry is something good;
>
> but for a man to become angry is something evil. No one in his right mind
>
> entertains any doubt as to whether God does anything from an evil intention. For

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[22] By 'theodicist' I take Davies to be saying that Aquinas does not see it as necessary to find goods which justify the evils humans suffer. Recall the distinction between theodicy and skeptical theism discussed in chapter 1.

there cannot be anything evil in the highest good. But there may be something

evil in man which belongs to divine goodness, e.g., not being merciful inasmuch

as mercy implies passion, is something blameworthy in man. Yet divine goodness

requires it because of its perfection. It is clear that the three actions cited, i.e. to

calumniate, to chastise and to aid the counsels of evil men are evil in man. So he

(Job) calls into the question whether they can be goods in God. (*Commentary on

Job* 10.1).

This introduces the argument, but he ultimately concludes that "this (calumny,

chastisement, and aiding the counsels of evil men) cannot seem good to God, since Job is

the work of the hands of God and since his enemies who oppress him are shown to be

evil" (*Commentary on Job* 10.1). It is not clear in the text exactly how this undermines

the CE defense[23] but it is clear that Aquinas does consider it undermined. Given the

above, it seems unlikely that Davies is correct that the CE defense represents Aquinas's

own thoughts.

It should come as no surprise to us then that, contra the CE defense, Aquinas

accepted that we could know what God would or should do in certain circumstances. For

example, from his commentary on the book of Romans, chapter 8:28-32, Aquinas begins

the section by summarizing what the author – Paul – aimed to accomplish in the passage,

and among them is showing how the Holy Spirit directs external events to our good.

Further down he says definitively: "God is said to exercise a special care over the just…

inasmuch as he takes care of them in such a way as to permit no evil to affect them

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[23] It will become clear when we factor in the positions he takes in other texts which we will examine below.

without converting it to their good" (*Commentary on Romans* 8.6). This quote concludes

a larger argument which begins by claiming that everything that happens, even evil,

happens for the good of the universe as a whole,[24] and to support this he cites

Augustine's *Enchiridion*. He continues to point out that for lesser parts of creation – non-

human animals – God allows evils done to them to accrue for the good of others. So, a

lamb may die to feed a lion; it is bad for the lamb, but good for the lion, and this is how

the universe works (*Commentary on Romans* 8:6).

But Aquinas denies that this is how it works for the noblest parts of creation. Whatever

happens to them, he says, is "ordained only to their good, because his (God's) care for them is

for their sake." By "noblest parts" he means all who bear the image of God – all of humanity –

and although he singles out the saints in the next paragraph, this is likely because he is

commenting on a portion of scripture addressed to saints specifically. We know this from a

similar reflection Aquinas makes in his commentary on Job, where he writes:

> Here note that although all things are subject to divine providence and all things
>
> in their state receive their greatness from God, nevertheless some receive it in one
>
> way, others in another. For since all particular goods which are in the universe
>
> seem ordered to the common good of the universe as part is ordered to whole and
>
> imperfect to perfect, they are disposed by divine providence as they are ordered to
>
> the universe. Note that according to the way some things participate in perpetuity,
>
> they pertain essentially to the order of the universe. However, as they are deficient
>
> with respect to perpetuity, they pertain accidentally to the perfection of the

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[24] This statement is sufficient to justify Rowe's first premise, that God would not create a world that contains pointless evils. So, we see that Aquinas would not reject it as the CE defense demands.

universe and not in themselves. *Therefore according as they are perpetual they*

are ordered by God for their own sake; but according as they are corruptible they

are ordered for the sake of other things (*Commentary on Job* 7.4; emphasis

added).

Aquinas also believes that human beings are perpetual insofar as they have an immortal soul. So

here we see, contra Davies' interpretation, that Aquinas believes that God allows evils to befall

human beings only when he can work them to their benefit.

In fact, if we look closely we can see that Aquinas's comments on Job 10, Romans 8,

and Job 7, each quoted above, share a common line of reasoning and taken together we can

reconstruct an argument for his conclusion that for every perpetual being God orders all things

for their good. In the quoted section of his commentary on Job 10 Aquinas rejects the CE defense

on the grounds that Job is "the work of God's hands." Insofar as God creates Job, he wills Job's

good (since good is convertible with being). Evil men are acting against Job's good. Thus, for

God to support the evil men (the possibility of which is what the CE defense was raised to

consider) it seems he must be willing contradictory things, i.e., he wills Job's good but then wills

against Job's good.[25] Given God's nature, it is absurd to think that he wills contradictory things.

But note that for corruptible beings it would not be absurd for God to will their existence and

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[25] Someone might object here that this argument equivocates between two senses of "good." When God creates Job, he is willing his absolute good. What the evil men are acting against are particular goods for Job, that is, they are threatening his flourishing, not his existence. I will make two comments to address this possible objection. First, as a response, I think it is true in Aquinas's view that good is convertible with being in both senses of 'good' used here. In other words, the distinction between absolute good and particular good is a virtual distinction (for an explanation of virtual distinctions see Feser's *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction,* Editiones Scholasticae, 2014, pp. 72-77). So, for God to will one he must the other, just as when he wills "the author of *Ivanhoe*" to exist he is necessarily willing Sir Walter Scott to exist. Second, if you find this defense unpersuasive, it is my objective in this portion of the paper is to transmit Aquinas's thoughts as accurately as possible, and this argument is the only way I can see to make sense of the enthymematic argument Aquinas offers in his commentary on Job 10. If the argument equivocates, it is because Aquinas equivocates.

their non-existence, since he could will in eternity that they exist from the period of *t1* to *t2*, where *t2* is the moment of their corruption. However, for incorruptible beings the same would not be possible, because to will that an incorruptible being comes to exist at *t1* is the same as willing it to exist from *t1* to infinity; that is just what incorruptible means. Altogether this is the point Aquinas is trying to make in the above quoted comments on Job 7. So, when Job remarks that he is "the work of God's hands" Aquinas interprets him to be gesturing to the following argument:

p4. God created Job (ie. he wills his being).

p5. "Good" and "being" differ in sense but share a reference.

p6. Therefore, God wills Job's good.

p7. Job is essentially incorruptible.

p8. Therefore, God perpetually and unceasingly wills Job's good (from p6 and p7).

p9. God cannot will contradictory propositions.

p10. Therefore, God could never will contrary to Job's good.[26]

This argument works equally well if we substituted any being with an immortal soul for Job. This is what justifies his conclusion that insofar as something is incorruptible,[27] God works all things for its good, and is the reason he ultimately rejects the CE defense that Davies attributes to him.

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[26] My thanks to Fr. Greg Smith-Windsor for his helping me see this line of justification.
[27] Of course, Job's body is not incorruptible, but on Aquinas's account his soul is. There is a lot that can be said here about Aquinas's belief in the resurrection, however, it does not affect the conclusion of the argument against the CE defense that we have sketched, so it is outside the scope of this study.

Despite having ruled out the CE defense as an interpretation of Aquinas, it is crucial that we also note that Aquinas believed the lack of theodicy was religiously undermining. We can see this attitude in several places. First consider the prologue of his commentary on Job. Aquinas thinks Job is a text focused on the philosophy of divine providence and sees the location of the book – the first of the wisdom literature – as a mark of its importance. Commenting on this, he notes that we can be assured of providence in the natural world because of the regularity of natural causes (*Commentary on Job*, Prologue). In the sphere of human affairs, however, providence can be more easily doubted because at face value it appears as if there is no regularity, for, he writes, "good things do not always befall the good nor evil things the wicked" (*Commentary on Job*, Prologue). Rather, it appears that evil and good are apportioned "indifferently." To this opinion he responds:

> This idea causes a great deal of harm to mankind. For if divine providence is denied, no reverence or true fear of God will remain among men. Each man can weigh well how great will be the propensity for vice and the lack of desire for virtue which follows from this idea. For nothing so calls men back from evil things and induces them to good so much as the fear and love of God. For this reason the first and foremost aim of those who had pursued wisdom inspired by the spirit of God for the instruction of others was to remove this opinion from the hearts of men (*Commentary on Job*, Prologue).

This is how his commentary on Job opens. In the rest of the commentary he interprets Job as making a sophisticated philosophical argument for the position that God apportions evil for the benefit of the individual, i.e., an argument for theodicy. We must conclude from this that Aquinas considered at least some measure of theodicy to be critical for the religious life.

In support of this conclusion consider his commentary on Hebrews 11:6 where he writes: "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists…Secondly that *he know that God exercises providence over things.* For otherwise, no one would go to Him if he had no hope of a reward from him" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 11.2). What is interesting about this passage is Aquinas's assumption that a theory of providence will give us hope for a reward from God. In light of the context of Hebrews 11, where the author is exhorting persecuted Christians to persevere, we can safely conclude that this reward is a good which justifies the injustices which humanity suffers.

Thus, we have in two texts Aquinas's association of providence with theodicy, and a value for theodicy because of its power to draw us to God. In the next section we will examine Aquinas's own attempt at theodicy and the important role drawing to God plays in it. To conclude this section, we can affirm confidently that there is indeed a need for theodicy in Aquinas's metaphysics. Aquinas himself recognized the argument some raise to the contrary and rejected it. However, when he affirms the importance of theodicy, he is more likely to emphasize its importance in living rightly - in fostering desire for virtue and for God – rather than its importance in arguing for the existence of God. I think this emphasis departs from the contemporary discussion of the problem of evil in philosophically fruitful ways, which I will explore in section 2.2.

(2.1.3) Humanity's Highest Good

C.S. Lewis, in his introduction to medieval and renaissance literature wrote about *The Consolation of Philosophy that* "[t]o acquire a taste for it is almost to become naturalized in the Middle Ages" (75). Speaking on just one medieval thinker – Aquinas – he could not have been more right. So, let us leave Aquinas briefly and consider Boethius.

In his *Consolation of Philosophy,* Boethius examines the problem of evil within the context of his own life, written in the year he was imprisoned, facing execution for crimes he likely did not commit, framed by political opponents. He structures the book as a dialogue between himself and Philosophy personified, peppered with reflective poetic asides. Boethius describes himself as wretched, whimpering in his cell when Philosophy enters. Her first "consolation" is to scold him, then diagnose him. Her diagnoses:

> I know the cause, or the chief cause, of your sickness. You have forgotten what
> you are…You do not know the aim and end of all things; hence you think that if
> men are worthless and wicked, they are powerful and fortunate. You have
> forgotten by what methods the universe is guided; hence you think that the
> chances of good and bad fortune are tossed about with no ruling hand (18).

Here Boethius outlines three ingredients to theodicy: first, to know what we are; second, to know towards what end we are aimed; and third, to know that the universe is providentially ordered to further that aim. The thrust of Boethius's three ingredients is to argue that there is an objectively "best" state for all human beings, an ultimate good grounded in the nature of humanity, and that God is justified in allowing us to suffer the loss of lesser goods for the sake of gaining this greatest good.

We can find in Aquinas's corpus a theodicy which follows very closely to Boethius' argument. It is not presented as a clear and concise whole in any one text, but it is nonetheless there. In fact, we have already seen an overview of Aquinas's thoughts on the first and third points in Boethius's outline. On the first, he follows the Aristotelian tradition in holding that humanity is a creature under the genus animal, specified by our power for rationality (see part 2.1). Concerning the third, we have seen Aquinas argue that God wills the good for every human

being (see part 2.2). What is left is to comment on the second ingredient, on what is the highest good of humankind, so we turn to that now.

The clearest presentation of Aquinas's thoughts on this question is found in the *Summa Theologiae, Prima-Secundae Pars*, questions 1-5. He begins by arguing that human beings by nature act intentionally, that is, for determined purposes and ends (*ST* I-II 1.1).[28] From there he further argues that there is one, foundational end which motivates all others (*ST* I-II 1.4 -5), and this is a state of complete fulfillment and happiness.[29] However, happiness is a state which results from acquiring the object of one's desire, so to know what our final end is we must know what the object is which could fulfill us completely - our consummate good – and what this is Aquinas explores in question 2.

His method is one of elimination.[30] He canvasses goods which human beings are apt to dedicate their lives to – wealth, honor, glory, power, health, pleasure – and finds that in none of them is ultimate fulfillment found, not even in a good of the soul, which comes closest (*ST* I-II

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[28] In fact, Aquinas believes that there can be no action whatsoever that is not directed at an end. So it is not just a feature of human nature, but all nature. He is not thereby arguing for panpsychism. Intentions can belong to action in two ways, as coming from within an agent, ie. self-directedness, or as coming from outside the agent. Intention of the first kind is only found in rational agents. Intention of the second kind can be found in irrational agents, but only because they are directed by actions of the first kind (*ST* I-II 1.2).

[29] The argument is like the second way but concerning final causes rather than efficient causes. Chains of essential causes (as opposed to accidental causes) must terminate in a first cause from which the causal power originates. It can be helpful to think of essential causal chains as chains of *dependence*. The reasoning is the same as the mundane deduction of the necessity of a power generator from the encounter of electricity in one's reading lamp. If a reading lamp is giving off light we know it must be plugged in because lamps do not have the power to generate electricity on their own; they *depend* on something else for that power. However, the wires from which the lamp gets the electricity when we plug it in are also dependent in the same way. For each thing in the chain we must ask "is this the sort of thing which can generate electricity on its own?" If not, then we go one step further until we find the thing that does. In the case of final causes, the power which is being passed down the chain is desirability. So, the question is "is this good the sort of thing which I desire entirely for its own sake?" and Aquinas takes it as obvious that everything is desired for the sake of fulfillment. See Feser's *Scholastic Metaphysics*: *A Contemporary Introduction* pp. 148-154 for details about essentially ordered causal series.

[30] Here too he follows Boethius, this time lock-step (see *The Consolation of Philosophy* Book 3). Boethius was himself following the example of Aristotle (see *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1), and, I think, *Ecclesiastes* (see *Ecclesiastes* ch. 2).

2.1-7). In the elimination of each, something is revealed about the ultimate object of the will. He concludes that:

> It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's happiness. For happiness is the perfect good, which lulls the appetite altogether; else it would not be the last end, if something yet remained to be desired. Now the object of the will, i.e. of man's appetite, is the universal good; just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good (*ST* I-II 2.8).

This universal good, of course, is God, who, as we have seen, is the only being which is good in itself. This then is the object of total fulfillment, to be united with God. It is therefore the best possible state a human can be in or strive for. By extension, the worst possible state is not poverty, shame, powerlessness, sickness, or pain, but alienation from God. It follows that if one were to suffer any of the above, but through it was able to gain the greatest good,[31] the suffering would be worth it.

(2.1.4) Aquinas's Theodicy and Desires of the Heart

We have examined all the pieces to construct an outline of Aquinas's theodicy and have only left the task of gathering it all together into a manifold whole. A theodicy attempts to justify God by accounting for the evils that humanity suffers through an appeal to higher, justifying goods which can only be had through the evils. This necessitates a scale of goods, whereby goods can be judged greater and evils lesser. For Aquinas, this scale is grounded in the nature of

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[31] Or, for that matter, avoid the worst evil, which is further alienation from the greatest good.

humanity as rational animals.[32] To possess this nature is to be aimed at a determinate end in which one finds ultimate fulfillment. This determined end, he argues, can only be ultimate good itself, which is God. All other goods are only good insofar as they participate in this highest good. Furthermore, in his view, humanity is not thrown into a random and chaotic world, but a carefully ordered one. For rational beings, who have an immaterial soul, he believes everything that happens to them is ordered for their good. Therefore, whatever evils a person suffers must be a necessary tool through which God either draws us closer to him or halts us from further alienating ourselves from him.

This interpretation of Aquinas is identical to the one articulated and defended by Eleonore Stump in her book *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Power of Suffering*. There she outlines this position and defends it. She defends it primarily through potent illustrating narratives. She also rallies to her cause recent findings in contemporary psychology that support suffering having the effect of opening people up to new and deeper relationships.

Part of this defense is fixing what she sees as an oversight in Aquinas's argument: the sufferings caused by the loss of the desires of our hearts. The root of suffering is the frustration or loss of what we deeply care about (11). Part of what all people care about is their own flourishing, but Stump thinks this is not all that we care about. A "desire of the heart" is the term she uses to denote deep desires which are not for the sake of our flourishing, and thus not necessarily aimed at objects essential to our flourishing. Put simply, Stump argues that it is essential to human flourishing that we have desires for things just because we have set our hearts on them and not because they are essential to our flourishing (*Wandering in Darkness* 7). When

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[32] This move in itself is already a great improvement to the contemporary discussion of the problem of evil outlined in chapter 1, where the degrees of goodness and badness were principally measured via intuition.

desires of this kind are frustrated and trampled a person suffers, and the identity-constituting

nature of desires of the heart make this suffering resistant to appeals to universal redemptive

goods like drawing near to God.[33]

Here let us introduce a distinction in the way we frame the problem of evil, a distinction

that will be central to chapter 3 of this paper, but that is also useful for understanding Stump's

point about desires of the heart. The problem of evil can be raised in two ways: first, as an

objection to God's existence; second, as a question about God's providence. Too little attention

has been given by contemporary analytic philosophers to the unique demands entailed by these

contexts in which the problem of evil can be raised. In the first context the problem of evil is an

argument raised as an objection to theism. In the second context the problem is raised under the

assumption that theism is true and asks about the way God acts. Stump's objection from the

desires of the heart is more at home in the second context.

Consider as an example the "G.E. Moore shift" as a response to the problem of evil. Here

is the problem in basic syllogistic form:

p11. If God exists there would be no pointless suffering.

p12. There is pointless suffering.

p13. Therefore, God does *not* exist.

The G.E. Moore shift takes the inverse of the conclusion and shifts it to the minor premise,

making a new syllogism which proves the inverse of the original minor premise. So:

p11. If God exists there would be no pointless suffering.

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[33] It is not clear to me whether Stump considers desires of the heart to be identity-constituting or not. Nevertheless, I think they are identity-constituting, and I think that this fact explains much of what Stump does believe about them.

p14. God exists.

p15. Therefore, there is no pointless suffering.

The result of this maneuver is the pitting of p12 and p14 against each other. Do we have more evidence that God exists, or that pointless suffering exists? A theist who is very confident in their reasons for believing God exists might find this strategy attractive. In fact, as I will argue below, Aquinas uses something like this strategy in his direct responses to the problem of evil (see section 2.2).

If we suppose that the G.E. Moore shift is successful, what we would have is a response to the problem of evil as a question about God's existence. However, nothing in it is helpful for the problem of evil as a question about providence because the obvious rejoinder remains unanswered: if there is no pointless suffering, what is the point of all this suffering? In the context of asking about God's providence the attitude of the question will not be skepticism, but curiosity.

Another way to raise the same question, and one that is closer to the way Stump raises it, is to point out that if we stopped at the G.E. Moore shift we would have no content for the word "good." We would be, in effect, suspending all claims to what is good. Consider a mother who loses her daughter to a horrible illness. She is a convinced theist, so she thinks to herself, no doubt with much force of will, "even this must be good somehow." But how could not a nagging thought persist, "if such a bad thing could be good, then I do not know what good is." This thought cannot but be deeply pernicious to one's moral life. How can she do what is good if she has lost faith in her ability to recognize it?

Stump's concern is that it is also religiously pernicious. In the Christian theistic tradition, which Stump and Aquinas share, it is considered one's highest duty to align one's will with God's. Stump explores this duty using a portion of a letter written by Teresa of Avila:

Oh, how desirable is…[the] union with God's will! Happy the soul that has reached it… But alas for us, how few there must be who reach [union with God's will]… I tell you I am writing this with much pain upon seeing myself so far away [from such union] – and all through my own fault… *don't think the matter lies in my being so conformed to the will of God that if my father or brother dies I don't feel it, or that if there are trials or sicknesses I suffer them happily* (quoted in *Wandering in Darkness* 424; emphasis added).

Teresa thinks it would be good if she were to feel no grief over the loss of her family, though she confesses to not yet attaining that level of piety. Jarring as this statement is, we can see the reasoning behind it. Teresa sees the death of her father like the hypothetical mother saw the death of her daughter: God allowed it to happen, so it must be good. To feel grief over this is to will contrary to the good, and thus to will contrary to God.

Stump calls those with this attitude the "Whatever Faction," because they "try to maintain as good anything that happens, whatever it is, on the grounds that it is what God wills" (427). This attitude fails to distinguish between a person's *antecedent will* and *consequent will.* One's antecedent will is the state of affairs they wish would obtain if everything were up to them, whereas their consequent will is what they in fact do given the actions of others. To mark the difference clearly, imagine the example of a professor who wants all her students to get an "A" on their term papers, but then finds that many of her students wrote bad papers because they only started them the night before. Her antecedent will is to give all her student's A's, but her

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consequent will is giving bad grades to the papers that deserve it. As the example illustrates, very often we will what we wish would not have to be. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds for God.

Now we are prepared to see the religious perniciousness in the Whatever Faction's belief. By accepting as good whatever it is that happens, they are confusing God's consequent will with his antecedent will (*Wandering in Darkness* 428). To align properly with God's will they must will the good as he wills it, which is to desire the particular things which are in fact good for us and others. This cannot be done if we stop at the G.E. Moore shift. Theists *must* develop some account of what is good and bad, and why, so often, it is what is bad that in fact happens; in short, they must give us a theodicy.

With this in mind, Stump sets out to develop some account of what is good for human beings. It is here that she develops her objection from desires of the heart. Following Aquinas, she answers at one level that what is good for us is what contributes to our flourishing (8). This she calls the objective scale of value (9), objective because there is a fact of the matter about what contributes to our flourishing. The goods for flourishing are the goods for us qua human beings; they are the general goods for members of our species. We all care about having what is necessary for our flourishing, and if we were to be asked why we care about these goods we will likely give a response along the lines of "because it is good for me."

However, there is a subjective scale of value for humans too; these are the things that we care about which are particular to us as individuals. As far as these goods are concerned, if we were to be asked why we care about them, the only acceptable answer we could give is "I just do" (*Wandering in Darkness* 437). The deepest desires on the subjective scale of value she calls desires of the heart. Stump employs the metaphor of a web of desires (7). At the center of the web are the desires of one's heart, and on them every other desire is pinned. When one of these

desires is lost, other, lesser wants – work, food, entertainment, etc. – lose their draw (*Wandering in Darkness* 8).[34]

We suffer, says Stump, when something undermines what we care about, and this goes for both scales of value (11). Theodicies try to justify suffering by finding some good for the sufferer which could only be gained through the suffering that they endure. Is it enough for these justifying goods to be only those on the objective scale of value? Stump answers no. A theodicy which only appeals to a person's flourishing and leaves out what that person cares about is a failed theodicy (*Wandering in Darkness* 418-450).

Her reasons for this are twofold. First, because, paradoxically, to have the desires of one's heart *is necessary for flourishing* (*Wandering in Darkness* 444). How can something definitionally subjective be a part of the objective scale of value? It can because of the difference between general and particular goods. A general, objective, good for human beings might be that they love somebody. But no one can love somebody in general, they must love somebody in particular, and it is choosing their particular love that is subjective. It is illustrative to consider the parallel phenomenon of elective classes. An elective class seems paradoxical: it is a mandatory class which you can choose. The principle here is the same. It is crucial to an education that we study some subjects just because they are interesting to us. Likewise, it is crucial to human flourishing that we value some things just because we value them.

The second reason is tied to the nature of love. It is essential to love, Stump argues, to have some care for what your beloved cares about. Again, to love someone is to love some

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[34] Stump thinks there is an objective side to the subjective scale. Not just anything will do as the deepest desires of our hearts; some things are more suitable than others, just because of our nature as human beings. Only persons and projects really make up the heart's desires, and of the two persons are the most suitable (*Wandering in Darkness* 440).

individual, and it is in large part our particular desires which individuate us from other members of our species (*Wandering in Darkness* 438). If God loves humans (and in the tradition of Stump and Aquinas it is believed that he does) then God must care that we get the things we care about (*Wandering in Darkness* 444).

So, Stump introduces a new demand of theodicy within Aquinas's framework. In the broadest sense a theodicy attempts to explain why God permits certain evils by appealing to justifying goods which come with them. Aquinas introduced the demand that the justifying good be objectively good for the sufferer. Stump argues that those justifying goods for the sufferer cannot come at the cost of the loss of the sufferer's deepest desires. Despite these rigorous demands, she thinks that Aquinas's theodicy is able, with some added pieces, to account for desires of the heart, to meet these demands.

(2.2) Aquinas's Response to the Problem of Evil for the Existence of God

So far I have sketched and commented on developments in understanding Aquinas's response to the problem of evil with some consideration of the views of modern interpreters. However, there is an important point that is underexplored by contemporary scholars, on which I will focus for the rest of this chapter. Put provocatively, it is this: that *Aquinas's theodicy sketched above is not Aquinas's response to the problem of evil.* Here I will draw again from the distinction made earlier between the two contexts in which the problem of evil may be raised, that is, between the problem of evil for the existence of God and the problem of evil for the providence of God. I will argue that the contemporary discussion of the issue, including contemporary exegesis of Aquinas, is insufficiently sensitive to this distinction. In this section I will show how the distinction makes sense of the seemingly superficial way Aquinas addresses

the problem of evil when he considers it directly. In the third chapter I will explore the distinction more fully.

It may seem unusual that neither Davies nor Stump's recent book length treatments of Aquinas concerning the problem of evil give primacy to the passages where he addresses the problem directly. Those are the passages where he explores it in the least interesting and innovative ways. Nevertheless, I think it is a mistake to pass by these parts without comment. As I will show, a straightforward reading of them reveals something important about Aquinas's attitude toward to the problem.

There are two places where Aquinas considers the problem directly. Most famously from the *Prima Pars*, question two, article three, he asks "does God exist?" In the first objection he writes:

> It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the
> other would be altogether destroyed. But the word "God" means that He
> is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be
> no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.

To this he replies:

> As Augustine says: "Since God is the highest good, He would not allow
> any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as
> to bring good even out of evil." This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that
> He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.

Hardly a satisfying reply. One might infer from the borrowed response that Aquinas did not invest much thought on the objection, that it was included merely for the sake of completeness,

and not because Aquinas considered it a real problem for either him or his readers. But, of course, we have already seen that Aquinas has a lot to say about theodicy. Why in the work which Aquinas intended to be the culmination of his thought did he choose to pass over all he had written on the subject and settle for a one sentence quotation from Augustine?

We might answer that it was due to contextual factors of the particular work; that while there was much that he could say on the subject it would be superfluous considering the target audience and purpose of the work. Afterall, the *Summa Theologiae* was written for the instruction of students (*ST* prologue). Undoubtably there is some truth to this suggestion, however it still leaves the question of the exact *manner* in which the context of the *Summa* affected his response. For example, should we conclude that Aquinas opted for a simpler response because an advanced one would be too difficult for his intended audience? While possible, his willingness to dive into much more advanced and complex treatments of questions in subsequent articles ought to push us to find other explanations.

What I want to suggest, and will argue for, is that Aquinas gives a brief response to the problem of evil simply because he thinks a brief response is sufficient. Aquinas thought that the problem of evil as we moderns conceive it, that is, as a challenge to God's existence, was not a very serious problem, so he did not feel the need to spend many words refuting it. This is not to say that it was not an important problem for him. Any challenge to the existence of God is important since all of the science of theology depends on God existing. Nevertheless, an important problem to solve may still be easy to solve, and that is exactly how Aquinas saw the problem of evil in terms of God's existence.

The evidence for this view is in the shift from his analysis of the problem of evil in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* to the analysis in the *Summa Theologiae*. His response in *Summa Contra*

Gentiles, book three, chapter seventy-one goes into a little more detail, and I think that the

strategy he uses in it is revealing. He points out that a perfect cause does not entail a perfect

effect if there is defect in the instrument through which the cause acted (*SCG* 3.71), building off

of his argument in the preceding chapter that God works through natural agents in a manner akin

to an artisan working through the tools of their trade (*SCG* 3.72). The existence of evil in

creation thus does not strictly entail imperfection in God.

He continues on to list goods which may justify some evils. As an example, he remarks

that "perfect goodness would not be found in created things unless there were an order of

goodness in them" (*SCG* 3.71). By "perfect goodness" he means God. Aquinas believes that the

purpose of creation is to reflect God's nature, but no single thing can reflect God's goodness well

on its own (*SCG* 3.71*)*. What is needed is many things which each reflect a different part of

divine goodness. However, for each unique created species it must be like God in some way

(thus reflecting His goodness), and also unlike God in other ways (so as to be differentiated from

other created beings). Any manner in which a being is unlike God is a way that being is "evil,"

because to be unlike God is to be unlike goodness itself in Aquinas's metaphysics (*SCG* 3.71).

What is more, Aquinas argues these created beings can only rightly reflect God's goodness if

they are ordered hierarchically, with some beings reflecting more of God than others (*SCG* 3.71).

Without hierarchy no beings share God's position of holding a higher place than others (*SCG*

3.71). Also, perfect goodness is most visible when every grade of goodness is represented, from

most excellent to the least (*SCG* 3.71).

Other goods which are essentially tied to evils are also listed, but for the sake of space we

will not examine them all. I think it is enough to consider the characteristic example outlined

above. He concludes it the same general way as he concludes the others: "Therefore, it does not

pertain to divine providence to prohibit evil entirely from things" (*SCG* 3.71). His point, it seems, is to simply provide plausible counterexamples to the premise that the presence of evil in creation is logically incompatible with a perfect creator. We will speak more on this point below.

It is easy to overlook the importance of what he takes himself to be arguing for. He might have concluded by saying something like "and these are the reasons why there is evil in creation," but he does not. Rather, he aims only to argue that the presence of evil in creation does not *logically entail* imperfection in the creator. Indeed, the title of the question is "[t]hat divine providence does not entirely exclude evil from things." The philosophical maneuver Aquinas is making in this passage is identical to the one made by Alvin Plantinga in his book *God, Freedom, and Evil* (see section 1.1.2 above). Neither are trying to explain how evils in creation are in fact justified. They are merely demonstrating that it is not absurd for a perfect God to create an imperfect world. In contemporary jargon, they are refuting the logical problem of evil.

This method of defense is consistent with Aquinas's expressed sentiments on the goals of Christian apologetics. In a short treatise written by request from an anonymous cantor from Antioch titled *De Rationibus Fidei (DRF)* he remarks on "how to argue with unbelievers" (*DRF* ch. 2). There he warns his readers not to "try to prove the Faith by necessary reasons," for this would "belittle" a faith which is beyond human reason (*DRF* ch. 2). Nevertheless, neither can the faith be proven false by necessary reasons since it is true. Thus, he urges his readers not to seek to prove the faith, but to defend it (*DRF* ch. 2).

We are now prepared to see why Aquinas was content with the simple quotation from Augustine in the *Summa Theologiae*. The quotation succinctly cuts to the heart of the matter. If God can bring about good from evil, then it does not follow by necessary reasons that evil disproves God's existence. In the very same article, Aquinas would also argue that we do, in fact,

have proofs that God does exist. With proofs of God's existence in hand, and all proofs that he does not exist refuted, Aquinas's defense is complete. A retreat to an evidential formulation of the problem of evil will not suffice since proofs overrule probabilistic arguments. This is Aquinas's response to the problem of evil when raised as a challenge to God's existence.

To summarize, in section 2.1.2 we examined briefly Aquinas's belief that theodicy is essential to two important religious functions: to foster desire for living virtuously, and, most importantly, to enable one to draw near to God. When he discusses these essential functions he always discusses them under the general question of Gods providence, *not* as a question relating to God's existence. My position is that Aquinas's response to the problem of evil for the existence of God is short and simple – aimed only at defeating the logical problem of evil – and that his theodicy, sketched in section 2.1, is his response to evil thought of as a problem in understanding divine providence. In the final chapter of this thesis I want to explore why Aquinas might have thought it was essential to develop a picture of providence which explains how our sufferings might be for our good.

In chapter 2 we discovered a distinction between the ways that Thomas Aquinas thought about the problem of evil. One was identical to the way we think of the problem today, that is, as a challenge to God's existence. The second way was as a question about God's providence. Supposing God does exist, and this world is his creation, what is the point of the evils we suffer? Why did he choose to make the world this way?

We also discovered that Aquinas viewed the second way of conceiving the problem, if it is not adequately answered, as undermining a healthy religious life; indeed, he says that without an answer "no reverence or true fear of God will remain among men" (*Commentary on Job* Prologue). Just a few sentences later he adds that not only reverence and fear but *love* of God is what is threatened by a faulty doctrine of providence.[35] Finally, and most importantly, faith itself is threatened by ignorance of God's providence. Again commenting on Job, Aquinas says concerning Job's request for God to explain why he is suffering that "[m]an must know the cause of his punishment, either to correct himself or to endure the trials with more patience" (*Commentary on Job* 10.1). Patience in adversity is something Aquinas closely associates with faith; for example, in his commentary on Hebrews 6:12, he exhorts his readers to be "imitators of those who through faith, without which it is impossible to please God, and *patience against adversity*, inherit the promises. For by formed faith and patience the promised inheritance is obtained" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 6.3; emphasis added).[36] So, it is interpersonal connection

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[35] A familiarity with Aquinas's understanding of fear reveals that it is the love of God that is principally threatened, and that the true fear of God necessarily follows: "Now fear is born of love, since man fears the loss of what he loves" (*ST* II.II 19.2).

[36] Aquinas understands patience as "a limit to sadness, so that it will not exceed the bounds of reason" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 10.4). Faith for him is an infused virtue of the intellect, thus a perfection of reason, whose proper matter are "things that appear not" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 11.1). Given these definitions it is simple to see the connection between the two terms. In adversity it appears as if God does not care for our good. The knowledge that comes through faith assures against appearances that God does work everything for our good (*Commentary on*

with God (fear, love, reverence, faith) that is threatened by this problem. It is easy to see why he would think this if we reflect on the book he was commenting on: how could Job's sufferings not threaten his relationship with God? What holds for Job here holds for us all to some degree.

For this reason, I propose that we mark this distinction by calling the first problem the *Existential* Problem of Evil and the second the *Interpersonal* Problem of Evil. The Existential Problem has been widely explored in western philosophical thought, both contemporary and ancient. The Interpersonal Problem, however, has not gotten the attention it deserves. In this chapter I will take a modest step towards addressing that deficiency, particularly by examining one crucial mode of interpersonal relation: trust. I single out trust because I believe trust in God is especially threatened by suffering. Although Aquinas seems to say little about trust, I will argue that trust is intimately bound up with faith, of which he says much. After outlining what trust is and why it is important, I will show how the Interpersonal Problem of Evil threatens trust in God, and why some contemporary answers to the Existential Problem are not helpful for responding to this new challenge. I will conclude by noting how theists need to respond moving forward, and by recommending promising avenues for developing those responses.

(3.1) What is Trust and When is it Justified?

Trust is something common. When I wake up in the morning and make oatmeal, I am trusting that my oats are safe to eat. When I check the weather on my phone, I am trusting that the software developers are giving me accurate information. We trust our doctors, our teachers, our friends and family, also our baristas, barbers, and cashiers. It is the terrain in which human

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Romans 8.6). This provides the rational limit to sadness which is patience. So, when Aquinas says that "[m]an must know the cause of his punishment… to endure trials with more patience" (*Commentary on Job* 10.1) or that without knowledge of providence "no one would go to him (God)" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 11.2) he is making the surprising claim that some knowledge of providence is important for faith.

beings act and come to know. I think it is no exaggeration to say that trust is as important a concept to the human experience as knowledge, beauty, free-will, or justice but, comparatively, it has received a miniscule fraction of philosophical attention.

In this portion of the paper I will outline some developments in the contemporary analytic study of trust, first by focusing on the papers that introduced the topic to modern philosophical consciousness, Anette Baier's "Trust and Antitrust*"* and Elizabeth Anscombe's "What is it to Believe Someone?" What we will be looking for principally in these papers is an answer to the question of when an act of trust justified. The interpersonal problem of evil, as I construe it, is a challenge to trust in God being justified, so answering this question is essential to our project. Of course, to answer it we will first have to know what an act of trust is and what grounds such an act. With these goals in mind, let us turn to the literature.

(3.1.1) Baier's "Trust and Antitrust"

Anette Baier is credited with starting the contemporary philosophical reflection on trust with her 1986 paper "Trust and Antitrust" (Faulkner and Simpson 1). In it, her focus is on the impact of trust on ethics, as contrasted with the epistemic focus Anscombe takes. Baier's stated driving questions is "whom should I trust in what way, and why?" (232). However, almost as much space is given in her paper to asking why moral philosophers past and present ignored trust as an issue. She notes the strange silence on trust (232), particularly when compared to the social contract which became the primary philosophical model for interpersonal cooperation (245). Understanding why trust has gone unnoticed by western philosophers, particularly when contrasted with the attention given to social contracts, is her key to answering what trust is and when we should give it.

The immediately discernible differences between cooperation via trust and cooperation via contract, according to Baier, is first that trust relationships are very often characterized by an inequality of power between the relevant parties, whereas contracts are typically made between equals (241); second, contracts are only binding when both parties freely enter into them, whereas relationships of trust might be un-chosen, or even not explicitly understood, by one or both parties. An illustrative example of these differences is the trust a daughter has for her parents. This relationship cannot be reduced to the model of contract, since the child does not choose to enter into the arrangement, and it can hardly be said that there is an exchange of services between equal parties. Instead, the daughter, likely unconsciously, trusts her parents to provide for her merely from the expectation of the parent's love for her.

This contrast narrows in on the essence of trust: *trust is reliance on another's goodwill* (Baier 234). "Reliance" in this definition is the genus to which trust is a species. To rely on something or someone is to act in a way that leaves one vulnerable to that on which one relies. One might rely on one's car to get to work and be vulnerable if the car breaks down. In a game of chess, one might expose their queen, relying on a lack of foresight from one's opponent and risking defeat if mistaken. But neither of these instances of reliance are instances of trust since what is being relied on is not the goodwill the truster has for the trustee. Baier suggests that a mark of trust compared to other types of reliance is that a failure of reliance is likely to be disappointing, whereas a failure of trust is a betrayal (235).

It is easy to see now why trust is necessary to fully understand relationships where there is a great disparity of power between the two parties, as in the case of a parent-child relationship. The vulnerable can only depend on the goodwill of others, as they have no resources to coerce or compel. As we have noted, the core of trust is vulnerability. The luminaries of western moral

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philosophy, for whatever reason, were just the kind of persons who were least likely to be confronted with their own vulnerability to the goodwill of others, Baier contends. That is, they were "mostly men who had minimal adult dealings with women" (Baier 247-248), which influenced them to focus "so single-mindedly on cool, distanced relations between more or less free and equal adult strangers" (248). It is for this reason, she suggests, that our moral philosophy has been so fixated on social contract.

However, she admits that trust did not go entirely unnoticed, since there was a subset of men who, though they had no female partners or children, nonetheless were preoccupied with understanding vulnerability to other persons, namely, clergy. In her words, "Saint Thomas Aquinas, and other Christian moralists, have extolled the virtue of faith and, more relevantly, of hope, and so have said something about trust in God" (233). Curiously, it is the virtue of hope that is the most relevant to trust in her estimation. I will argue below that this is a mistake, that faith is the theological virtue of trust in God.[37]

Trust becomes relevant to moral philosophy when we return to Baier's original driving questions: whom should I trust and why? As a species of reliance, trust leaves the truster vulnerable. This vulnerability can be taken advantage of. Consider, for example, that nine hundred or so people put their trust in Jim Jones, and they died for it. We want to be able to say that those people should not have trusted Jones. Also, we ought to be averse to misplaced trust ourselves so we can avoid such a fate. So, when is it wrong to trust?

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[37] Her recognition of the theological literature notwithstanding, Baier wants to keep the pre-enlightenment theological literature at an arm's length. Primarily she thinks the dissimilarity between relationship with God and relationship with other persons is too great for it to be of any use for understanding trust (242). But it is hard not to read her as being suspicious of the literature in general. She suggests that "theological contamination" of trust might be partially responsible for the general aversion to the topic that characterized philosophy since the middle ages (242). She likens faith to an "infantile residue" to which the enlightenment self-reliance can be viewed analogously as an adolescence which she hopes will lead to the adulthood of a mature moral philosophy of trust (242).

Baier's answer to this question assumes a doxastic nature of trust. Since trust is reliance on the goodwill of others, then, in the broadest sense, trust will be reasonable when there are "good grounds for such confidence in another's good will, or at least the absence of good grounds for expecting their ill will or indifference" (Baier 245). This "good grounds" is grounds for *belief*, specifically, belief in the goodwill of the trusted party, i.e. a doxastic model. Of course, we rarely trust others with our good unqualified. Typically, we trust specific people with specific goods: our babysitters with our children, our chefs with our food, or doctors with our health, etc. In these qualified situations, trust is healthy to the degree that the trusted party has a shared care for the entrusted good (Baier 253), and is thus justified to the degree that there is reason to believe they do share that care. Of course, humans are complex, capable of having mixed and even conflicting motives, and Baier has more to say about the deleterious effects that conflicting motives can have on a trust relationship (254-256), but for our purposes the simple answer is enough.

(3.1.2) Anscombe on Believing Someone

Some years before Baier's initiation of trust as a topic for contemporary analytic philosophers, Elizabeth Anscombe published a short, underappreciated paper that examined the epistemic dimensions of trust. "What is it to Believe Someone?" aims to answer its titular question, a question which Anscombe claims to have been not just neglected, but to have been unknown to philosophers of her time (141). The paper was published in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, a collection of papers in the philosophy of religion. An inquiry into what it is to believe someone deserves its place in such a collection because, Anscombe claims, believing someone is identical to faith (141). "At one time," she writes, "there was the following way of speaking: faith was distinguished as human and divine. Human faith was believing a mere

human being; divine faith was believing God" (142). She offers no citation to support this claim about usage. What she does offer is an Old Testament passage: "Abraham *believed God*, and that counted as his justification. Hence he was called 'the father of faith'" (142; emphasis added). She blames the absent attention to the phrase on Kierkegaard, who set the agenda for thinking philosophically about the story of Abraham.[38]

Its connection to faith aside, what does it mean to believe someone? Broadly, to believe someone is to believe *x* that *p* (Anscombe 142). In other words, it is a belief in testimony. The anglophone philosophical inheritance is sparse with analysis on testimony that is not religious testimony.[39] Principally we have an account offered by Hume, so Anscombe starts there. Hume thought testimony could be fully explained as a type of inductive inference; we notice that often what we are told by others is true, so we come to associate testimony with truth (Hume 98). Anscombe rejects this theory as so implausible that "the mystery is how Hume could ever have entertained it" (143). Testimony is so tightly woven with everything we know that it cannot be totally reduced to some other method of knowing (Anscombe 143-144).

Seemingly without any past wisdom to build off of Anscombe starts from scratch. A face value account might be that to believe *x* that *p,* is to believe *p* is true when *x* says it.

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[38] I think Kierkegaard is more sensitive to trust than Anscombe gives him credit for. Below I will argue it is part of the purpose of *Fear and Trembling's* famous epigraph to clue in the reader to interpersonal experience being key to unlocking the text. Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling,* constantly reminds the reader that he does not have faith, so he does not fully understand it. The reason Kierkegaard is seemingly blind to trust in the work is because de Silentio is blind to trust, like the servant in the epigraph, he can see the movements without understanding them. Nonetheless, the "double-movement of faith" only makes sense because of the relationship Abraham has with God; the reader is supposed to see in the movements what the pseudonymous author does not: trust in God.

[39] I read Anscombe as deliberately excluding all religious analysis of testimony after her initial acknowledgment of them as a method for proving their relevance. She exclusively uses a theologically neutral method of analysis by focusing on a commonplace figure of speech which is nonetheless theologically important: believing someone. Through that method she is able to demonstrate how crucial it is to understand trust in testimony to an audience that would otherwise be dismissive of the topic if she had explored it through an analysis of theological philosophy.

Anscombe rejects this account too (144-145), and she is right to do so. The problem is that one might already believe *p* for reasons that have nothing to do with *x* saying it. For example, if you, the reader, wrote to inform me that Saskatchewan is a province of Canada, I would believe what you have said, but I would not be believing you, because my reasons for believing that Saskatchewan is a province of Canada would have nothing to do with your testimony.

Another basic feature of believing someone that Anscombe draws out is that believing someone involves a sort of belief substitution. As she says it, to believe someone is to rely on them that *p* (145). For example, imagine a person who knows little about automobiles reporting that the throttle body valve in his car was not closing all the way, and that it would not run properly. We ask him how he knows that, and he responds that a mechanic told him. If we then asked what he personally thinks is the issue with his car, he would probably answer that he has no opinion on the matter; he just believes what the mechanic told him. By believing the mechanic he is suspending his own opinion or inquiry in favor of the mechanic's. This illustrates the substitutionary nature of believing in someone; when we trust somebody, we are substituting our epistemic position for theirs. More will be said on this below.

Anscombe concludes her inquiry by removing the analytic language like scaffolding and simply saying that "believing someone… is trusting him for the truth" (151). The focus of her method is not actually to draw analytic lines, but to understand a natural way of speaking. This leaves its subject matter in an unusual place, crossing several analytic lines. To believe someone is an act of trust, but not exhaustive of trust entirely. Also, as her thought experiments make clear, she takes it to be a method of acquiring testimonial knowledge, but not the only method. Finally, there is its relationship to religious faith. In examining a mundane phrase, Anscombe is

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forced to place it awkwardly in a space overlapping the corners of philosophy of trust, testimonial epistemology, and theology.

As an aside at the conclusion of her paper Anscombe says something interesting about what grounds believing someone. It is interesting particularly for us because if we know what grounds an act of trust, we will be close to knowing what justifies it. She answers that trust is grounded in a calculation that a testifier is truthful (151). The picture is thus that in an act of trust one first comes to believe that a certain testifier is truthful in what they say, and then believes what is said because of that. There are two beliefs here: first the belief that the speaker is truthful, second the belief in what the speaker says. We can safely assume that the latter is justified by the former; thus, an act of trust is justified insofar as the belief that a testifier is truthful is justified.

I have focused on Anscombe and Baier's papers for two reasons. First, because they mark the very beginnings of trust as a topic for analytic philosophy; contemporary work by and large built off or responded to these two papers.[40] This is important because my project in this chapter depends on an equivalence between traditional theological notions of faith and contemporary analytic notions on trust, and as we have seen, this is an equivalence already accepted in the contemporary discussion. Indeed, it is built into it at its inception. Both Baier and Anscombe acknowledged that the work they were doing was retreading ground already explored by the western Christian tradition, although they both chose not to draw on that tradition for insight.

The second reason is because Baier and Anscombe, when taken together, exhibit a cohesive and correct vision of what trust is. Trust is the reliance on another's goodwill. This

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[40] Actually, this is mostly true of Baier's work which is broadly recognized as framing the contemporary discussion on trust. See, for example, Faulkner and Simpson, who begin their collection of papers on the philosophy of trust with an overview of "Trust and Antitrust"; Macloed, who cites and discusses Baier's work extensively in her introduction to trust; and Jones, an early paper on the topic in its own right, who credits a special influence to Baier's work (p. 6, footnote 2).

reliance has two broad categories, trusting someone to tell the truth and trusting someone with the care of certain valued goods. In both cases, this reliance is best understood as being grounded in a belief, a belief that they are truthful or will care for the good and is justified insofar as there are good grounds for such a belief. This doxastic picture of trust has been challenged by some philosophers who followed them, so we will turn to those challenges now.

(3.1.3) Doxastic Nature of Trust

The challenges to the doxastic model of trust come chiefly from the unusual relationship trust has to evidence. To see this, consider the position commonly called evidentialism, best represented by W. K. Clifford who argued that "[i]t is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and to investigate, there it is worse than presumption to believe" (309). If trust is essentially a type of belief it would undermine evidentialism. It breaks with it in two ways that can be seen with two examples of trust.

First, consider a marriage, where both participants vow to commit to each other for their remaining lives. When the two make these promises they no doubt believe that they and their partner will fulfill them faithfully, but is this belief supported by the evidence that is available to them? Many marriages end in divorce, and more still result in unfaithfulness, abuse, or some other serious compromise of the initial vows. The evidence does not support the level of confidence that is typically expected from spouses. If they were to follow evidentialism they should expect that their spouse will be unfaithful at some point and thus guard themselves against that probability. Later, when the evidentialist's spouse exhibits suspicious behavior, it would not be irrational to suspect them of unfaithfulness. However, most people recognize that to approach a spouse in this way – cautious, calculating, and unforthcoming – would be a betrayal. They are treating them as if they are not trustworthy.

Now consider the example of an uneducated Greek tradesman, who hears from Pythagoras that the world is a globe. We want to say that it is rational to trust Pythagoras. Afterall, he is the relevant expert on the issue, and we know in fact that his calculations were correct: the earth is round. However, if the tradesman were committed to evidentialism he ought not believe what he says. All of the tradesman's evidence indicates that the world is flat; he looks at the horizon and sees no evidence of any curve whatsoever. And if he has the sense to trust Pythagoras, and thereby believes that the earth is round, he will disregard the evidence he has to the contrary. If you asked him to explain how the earth is round when he can clearly see it is flat with his own eyes, he would not be wrong to reply, "I do not know why it seems flat, nonetheless I believe it is round on the testimony of Pythagoras." This would not be acceptable if he was reasoning evidentially. When we are processing evidence, the best practice is to look for a theory that encompasses all reliable data. It is never right to disregard evidence as the hypothetical tradesman does when he trusts Pythagoras.

In the first example, trust for the spouse entails holding a belief with a level of confidence beyond what is supported by the evidence. In the second, the tradesman, by trusting Pythagoras, holds a belief in the face of contrary evidence that he cannot explain. Consider also how we see efforts to acquire evidence for beliefs to be in tension with trust. Let us return to the example of a person who suspects their spouse of unfaithfulness and sets out to covertly gather evidence. Here the act of gathering evidence is the act of betraying trust. If this person trusted their spouse they would not feel the need for evidence.[41] And if the ancient Greek tradesman, after hearing

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[41] Someone might respond that it is the suspicion that betrays trust, not the gathering of evidence, but this would be a mistake. Indeed, mere suspicion can be a betrayal of trust, but seeking to know by evidence can be as well. Recall Anscombe's distinction between believing what is said by person p and believing p. Knowledge from evidence is always of the latter kind. So if you seek evidence for a proposition after p testifies to it, it is *usually* because p's testimony is not sufficient for you to believe the proposition. That is, it is because you do not trust p to be relaying you the truth, either because you suspect p is untrustworthy or because you suspect them to be ignorant. I have

Pythagoras's lecture, left to inspect the matter for himself, scrutinizing the evidence he offered, he would not be trusting Pythagoras.[42] Even if he found, after weighing the evidence for himself, that Pythagoras was correct he would not be trusting Pythagoras, even though he believed what Pythagoras said. In this scenario he believes what Pythagoras said, but not because Pythagoras said it. So, we see that trust, if trust is a belief, breaks with evidentialism.

Karen Jones advocates for an affective attitude model of trust, specifically, an attitude of optimism towards the goodwill and competence of the trusted individual (11). One of the advantages of such a model is that it does not threaten evidentialism (Jones 25). Paul Faulkner likewise sees trust as essentially affective. To him, what distinguishes trust from mere reliance is an *expectation of someone*, which he believes needs to be understood as being susceptible to a certain reactive attitude if that expectation is let down (882).

Both Faulkner and Jones see it as essential to the trust relationship that the truster expects the trusted party to be moved to assist partially by the knowledge that they are being trusted. The trouble with this understanding of trust is that it rules out instances of unknown trusting. For example, imagine in an elevator I overhear a famous sports star telling someone he will not be playing in tonight's game, and I believe him. On the grounds of this information I place a bet on

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emphasized the word 'usually' above because I want to be clear that seeking evidence for a proposition already given to you through testimony is not always a betrayal of trust. It is a matter of motive. Sometimes we seek evidence for propositions we already believe on testimony simply because we want to understand the matter more fully, perhaps to explain to others, or perhaps for our own edification. This is not a betrayal of trust, because the testimony truly is sufficient for belief, but something deeper than mere belief is desired. This is what is expressed in the famous medieval maxim "faith seeking understanding" which was invoked to communicate the attitude in which matters of faith ought to be studied.

[42] A question arises here about whether or not trust is all-or-nothing as I have characterized it here or does it come in degrees? As with all things dealing with human psychology, it is very complex, and the simple, binary description I have given, where any seeking of evidence betrays trust, cannot be the full picture. My point is that doubt and trust are contraries, just as, say, the colors white and black are, but that does not mean that there cannot be shades of grey. The essential attitude of trust is assurance, perfect trust would mean perfect assurance, the complete elimination of doubt.

the game. However, that night he not only plays, but scores the winning goal. It seems clear that in such a scenario I really am trusting the sports star and I would subsequently feel betrayed, even though I have no expectation that my trusting him has any effect on his actions. How could it, since he does not even know who I am or that I was listening?

Moreover, affective descriptions of trust stray very close to being a phenomenology of belief. For example, Jones' writes:

> Emotions are thus not primarily beliefs, although they do tend to give rise to beliefs; instead they are distinctive ways of seeing a situation… the claim being advanced here is that the attitude of optimism constitutive of trust is a distinctive way of seeing another. This way of seeing the other is constituted by a distinctive trusting cognitive set, *which makes one's willingness to rely on the other seem reasonable* (11; emphasis added).

Notice that what is not being denied is that trust leads to belief. We can thank Anscombe for ruling out the possibility of that denial. Rather, what is at question is whether trust is a belief itself. If it is not, if it is an emotion or attitude as Jones' suggests, it is not clear why it would lead to a belief, especially a belief that seems reasonable. For example, one can be afraid while simultaneously thinking it is irrational to be afraid. Likewise, I am often offended by useful criticism of my writing, even though I know it is irrational to perceive that criticism as a slight, and, in fact, I invited the criticism in the first place! However, believing that someone is trustworthy would also make it seem that it is reasonable to rely on them, and if you believed that they were trustworthy you would be optimistic concerning their goodwill. So, even if we pursue a phenomenology of trust on an affective model, we arrive at a phenomenon that is

explained best by the doxastic model. The phenomenon of trusting is precisely the phenomenon of believing someone to be trustworthy.

These issues move me to finding the doxastic model more plausible, and when we inspect closely what I have called the substitutionary nature of trust I think we will see why trust interacts so unusually with evidence. Anscombe was the first contemporary analytic philosopher to notice the substitutionary nature of trust, which is the fact that when we believe someone on some matter, we forgo our own opinion on that matter in favor of theirs. When we forgo our own opinion and instead believe someone else's, we are in a way substituting their epistemic position for ours.

Arnon Keren advocates something similar to a substitutionary account in what he calls 'preemptive reasons,' borrowing Joseph Raz's terminology. He argues that understanding trust as a type of preemptive reason neutralizes the objections to doxastic accounts raised by Faulkner or others. A preemptive reason is a higher-order reason to act against certain other reasons (Keren 2600). When we testify, in Keren's view, we invite others to see our testimony as evidence for some proposition, but also as a preemptive reason "against forming a belief on the basis of our own weighing of certain other evidence" (2600). In the next paragraph he clarifies: "A speaker who invites you to trust her is inviting you not merely to rely upon her judgment but to rely on it, more specifically, *instead of making your own judgment* on the basis of all the evidence available to you" (2600, emphasis added).

If this is indeed what trust is, it is easy to see why it has such an unusual relationship with evidence. Evidentialism is a good maxim so far as our own epistemic position is concerned. But human beings are not just rational animals, we are *dependent* rational animals; so many of our goods are beyond our reach as individuals, and it is because of this that we form complex webs

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of trust. Among such goods is knowledge: we need to know much more than we can know with only the evidence and abilities available to us. When we trust others, we can come to know what is beyond us. Thus, we ignore evidence against beliefs we take on trust, because in the act of trust we choose to forgo our own evidence and instead rely on another's. Similarly, when we choose to trust we are forced to hold to something at a level of confidence beyond what our evidence supports, because in an act of trust we are forgoing evidential reasoning on this issue.

I suspect that it is obvious that committing to someone in this way is a serious risk. When could it ever be rational to make such a dangerous commitment? Only when there is good reason to *believe* that the trusted party is trustworthy.[43] Affective models, or other non-doxastic models of trust, not only fall short in adequately explaining the phenomenology of trust, they also do not give us a picture of trust that is rationally justified. Yet, we know that many acts of trust really are justified.

What counts then as good reasons to believe someone is trustworthy? We can divide our reasons to trust into three separate kinds. First, we can believe that someone is trustworthy through the testimony of others that we trust. I suspect that this is primarily how people do begin to trust others; however, it does not answer the question of what ultimately justifies trust, it only postpones it.

The second is that we can believe that someone is trustworthy through inductive inference from evidence of their trustworthiness. At first this might appear dubious to us; after

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[43] Where trustworthiness is a shared value for the good that is being entrusted to them, whether that good be telling the truth, or some other concrete good. Ultimately, I think Baier was right to single out goodwill as the primary characteristic that makes someone trustworthy. If someone genuinely wants what is good for you, sees it as valuable in itself, and is willing to sacrifice to secure it, this is a person whom you can trust - with telling the truth because they will recognize that human beings need truth and with particular things that you value because what is valuable to you will be valuable to such a person (except in those cases where you might value what is contrary to your good. This does happen sometimes).

all, have we not been at pains to show that trust strains the norms of inductive reasoning? However, there is no conflict. Suppose that person *p* testifies to proposition *x*, and determining that *p* is trustworthy, you decide to believe *p* that *x*. Your belief that *x* will be a belief based on trust and will therefore strain the norms of inductive reasoning in all the ways we have discussed above. Your belief that *p* is trustworthy need not be based on trust though; there is no conflict in believing it on standard inductive reasoning.

The third kind of justification requires the most explanation; it is to perceive the goodwill of the trusted party directly. Just as it is one thing to deduce that there was murder from evidence found at a crime scene and another to witness the murder first hand, some philosophers have suggested that human beings are equipped with the tools to perceive the interior psychological states of others directly. We will examine this form of justification in detail in the next section.

(3.1.4) Trust and the Second Personal

We return again briefly to the work of Eleonore Stump. Besides her work on Aquinas and the Problem of Evil, Stump defends second-personal connection as an avenue to justify trust. In her paper "Faith, Wisdom, and the Transmission of Knowledge through Testimony" Stump outlines and defends these views the most clearly. The driving question for her is how can trust be considered an intellectual virtue (205)? Recall that a virtue is a perfection or excellence of a natural capacity based on the aim of that capacity. The aim of the intellect is to acquire truth, which is to know. An intellectual virtue then is an excellence in acquiring knowledge, and trust at some level appears to qualify, since trusting in testimony is an important way that human beings come to know truths. However, it also seems not to qualify, since trusting appears passive. How can something be considered an excellence of someone when, by trusting, it seems you are not doing anything at all, but rather relying on someone else to do something?

To explore the problem, Stump takes a scene from the opera *La Traviata* and uses it as a thought experiment (205-206). In the scene, a young courtesan, Violetta, who has developed a cynicism towards men due to her profession, nonetheless believes the confession of love made by Alfredo, a stranger to her, who fell in love with her from a distance. In trusting Alfredo, Violetta comes to know that he loves her. What makes this situation particularly suitable as a thought experiment is that there is no history between Violetta and Alfredo that she can draw on to judge his trustworthiness. If we look back at the three kinds of justifications for belief above, she has no experience to reason inductively about Alfredo's trustworthiness, and she also has no testimony from others about any feature of his character. Nevertheless, while dramatic, this situation is plausible; it is not hard to believe that people do trust others in situations like Violetta's. If Violetta's trust is justified, there must be a third way of justification that is not testimony or experience.

The first matter of note in this case is that Violetta is able to *choose* to trust Alfredo or not. Choosing is not passive, so the original concern that trust cannot be a virtue because it is passive is addressed. However, this raises its own set of concerns. In choosing to trust Alfredo, Violetta is choosing to believe that he loves her. Belief is supposed by many to be non-volitional. After all, you the reader cannot choose to believe there are no words before your eyes at this moment. Can anyone choose to believe that 1+1=3? Some beliefs are like this, yet in Violetta's case we have a genuine case where a belief is voluntary. How can it be possible for anyone to choose to believe? Stump finds her answer in the Thomistic understanding of faith.

To describe it very succinctly, Aquinas's account of the will as being aimed at the good generally and the intellect as being aimed at the good of truth specifically allows the will to move the intellect, i.e. to choose to believe, in situations where, first, there are no grounds for

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contrary belief sufficient to compel the intellect, and where, second, the chosen belief is recognized as a good for the person overall ("Faith, Wisdom, and the Transmission of Knowledge through Testimony" 210).

The first condition has to do with what Stump calls the "design plan" of the human organism and its constituent parts (210). The particular parts of human beings are aimed at their own particular goods, for example, the legs for walking. The will is aimed at the ultimate good for the human being and commands the particular parts to their ends for the sake of this ultimate good as, for example, when I will my legs to walk for the sake of exercise. However, when I will my legs to move, I cannot will them to do what is outside their design plan. Thus I can will my legs to walk, but I cannot will them to bend forward, so that my foot touches my chest ("Faith, Wisdom, and the Transmission of Knowledge through Testimony" 210). Likewise, there are some beliefs that we hold on such overwhelming grounds that the intellect is compelled to assent, and in these cases the will cannot choose to believe otherwise. To do so would go against the design plan of the intellect and would be like willing the knee to bend the opposite way. This is why we cannot choose to believe that 1+1=3.

The second condition has to do with the design plan of the will. As we have already said, the will is aimed at the good of the human being generally and orders the particular parts for the sake of this general good. Thus, if a certain belief is recognized as good for the human being, but the intellect lacks sufficient grounds to move itself to assent, the will can move it instead. Stump cites some easily recognizable examples of a person choosing to eradicate racist beliefs from their upbringing, or fighting the irrational beliefs of mental illness, such as the obsessive washing

of one's hands or the harmful belief of worthlessness that can accompany serious depression (211).[44] For Aquinas, faith in God is also an example.

I think we can comfortably recast this into, perhaps, more familiar language by saying that we can will to believe for practical reasons when theoretical reasons are insufficient. However, can we will to believe purely on practical grounds? If we can, then we might explain Violetta's choosing to believe Alfredo as being motivated by an understanding that her cynical attitude towards men, while well founded in experience, could ultimately lead her to being closed off to valuable intimate relationships. To avoid bitter loneliness she must trust, so she chooses to believe Alfredo. For my part, I think that to believe on purely practical grounds, without heed to any theoretical considerations, is to act contrary to the design plan of the intellect. It is wishful thinking; while not impossible, it is nonetheless poor epistemic practice that we ought to avoid. So, the above explanation of Violetta's trusting is insufficient. There must be a theoretical component to her belief in Alfredo's testimony.

Stump finds this component in the contemporary neuroscientific concept of mind-reading, which is the innate capacity to know other persons and their mental states (216). Research into mind-reading is closely tied with research into the autism spectrum in children. A contributing factor of autism is an impairment in mind-reading ability. A neuro-typical child, for example, can know that their mother is sad when she is crying, and part of this knowledge is a knowledge of sadness. Children with autism can also know that their mother is sad, but this knowledge is likely to be a result of a learned inference, i.e. that faces with tears are sad ("Faith, Wisdom, and the Transmission of Knowledge through Testimony" 217-218).

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[44] These acts of will are difficult and require tremendous willpower. We should not think that this disqualifies them as examples. A choice is no less a choice when it is difficult to make or execute.

This mysterious capacity to perceive the psychological states of other beings without needing the mediation of inference is believed to be rooted in what is called the mirror neuron system. Mirror neurons, Stump explains, fire both when one experiences an emotion and when one sees that emotion in others (218). It is also thought that the mirror neuron system is responsible for the human capacity for empathy (218-219). The result is, to return to the instance of a mother crying, if a child's mirror neuron system is functioning well, there is a part of the mother's sadness which the child will also experience when they see that sadness, and so we can say that the child knows their mother's sadness directly, in a way not entirely reducible to knowing *that* their mother is sad.

What is more, Stump cites evidence that empathic mind-reading extends beyond simple emotions like sadness or pain; it also tells us something of the moral state of others (221). There is something in the doing of morally reprehensible acts – a callousness perhaps – that can be read by observers. Similarly, a sensitivity to other's well-being can also be perceived. If, as I have argued, trustworthiness is a just such a sensitivity, then human beings have a capacity, imperfect to be sure,[45] though nonetheless present, to perceive the trustworthiness of others in a way unmediated by inference.

It is commonplace to ask someone to "look me in the eye" when one wants to be assured of their truthfulness. Given what Stump has said about mind-reading, this practice makes sense. Deception is easiest if you can avoid the sort of second-personal connection that Stump describes, because in it one's intentions might be perceived. Having someone look you in the eye when they speak initiates this very connection. Once in it there is an empathic exchange: you

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[45] Just like every other kind of human sense, mind-reading can fail, and the sharpness of "vision" can vary from person to person. For some people it may be the case that their capacity to mind-read is unreliable and they would be better off depending on the other methods for justifying trust.

perceive them perceiving you and they perceive you perceiving them. In this state it is difficult to conceal emotions of guilt, pride, or fear over the deception.

So, if we return to the example of Violetta and Alfredo, Violetta can be justified in trusting Alfredo because in her second-personal connection with Alfredo she perceives his goodwill, truthfulness, and love. However, whatever is perceived in this complex exchange is difficult to describe. If we were to ask Violetta what exactly it was about Alfredo that convinced her to trust him, how could she answer? "I just feel it," she might say; "I had an instinct and I could just tell that he was telling the truth." This is the sort of language we use to describe knowledge that is non-inferential in character.

(3.2) Is Faith Trust?

So far we have outlined what trust is and how an act of trust can be justified. This is enough foundation for us to make the argument that this chapter sets out to make: that our suffering is an obstacle to trusting God and this is a problem that theists cannot avoid. However, there is one remaining auxiliary point that I want to make, namely, that the 'trust' that we have analyzed is identical to religious faith. It is not essential to the argument I will make in section 3; however, it does strengthen it. Theism is seldom believed strictly as a position in metaphysics; most theists are religious believers of some stripe. In the western philosophical tradition, they are typically practitioners of one of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three religions share faith as common value, that is, the practitioners of these religions are called to develop their faith. If I am right that faith is trust and that suffering is an obstacle to rational trust, the interpersonal problem of evil will have as much force against the doctrines of these religions as the existential problem of evil does. That is to say, it is a problem that must be addressed by theists.

What complicates this issue is that the value of faith as a virtue in the three great monotheistic traditions is derived from the value each has for their respective scriptures, traditions, or both. What I mean is that faith is valued within the scriptures and traditions of these religions, and it is because of this that practitioners of these religions value it. This complicates the matter because there is no guarantee that the faith of one tradition is identical to the faith of another. So ultimately, answering whether faith is a kind of trust must be done on a case-by-case basis, which is much too big of a project for this paper to take on. I can only offer an argument for the tradition I am educated in – the western Christian tradition – and leave it to other scholars to comment on whether a similar argument might be successful for the others.

Before I make the argument that faith is trust, let us take a second to ask whether this is really a proposition that needs defending. For many readers it may seem obvious that faith is trust in God. As Benjamin W. McCraw notes, it is a common platitude that faith is essentially trusting in God, a platitude that he at least sees as obviously true (141-142). Nevertheless, he notes that many philosophers disagree (141). Likewise, John Bishop lists seven models of faith, of which the trust model is one (Bishop Introduction). While not all of these models compete with the trust model, some of them do. For the sake of space, we will not look at these competing models in detail, but it needs to be said that there are indeed scholars who deny that faith is trust.

(3.2.1) Foundational Assumptions of the Contemporary Discussion

We have already noted that the pioneers of trust as an issue in contemporary analytic philosophy, Anscombe and Baier, saw their work as closely related to faith in the western Christian tradition.[46] In the case of Anscombe, she saw her work as a return and continuation of

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[46] To avoid the onerous phrase "in the western Christian tradition" I will just use the term 'faith' in what follows. It should be understood that the faith I am discussing is strictly the faith of the western Christian tradition.

the commonsense analysis of faith, while Baier saw herself as offering a new start to the subject

to avoid the errors made by theologians.[47] We have also seen Stump drawing on Aquinas's

analysis of faith to better understand the contemporary notion of trust.[48] In an early monograph

on the topic of testimony, Coady writes:

> Yet it is not only fair, but also instructive to note that some pre-modern
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> philosophers who deny testimony the title of knowledge do concede it a
>
> significant role in the formation of true and sometimes highly advantageous
>
> belief. One such philosopher is Aquinas and indeed an adherent to an historically
>
> oriented religion like Christianity must be disposed to see at least some
>
> testimony-based beliefs as advantageous, namely those which constitute part of
>
> the content of his or her faith (16).

Later he further remarks that "Aquinas treats our dependency upon others as a species of faith"

and says that though he does not intend to explore it in the monograph, it nonetheless is an

"interesting and subtle theory of faith" (16-17).

So, we see that one reason to identify trust with faith is that that identification is baked

into the contemporary discussion from the beginning. It is not as if there are two separate

philosophical projects which we discover are studying the same phenomenon; rather, the later

project explicitly identified itself as continuing (or sometimes competing with) the work of the

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[47] Of course, as we noted above, Baier thought that trust was explored theologically through the concepts of faith and hope, but principally hope. Nevertheless, it is still true that she recognizes the relevance of the philosophy of faith in the work she was doing, even as she tried to distance herself from that tradition.
[48] Others besides Stump have turned to Aquinas for guidance as well, see for example, Matthew Kent Siebert's "Aquinas on Testimonial Justification: Faith and Opinion" and "Testimonial Trustworthiness: Truthfulness and Trust."

earlier one. The major difference is one of focus: the contemporary project is more focused on mundane secular instances of trust, whereas faith is, of course, religious and centered on God.

(3.2.2) Aquinas and Augustine on Faith

A second reason to identify faith with trust is that many of the most influential Christian theologians and philosophers would accept that identification. Let us begin with Aquinas, since we have already discussed how fruitful his philosophy of faith has been for understanding trust. Also, because Aquinas is such a skillful commentator on scripture and the Church fathers, his understanding of faith builds on important sources of tradition.

The author of the Hebrew epistle offers the only direct definition of faith in the Christian scriptures: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In his commentary, Aquinas says of this definition that it is "complete but obscure" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 11:1). After a lengthy exegesis of the text he concludes: "Now, if someone were to reduce those words to their correct form, he could say that faith is a habit of the mind by which eternal life is begun in us and makes the intellect assent to things that it does not see" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 11:1). This assent, he makes clear, "rests on God's authority" (*Commentary on Hebrews* 11:1). Leaving out the clause on the beginning of eternal life, this is precisely what trust is on our above analogy: belief that forgoes what we are able to see ourselves and instead relies on the authority of another, in this case God.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas puts forward the same definition, only this time more of a focus is given to the authority of Augustine rather than Hebrews. Augustine defines faith as "believing about God [*credere Deum*], believing God [*credere Deo*], and believing for the sake of God [*credere in Deum*]" and in *Prima-Secundae Pars*, question two, article two Aquinas lays

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out the subtle distinctions between these phrases. Here I am using Mark Jordan's translation. Believing about God (*credere Deum)*, Aquinas calls the material object of faith. It is, in Jordan's words, "believing things that have to do with God" (69), i.e. the sum of all propositions in Christian revelation that are taken by faith. Believing God (*credere Deo*) Jordan calls "believing what God says because God says it" (70). This, Aquinas says, is the formal aspect of faith, which is to say that all that one believes on faith they believe *through* believing God. To believe for the sake of God (*credere in Deum*) Aquinas interprets as the formal object of the will in the act of faith, since faith is a movement of the intellect by the will, the will acts for an end and this is God. In less technical jargon, it denotes *why* one chooses faith: to be united to God. The second condition – believing God – is clearly identical to trust, and Aquinas accepts it as the form of faith. So, no less of a figure as Thomas Aquinas understood faith as trust and believed this definition to be supported by apostolic scripture and St. Augustine of Hippo. These are giant figures of authority in the Western Christian tradition.

(3.2.3) Kierkegaard on Faith

Many influential Protestant philosophers also accepted faith as trust in testimony. Guy Longsworth argues that Immanuel Kant understood faith as a kind of trust, albeit one made on practical rather than theoretical grounds (252). I argue that Søren Kierkegaard could be added to this list as well.

Kierkegaard famously explores faith through the story of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling.* There he construes faith as an absurd double-movement, a paradox, where one resigns their worldly desires and simultaneously, through faith, believes they will receive them (27-53). The emphasis on faith's absurdity may lead some to suppose that Kierkegaard does not

understand faith as trust, since trust seems at face value to be a very mundane and rational action, far from absurd or paradoxical. However, I think this is too hasty a conclusion.

First of all, Kierkegaard does on occasion use the language of trust to describe faith. For example, when contrasting Abraham's faith with worldly heroes: "There was one who relied upon himself and gained everything; there was one who in the security of his own strength sacrificed everything; but the one who *believed God* was the greatest of all" (*Fear and Trembling* 16, emphasis added). The contrast of relying on oneself with believing God makes perfect sense given our discussion of trust above: trust is to rely on the testimony of others rather than on one's own powers. Further on, when describing the despair that Abraham must have felt when he heard the command to sacrifice his son, Kierkegaard writes: "All was lost! Seventy years of *trusting* expectancy, the brief joy over the fulfillment of faith" (19; emphasis added).

Furthermore, Kierkegaard emphasizes testimony and social epistemology in subtle ways in the text. For example, *Fear and Trembling* famously begins with a mysterious epigraph: "What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not." This is a quote from Johann Georg Hamann, a part of a story, where a son who captures an enemy city sends a messenger to ask his father what should be done with it. The father, Tarquinius Superbus, not trusting the messenger, seems to ignore him and absent-mindedly swings his cane, cutting the heads off the tallest poppies. The messenger returns and describes Tarquinius's actions to the son, who understands them to be a response: that he should kill the leaders of the city. Some interpreters of *Fear and Trembling* take this to be a clue to the reader that the true meaning of the text is not on its face, that there is a secret meaning (Kosch;

Green; Martinson)[49] but they fail to realize the full importance of the fact that the key to understanding in the passage is a relationship. The son could understand because the son knew the father, a veiled gesture to the importance of second-personal relationship in our epistemology.

Similarly, when Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author of the text, introduces himself, he stresses that he is a great admirer of Abraham, even though he could not understand the story fully. In this description he includes a stirring tribute to the importance of testimony:

> If a human being did not have an eternal consciousness, if underlying everything there were only a wild, fermenting power that writhing in dark passions produced everything, be it significant or insignificant, if a vast, never appeased emptiness hid beneath everything, what would life be then but despair? If such were the situation, if there were no sacred bond that knit humankind together, if one generation emerged after another like a forest foliage, if one generation succeeded another like the singing of birds in the forest, if a generation passed through the world as a ship through the sea, as wind though the desert, and unthinking and unproductive performance, if an eternal oblivion, perpetually hungry, lurked for its prey and there were no power strong enough to wrench that away from it – how empty and devoid of consolation life would be! But precisely for that reason it is not so, and just as God created man and woman, so he created hero and the poet and orator (15).

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[49] The translators of Kierkegaard that I use – Howard and Edna Hong – might also be among such interpreters. In their historical introduction to *Fear and Trembling* they suggest that Kierkegaard wrote into the text a hidden meaning meant for his ex-fiancé Regine Olson.

The poet, he explains, admires the hero, and passes the story of greatness on to further generations (15), and this is what Johannes de Silentio is for Abraham, the hero of faith (16). So, we can see that trust and testimony are important for Kierkegaard and the text.

That notwithstanding, trust does not appear in Kierkegaard's more detailed descriptions of the movements of faith. Why is this the case? I think this is best explained by the limitations of the pseudonymous author. De Silentio constantly insists that he does not fully understand the movements of faith. "By no means do I have faith" he says (32); "I cannot make the movement of faith" (34). "Thinking about Abraham… I am shattered. I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life, I am constantly repelled, and, despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hairsbreadth" (33); "For my part, I presumably can describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them" (37). This last quotation is an important one. It should make us think back to the messenger in the epigraph who communicates a message not known to him by describing Tarquinius Superbus' movements.[50] The point of writing in the voice of this character, besides emphasizing that the great difficulty of faith is not understanding it but living it, is to mark that faith is only fully understood when one does the motions themselves. There is something lost in the translation of the action into third-person description.

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[50] I think this reading of the epigraph is superior to "hidden-message" interpretations. Consider Green as a representative of the hidden-message camp. He writes "[o]n the basis of this epigraph, it is easy to conclude that the reader of *Fear and Trembling* is in the position of the envoy: recipient of a message not meant for him and one whose deepest meaning escapes him" (95). But it is much easier to conclude that it is Johannes Silentio who is, in fact, in the position of the messenger. This conclusion has considerable support within the text. In Hamann's story, the messenger conveys meaning he does not understand by describing the movements made by Tarquinius Superbus, and Johannes Silentio clearly identifies himself as communicating a message he does not fully understand by describing the movements of faith. It think it would be hard to argue that Kierkegaard did not expect us to notice this parallel. For a defense of a similar reading of the epigraph, see Ryan Kemp's "In Defense of a Straightforward Reading of Fear and Trembling."

I take Kierkegaard to be cleverly prodding the reader to consider the elements of faith that are not fully reducible to propositional description;[51] these are the elements that appear absurd or paradoxical to those looking on from the outside, but once one has the requisite experiences they can be at some level be understood as justified and rational. What precisely those elements are he does not make clear, though I think the story of Violetta and Alfredo might help us out here. That story illustrated how we perceive the intent of others through second-personal connection. Such perceptions are precisely the sorts of experiences which can be difficult, perhaps impossible, to fully understand from a third person perspective. Since mind-reading seems to be the process in which we directly encounter other persons, it cannot be exhaustively translated to third-person description because any description mediates what is essentially immediate. Second-personal mind-reading is thus a phenomenon which must be experienced to be fully understood.[52] As a result, those who have not experienced it, that is, those on the outside looking in, can only describe the movements.

At the least I take this collection of Christian thinkers – Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, and Kierkegaard – to represent a valid stream of orthodox understanding of faith, an understanding of faith as trust in God. Thus, Christian theists are faced with a serious problem: how can one

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[51] This reading is supported by other things Kierkegaard says about faith in *Fear and Trembling*. He describes faith as immediate, sensate, psychical, hidden, and interior in contrast to the external, universal, and disclosed nature of the ethical (54; 68-69; 82). When something is disclosed it is mediated through description. If there is something about oneself or one's experience which cannot be disclosed it is because it cannot be reduced to propositional description, i.e. something that can only be fully understood through un-mediated encounter.

[52] The word "fully" is important here. There are levels to the understanding just like there are rungs on a ladder. Consider again Violetta and Alfredo. The only person who can totally understand what Violetta experiences is Violetta. However, someone who also knows Alfredo might understand well enough what Violetta experienced for her actions to make sense to them. Another rung down the ladder would be someone who has had similar connections with other people that are not Alfredo (presumably this would be most readers). At the very bottom of the ladder would be someone who has never had the experience of second-personal mind reading. For this person, Violetta's actions might seem absurd. In *Fear and Trembling* I take Kierkegaard to be writing from the perspective of someone very near the bottom of the ladder.

respond to suffering with faith if that suffering undermines rational grounds for such faith? This is what we will explore in the final section of this chapter.

(3.3) Trusting God through Suffering – The Interpersonal Problem of Evil

In this chapter we have been constructing an argument. In section 3.1 we examined trust and discovered that not all acts of trust are justified. An act of trust is justified insofar as there is reason to believe that the trusted party is trustworthy. This makes the first premise of the argument:

p16. An act of trust is justified insofar as there is reason to believe that the trusted party is trustworthy.

In section 2 we argued that theism entails that it is rational for us to trust God. This is the second premise of our argument:

p17. Theism entails that it is rational for us to trust God.

For reasons of space, we have not made this argument entirely. I do not think this argument needs to be made very strongly, since I expect that most Christian theists will accept without argument that it is important to their worldview that it is rational to trust God, or at the least that it is not irrational to trust him. Nonetheless, I did make an argument that what we have here called 'trust' is what the western Christian tradition calls 'faith,' thus, Christians must be committed to holding that it is essential to their worldview that it is rational to trust God.

In this section I will argue for the following:

p18. Suffering is evidence against the trustworthiness of God.

If we then plug in the uncontroversial premise:

p19. God allows all human beings to suffer.

We arrive at the conclusion:

p20. It is probably irrational to trust God, and Christian theism is probably false.

I do not believe ultimately that the argument is successful. However, the argument does demand, I will argue, a certain response: a theodicy. Responses to the Existential Problem of Evil that do not employ theodicy, or worse, undermine theodicy, are open to attack with this new argument. Theists need to re-examine their responses to the Problem of Evil in light of these developments.

(3.3.1) Suffering is Evidence Against the Trustworthiness of God.

When do human beings suffer? It is tempting to answer quite simply that human beings suffer when they are in pain, but this is too hasty a response. The trouble with this answer is that pain is much too narrow a category. By 'pain' I mean to denote a range of unpleasant sensations of the body: the throb after stubbing one's toe, the sting of a bug bite, the arresting waves of a broken limb. These can be instances of suffering. However, the most acute forms of suffering are psychological experiences, like the sinking despair of heartbreak, the overpowering domination of terror, or the seemingly inescapable numbness of depression. We do sometimes describe such psychological experiences as 'pain' but only analogically. So, pain properly speaking does not exhaust the wide range of experiences in which we suffer.

A better definition is the one offered by Stump, which we discussed in section 2.1.4, that suffering is the frustration or loss of what we deeply care about (*Wandering in Darkness* 11). Christine Korsgaard gets at this point very well:

The painfulness of pain consists in the fact that these are the sensations which we are inclined to fight. You may want to ask: why are we inclined to fight them if they are not horrible in themselves? In some cases we are biologically wired this way; pain could not do its biological job if we were not inclined to fight it… Pain really is less horrible if you can curb your inclination to fight it. Ask yourself how, if the painfulness of pain rested just in the character of the sensations, it could help to lie down? The sensations do not change." (147).

Korsgaard is not talking about suffering here, but her concept of "horribleness" is very similar. The bad quality to pain is grounded in our desire to avoid it, and when you relax that imposing biological instinct, pain becomes more bearable even though the sensations remain the same. Stump makes the same argument with the example of the pains that come with athletic excellence or natural child birth (*Wandering in Darkness* 5-6). Marathon runners willingly subject themselves to incredible pain, but we are not inclined to call running a marathon suffering.[53] Likewise, some mothers choose to give birth without anesthetic, because there is something they desire in the experience of the pains of childbirth, and this too we are not inclined to call suffering.

At its root then, suffering occurs when our greatest desires are lost or frustrated, and the greater the desire the worse the suffering when lost. Of course, every human being values their own flourishing, and this is why intense prolonged pain or physical injury and disability are paradigmatic instances of suffering. However, the loss of valued external goods, perhaps a valued career or a loved one, can be just as bad or worse.

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[53] Does it make sense to ask "how can a good God allow marathons to exist?"

Let us recall now the division of goods we already made in chapter 2, between objective goods and subjective goods. Objective goods are the goods that we need to flourish as human beings, the necessities of our human nature: food, shelter, good health, a sense of purpose, even existence itself. Subjective goods, or as Stump calls them "desires of the heart," are those things which we value not because they are necessary for our flourishing, but just because we have set our hearts on them. This division exhausts the list of goods over which we might suffer. Therefore, suffering also can be divided into these two categories: suffering over the loss or frustration of our flourishing, and suffering over the loss or frustration of the desires of our hearts. We will examine each in turn and show how both kinds are evidence against the trustworthiness of God, who permits us to suffer them.

In section 1 we determined that trustworthiness is rooted in goodwill. A person who values our good can be relied on to act for our good; this is what we count on those we trust to do. Now, when we suffer due to the loss or frustration of our flourishing, and God permits that suffering when he could prevent it, it is obviously evidence against God's goodwill towards us. Can there be more direct evidence against someone's goodwill than their being unwilling to act for our good when they are able? Obviously not, thus suffering of the first kind is evidence against God's trustworthiness.

Suffering from the loss or frustration of the desires of our heart is less straightforward as evidence. Afterall, suppose we set our hearts on something which is detrimental to our flourishing? In this situation we are destined to suffer, either from the frustration of our flourishing or the loss of that on which we set our hearts; not even an omnipotent God could spare us. The same goes for when one person sets their heart on something which is contrary to

the flourishing of another. So, we cannot say that all instances of suffering can be avoided by God.

Nonetheless, even this second type of suffering can serve as evidence against God's trustworthiness when we recall that the objective set of goods and the subjective set of goods can and do overlap. Again, in section 2.1.4, we sketched Stump's argument that having the desires of our heart is essential to our flourishing. This is partly to do with the identity-constituting nature of our heart's desires. A significant part of what distinguishes us from other members of our species is our particular loves and aims.

To see another philosopher besides Stump make this claim we can look back to Kierkegaard. In his exploration of suffering, Kierkegaard introduces the concept of 'the wish':

> The wish is indeed the sufferer's relation to a happier temporality (faith and hope
> are the relation to the eternal through the will),[54] and the wish is, as it were, the
> tender spot where the suffering hurts, the tender spot that the suffering continually
> touches. Where there is not any wish, the suffering, even if there could be any
> question of suffering, is an animal suffering, not a suffering that is distinctive for
> a human being (*Upbuilding Discourses* 99-100).

The wish is desire – wanting – and he says that it is the cause of our suffering. Suffering without the wish is just animal suffering, by which I take him to mean the mere sensation of pain. Thus, we can confidently say that Kierkegaard agrees with Stump and Korsgaard that suffering is

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[54] This parenthetical aside makes sense when we realize the will is a particularizing capacity. The intellect grasps things insofar as they are generalized and abstracted. The will by contrast grasps things as concrete particulars. In the domain of the moral, the eternal is generalized as the abstract Good. Faith and hope, the movements to the domain of the religious, grasp the eternal as concrete particular, i.e. as a person: God. But the same will which allows us to relate to the eternal through faith also longs for "happier temporality" which is Kierkegaard's peculiar way of saying we essentially desire material goods as well as the eternal one.

grounded in the loss or frustration of our desires rather than in our sensations. Where it gets interesting is the sentences that immediately follow:

> It is a kind of spiritual suicide to want to kill the wish, because we are not speaking of wishes but of the wish with the essential accent of excellence, just as we are not speaking of transient sufferings either but of one who is suffering essentially. The wish is not the healing; that is only through the eternal… In the wish the wound is kept open so that the eternal can heal; if the wound grows over, if the wish disappears, then eternity cannot heal, then temporality has really bungled the illness (100).

If suffering is caused by desire, then can we abolish suffering by abolishing our desire? Kierkegaard answers "no." To do this, he says, is to kill the self. Our desires for particular goods are rooted in that particular desire with the "essential accent of excellence," that is, our desire for *the Good*, goodness itself. One cannot love goodness itself without loving the goodness in temporal things and to annihilate this desire is to annihilate one's self.

In summary, Kierkegaard is here enthusiastically agreeing with Aquinas's anthropology at least this far: that human beings are in their essence creatures of infinite longing. We long infinitely and thus are only fulfilled by the infinite good: the eternal. However, when one loves the Good they do not give up their love for particular goods. Kierkegaard makes this clear in *Fear and Trembling:*

> This movement (of faith) I make all by myself, and what I gain thereby is my eternal consciousness in blessed harmony with my love for the eternal being. By faith I do not renounce anything; on the contrary by faith I receive everything

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exactly in the sense in which it is said that one who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains… Temporality, finitude – that is what it is all about (48-49).

So, Kierkegaard agrees with Stump that having the desires of one's heart is essential to flourishing.[55]

For the reader who is skeptical that desires of the heart are indeed identity-constituting, let us offer one more argument. Remember, for the most part we are examining whether the suffering which results from the frustration of our heart's desires is evidence against the trustworthiness of God. Consider then that when we love someone, we want them to have what they want. If a young girl wants something, say, a bike, that itself will be a reason for their loving mother to want to get it for them. There might be overruling reasons against getting it, for example, if they cannot afford the bike. Nonetheless, that does not change the fact that the mother will want the bike for her daughter just because her daughter wants it. If a friend asks, "why do you want to buy your daughter a bike?" and the mother responds "because my daughter wants one," it would be bizarre for the friend to reply "what does your daughter wanting a bike have to do with this?" It is bizarre because we recognize that since the mother loves her daughter, she will want to get her what she wants barring any overruling reasons.

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[55] What about those cases where someone sets their heart on something that frustrates their flourishing? If Kierkegaard and Stump are right that having one's heart's desires is essential to their flourishing, then for the person that sets their hearts on what is contrary to their flourishing it seems that they are doomed to fall short of ultimate flourishing. We should bite the bullet here and say that regrettable cases like this do occur. Both Kierkegaard and Stump consider them under the label "double-mindedness" (drawing from the epistle of James). Their answers to this problem are different, but share some aspects, particularly, that the heart can change. For example, a young boy might set his heart on having an impressive baseball card collection, but as he matures this desire will be replaced by others. The individual who set's their heart on what is against their flourishing must change their heart to find happiness. However, the change of heart can only come from within their own will, that just is what a change of heart is, anything else would not be genuine change, but a coercion.

Now, what holds for love here also holds for goodwill, because the two terms are very closely linked. It follows that if God is trustworthy he will want us to have the desires of our hearts barring any overruling reasons. Therefore, the suffering which results from the loss of our heart's desires is *prima facie* evidence against God's trustworthiness. We can conclude confidently that suffering in both of its varieties is strong, universally available evidence against God's trustworthiness.

(3.3.2) Theodicy and the Interpersonal Problem of Evil

Now our argument has been made:

p21. An act of trust is justified insofar as there is reason to believe that the trusted party is trustworthy.

p22. Christian theism entails that it is rational for us to trust God.

p23. Suffering is evidence against the trustworthiness of God.

p24. God allows all human beings to suffer.

Therefore,

p25. It is probably irrational to trust God, and Christian theism is probably false.

In what remains of this thesis I will explore what avenues of response Christian theists have towards this argument. I will argue that they can meet the challenge. However, I will also argue that skeptical theism on its own is not a promising avenue, that there is a tension between skeptical theism and the goal in answering the problem, which is relating to God. As a result, I recommend that theists return to theodicy as their primary area of research concerning the problem of evil.

At the end of section 3.1 we outlined three types of reasons one can have concerning the trustworthiness of another: testimony, evidence, and direct perception through second-personal connection. The argument given above can be seen as an argument that the avenue of evidence works against God's trustworthiness, so first we will explore the avenues of testimony and direct perception respectively.

The difficulty with appealing to testimony to justify God's trustworthiness in the face of suffering is obvious: who could possibly be in the position to know? Every person who could testify to God's trustworthiness is without doubt a person who has suffered in some way. To be able to testify reliably to God's trustworthiness they would themselves have needed to answer why it is rational for them to believe in God's trustworthiness. For the chain of testimony to be reliable at all there would need to be a first member who is in a position to know the truth about God's trustworthiness by a method that is not just testimony from someone else, so testimony on its own will not do; we will need another method.

Direct perception through second-personal connection is a more promising avenue. This is precisely what restores Job's faith in God after his sufferings. However, there are some serious difficulties in appealing to this as a response. First, much work needs to be done in understanding the faculty of mind reading and how accurate it can be for beings so alien to ourselves. God is, of course, a very alien sort of being. Can our capacity to read minds function reliably in such alien interactions? Another difficulty with this avenue is that the theist must maintain that direct experiences of God are universal, since the evidence against God's trustworthiness, suffering, is universally available to all people. So, perhaps, for a select party of saints who have come into contact with God this argument might be successful, but theists need more than that since their position is that it is rational for anybody to trust God, not just those who have seen him.

In the case of God, we might add a fourth avenue: a proof of his trustworthiness. God is, after all, perfectly good and loving, and an argument that trustworthiness is included in perfect goodness should not be difficult to make. However, a complication arises when we ask how it is that we know that God is perfectly good and loving? This belief cannot come from faith in scripture or tradition since it is such faith that we are trying to justify in the first place. To be successful, a proof must proceed strictly from natural theology, and many of these arguments cannot prove God's perfect goodness. There are some, however, that purport to. Even if we provisionally grant that these proofs are successful, this avenue still hits the same obstacle that direct perceptions did: that the group of people who have the time, education, and intelligence to fully grasp such a proof is rather small.

Perhaps a combination of direct experience of God, proof, and testimony might do. If we grant that our capacity to mind-read functions reliably in interactions with God and that there are successful proofs of God's trustworthiness in natural theology, then could those people who have seen God and those who understand the proofs, through testimony, make it rational for the rest of us to trust God? I cannot demonstrate that it is impossible, but I think that a fair judge will rule this improbable at best. To even get this far we have had to set aside some serious difficulties; then we must add on the doubts that come with any flawed human testifier and multiply that by each link in the chain of testimony. This has to out-weigh the direct and powerful contra evidence of the suffering we experience. Bear in mind also that any act of trust exposes us to vulnerability, and the decision to trust God is especially life-altering. A great deal is ventured in faith, and the more that is ventured the more justification is needed. This will not do on its own as a response.

This, as far as I can see, exhausts the avenues available besides evidence from experience. Given that they are inadequate, a successful defense is forced to engage with the evidence of everyday experience, and this means finding some way to explain how the evils we suffer can lead to a greater good. This is the project of theodicy; it cannot be avoided by Christian theists.

Some readers may be surprised that I see it worth arguing that theodicy is essential to answering the interpersonal problem. Perhaps an analogy will clarify where the tension arises. Consider the relationship human beings are able to have with other animals, say, for example, a dog. Dogs are very different from humans; much of what human beings do is beyond a dog's ken, but not everything though. Dogs can understand to some limited degree the motivations and meanings behind our actions.[56] It is for this reason that dogs make such excellent companions. When we praise them for good behavior, or express our disappointment, they know and can act on this knowledge. Now, compare a relationship with a dog to a relationship with an amoeba. If an amoeba understands anything at all, it certainly does not understand humans. It makes sense to say that a dog trusts us, whereas it would be absurd to say that an amoeba does.[57]

Turning now to our capacity to relate to God, are we more analogous to a dog or an amoeba?[58] The point of the question is not to find an answer, but to show that there is a scale

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[56] This statement might be controversial or downright false depending on what is meant by the term 'understanding.' I want to avoid any controversy by just saying that "understanding" is used analogically here. It cannot be denied that dogs do act in a way that suggests a grasp of the world and human intentions that is greater than that of an amoeba. That is all my argument needs to say. I leave the content of terms like "grasp" and "understanding" aside for now.

[57] Someone might object, saying that the reason we cannot relate to amoebas is that they are the type of creature which cannot relate to anything at all, even other amoebas. While the difference between human beings and God is vast, humans are nonetheless the kind of thing which can relate to others in principle, so the analogy fails. To this we can respond by asking what makes something the kind of creature which can relate? The answer is intelligence: a capacity to understand the world of some type. But then why this? Because to relate to anything we must be able to grasp its intentions.

[58] My thanks to Thomas Williams for drawing this argument to my attention.

which represents our capacity to relate to God. It also represents in principle how rational it can be to trust God. The more we can grasp God's motivations and intentions, the higher will be our capacity to relate to and trust God. Part of the attractiveness of skeptical theism as a response to the problem of evil is its modesty. Through skeptical theism we answer the challenge to God's existence while avoiding the arrogance of having to claim that we understand the mind of God and can say precisely why he allows people to suffer. But this pious modesty comes at a high price. For each issue about God's providence which we cannot understand moves us lower on the scale; the lower we move the fewer grounds we possess to rationally trust God.

Finally, let me offer one more analogy to clarify why theodicy is needed and what its limits are. Aquinas, when discussing suffering, is prone to using medical analogies. The comparison is useful because medical treatments can be torturous, yet we count them as good because they secure the wellbeing of the patient. So, consider a patient – Gregg – who is discovered to have late stage cancer during a routine checkup. Gregg's doctor tells him that his only hope for treatment is to flood his body with toxic drugs and hope that they kill the cancer. Now Gregg knows nothing about cancer or chemotherapy, so to him this treatment sounds very suspicious. "How could it possibly be good that to flood my body with poisons?" he says, "I do not feel sick at all. I do not consent to the treatment."

Now suppose Gregg's oncologist responds by saying that the trouble with his argument is that he is assuming that because he cannot see any reason to undergo chemotherapy that there is no good reason. That cancer can be difficult to see but that she, as an oncologist, has the requisite knowledge to identify cancer and treat it, and the best treatment is chemotherapy. Would this be a good response to Gregg's worries? Hopefully, we can see that while the physician's argument may be sound, it is doomed to fail as a way of winning over Gregg's trust, which is precisely

what the physician needs to do. Yet, this is the very kind of response the skeptical theist offers. A more advisable avenue of response to Gregg would be to explain to him more about cancer and chemotherapy: to acknowledge his questions and address them. This response is analogous to theodicy.

This analogy can also teach us something about the limits of what a theodicy can do. When the physician explains cancer and chemotherapy to Gregg, she cannot be expected to explain *everything* about it to him. Not only is it impossible, if she somehow could Gregg would no longer need an oncologist, he could just treat himself. What Gregg needs is not to become a physician himself; he needs a physician whom he can trust, and an answer to Gregg's concerns need not be exhaustive in scope and detail to win over that trust. Likewise, we should not expect our theodicies to explain every instance of suffering we encounter. It is sufficient for them to provide a general picture of how suffering can work out for our good. If we needed our theodicies to be exhaustive, then there would be certainly be no hope for theism. Even the task of finding a general picture – a basic sketch of God's reasons for allowing suffering - is challenging.

Are theists up to this challenging task? I trust that they are. Ultimately, if we are to speak clearly about greater goods and worse evils, we need an objective scale by which goods and evils can be judged. For this reason, the most promising theodicies will be ones which follow the tradition set by Boethius and Aquinas outlined in section 2.1.3 of grounding justifying goods in human nature. My concluding advice for all readers interested in this question is that we focus our efforts on the question of theodicy, and that we begin by reexamining the theodicies of the past.

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