

(Neo -) Darwinism and The Epicurean Dilemma

Introduction

If God is all knowing, he is aware of evil, if he is all-powerful, he can prevent evil, if God is all-Good, whence then is evil?¹ This is the age-old ‘problem of evil’, first attributed to the Greek philosopher Epicurus. The inconsistency seemingly evident within the supposed omni-powers of the god of traditional theism have led many to conclude that it is absurd to conceive such a being exists, and if God does exist, he certainly is not benevolent, not a God worthy of worship. The decay, death, predation, disease, immorality and natural disaster ubiquitous in the world simply exacerbates the claim ‘God does not exist’ or, as the late Christopher Hitchens puts it, ‘God is not Great’². Thus, any serious theist that wishes to hold onto the centrality of the Judaeo-Christian God, being the source of all that is good, so frequently attested to in the book of Genesis and throughout the biblical texts, must search in anguish for an answer, or give up God, at minimum one that is good. It is the task of this paper to take the problem with utmost seriousness, not to sugar-coat or evade its poignant grasp on the hearts of the living, and to offer a defensible theodicy – hopefully tenacious enough to be called a solution.

The biblical account of creation points to a God that creates everything good and even very good (see gen 1:1 - 24) by an act of direct unmediated divine creative-power. Whilst exegesis and hermeneutical positions of these texts has differed throughout the centuries, some adopting an allegorical or symbolic meaning (Augustine, Origen, Clement of Alexandria etc.) and others a more literal word for word.³ It is clear since Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection that we cannot speak of biological life spontaneously being created direct by God. This being the case, it is important for any theodicy to consider the scientific data on not just the origin of species, but the evil that arises from the natural process that produces life, namely, natural selection. Therefore, the focus of this study will be to provide an adequate evolutionary theodicy.

What is natural selection? Charles Darwin: “[the] preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations, I call Natural Selection.”⁴ Darwin’s theory proposed that over vast spans of geological time random mutations occurred within organisms, those that were favourable to the environment in which they inhabited would survive and pass on these traits to their kin.⁵ Further, the sheer variety of random mutations inevitably led to newer and more diverse genus in the biosphere, resulting in the grandeur of life we see today, which nonetheless stems from a single common ancestor or microorganism.

The problem for theists, and indeed for Darwin himself, is the latter half of the theory i.e. “the rejection of injurious variations...” responsible for the suffering and eventual extinction of 98%

¹ Attributed to Epicurus by David Hulme see Anonymous, *Epicurus on God* (2012)

<<http://www.atheismandthecity.com/2012/11/epicurus-on-god.html>> [accessed 8 April 2020].

²² Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (U.S.A: Twelve, 2009).

³ Bernadeane Carr, *What The Early Church Believed: Creation and Genesis* (2004)

<<https://www.catholic.com/tract/creation-and-genesis>> [accessed 8 April 2020]

⁴⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species and The Voyage of the Beagle* (London: Vintage Random House, 2009), p. 601

⁵ Ibid., p. 638.

of species that ever roamed the planet⁶, which led Darwin to conclude that an all-good God could not have created life on earth and ultimately to recant his traditional Christian faith. However, it has been suggested by C. G. Hunter, and indeed with academic rigour, that Darwin's conclusion was a deeply theological one, a theodicy that separates God from material creation, who perhaps relies on secondary causation for anything to exist apart from God's-self.⁷ Removing God as the direct cause of creation would at the very least lessen the accusation that God was the author of evil and if, as will be argued in chapter one, if it was 'the only way' to create then this could go *some* way in resolving the dilemma, although, as will be made evident, the classic approach to theodicy will be found wanting.

The death, extinction, predation and suffering of the natural world is however not the only obstacle to theism that Darwin foresaw. Darwin believed that the nature and behaviour of our species *Homo Sapiens* may well have been a product of blind natural selection, sexual selection and the resource allocation game, known now as Game theory. This is in contrast with the hypothesis proposed by Jean Baptiste Lamarck, a contemporary leading biologist to Darwin, who suggested that it was culture rather than biology that morality evolved from.⁸

This argument was further exacerbated "due to the achievement of synthesis between Mendelian genetics and Darwinian evolutionary that occurred in the 1930's" giving rise to Neo-Darwinism whose leading proponent is Richard Dawkins, "who argue[s] that morality has evolved through natural selection and is genetically determined."⁹ Although Darwin would not have been aware of genetics in his day, Niamh Middleton explains that "[he] became increasingly convinced that the need to compete for resources [Game Theory] during times of crisis would have led, in the one species on Earth that had developed rational powers, to the evolution of calculated cruelty, aggression and greed."¹⁰ Thus, making God the author of both natural and moral evil, we could no longer, for Darwin, see ourselves as fully culpable for our actions. The blame was God's.

Therefore, chapter two will seek to reconcile this dilemma by inference to a free-will-event or 'fall' seemingly backed up by the geological record and by the work of palaeontologists and primatologists, who demonstrate that not only was it un-necessary for humanity to become so corrupt, but that it was highly unlikely given their initial nature.

Penultimately, even if this paper is successful in arguing for an 'Only Way' or 'Best Way' (Chapter one) argument for God to create, given some assumptions about God's end goal (*telos*) i.e. freely chosen relationship with the created other, and if our scientific investigations points to an origin of moral evil in the choice of human-beings (Chapter two), we may still ask, why does God not *prevent* evils that seem to have no lasting good outcomes?

To this end, chapter three will engage with the notion of *kenosis* (self-emptying) found in the letter from St. Paul to the Philippians (Phil 2. 6-8), in which theologians have seen the true

⁶ Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and The Problem of Evil* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 15.

⁷ Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin's God: Evolution and The Problem of Evil* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock, 2019), p. 165.

⁸ Niamh M. Middleton, *Homo Lapsus: Sin, Evolution and the God Who Is Love* (Sisters, Oregon: Deep River Books, 2018), p. 22.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

expression of the divine image in Christ as one that self-gives to others and who's power does not coerce creation to God's will but says, as Thomas Jay Oord explains, who purposes an 'Essential Kenosis View', "God always gives freedom, agency and self-organisation, and law-like regularity to creation, depending on the complexity of the creatures involved."¹¹ Therefore, it is due to God's preeminent nature of love that he cannot remove the gifts bestowed on creation. It is not that God will not prevent evil, he simply cannot for to so would be to "deny himself."¹²

Finally, a consideration of God's presence and actions in the world will need to be evaluated in the light of the former conclusion. This will involve not just the plight and redemption of human-beings but also of all creatures capable of experiencing the world as , if God is all-good, creatures developing in the natural world cannot simply be the means to the divine end. Therefore, eschatological consideration will be offered to make reparation for the calamities that undoubtedly befall our animal neighbours.

¹¹ Thomas Jay Oord, 'An Essential Kenosis View ', in *God and The Problem of Evil: Five Views*, ed. by Chad Meister and James K. Dew JR. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017)., p. 89.

¹² Ibid.

Chapter one – The Philosophical.

The philosophical argument about to be presented will attempt to deal with the intellectual problem of evil that such phenomenon pose. That is also to say that this chapter cannot deal with the emotional problem of evil. It is the belief of this paper that such arguments, for the Christian theist, must remain theological and Christocentric in nature, although these considerations will likely overlap in each chapter. It is perhaps at such times, given the current Covid-19 pandemic, that the question this paper addresses are most crucial, for why would an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God create a world ‘groaning in travail’ (Rom 8.22) so often? Why would God use an imperfect mechanism, such as natural selection, to create beings other than God?

As Christopher Southgate has pointed out any serious evolutionary theodicy must incorporate the notion that the way creation comes into being must be ‘the only way’ God could create, or at least ‘the best way’ God could create.¹³ If God could have created better, then he should have created better. It is the suggestion of this paper that for God to create apart from God’s self then he necessarily must abdicate divine sovereignty to do so, due to God’s lack of limitation. Prior to this it is worth spelling out the traditional or ‘Classic View’ to the problem of evil to see if it can resolve the dilemma in the light of the scientific data on evolution.

The argument is derivative of an Augustinian view of evil, one that says that evil is a privation of substance, substance or being are good, that is to say insofar as something exists it is good; what is evil is when substance’s decay or are corrupted causing a privation of its being.¹⁴ In other words, evil is a non-entity, it is simply, for Augustine, a corruption of some thing’s being. God cannot be the cause of corruption, not because God lacks the power, but that God’s nature as pure-being or all-goodness lacks non-being and non-being cannot immerge from pure-being itself, it simply does not exist. Augustine further reasons that, as Phillip Cary explains, “if there is to be creation at all, there is no alternative to corruptible things, because all creatures are by nature corruptible.”¹⁵ Cary goes onto say that this does not mean creatures are “inevitably corrupted, but it does mean they are [...] *vulnerable* to corruption. They are corruptible precisely because they are created.”¹⁶ Only an uncreated being such as God can have the ontological status of incorruptibility. Thus, God is unable to create incorruptible beings, as God cannot create the uncreated, God cannot create God.¹⁷

This deals with the problem of moral evil, insofar as God is unable to create something completely incorruptible. It does not yet though, deal with direct punishments from God featured prominently in the Hebrew Bible, nor does it provide a solution to natural evil.

Augustine offers a somewhat paradoxical defence of God’s ‘punishments’, the view being that God can cause evil if that evil is justified. Although, the word evil (*malum*) in this context is better translated as bad.¹⁸ Cary points out that, for Augustine, an event considered bad such as

¹³ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*., p. 48.

¹⁴ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. by Betty Radice, trans. by R.S Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961)., p. 148.

¹⁵ Phillip Cray, 'A Classic View ', in *God and The Problem of Evil: Five Views*, ed. by Chad Meister and James K. Dew JR. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017)., p. 20.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

judgemental plagues, wars and famine can be morally good, even if to accomplish the act involves something bad.¹⁹ The view puzzling terms this type of event as an ‘evil good’ or that God causes ‘good-bad things’ which certainly seems to present itself as an oxymoron.²⁰ God’s will to punish then comes from the morally good precept that to do so would be just, and if God is all-good, he must also be perfectly just.

This view comes from a *specific* exegesis, one that will be challenged in chapter three, of scripture where God seems to exact his vengeance upon the Israelites or sinners in general. The flood account is perhaps a good example where the sins of humanity “grieved [God] to his heart” and God sends the waters to wipe the Earth clean (see Gen 6-7:24). This potentially deals with God causing suffering of free creature such as humans and ‘fallen angels’ but what of the animals that seem to perish alongside them? Again, this view relies heavily on a pre-scientific and literal hermeneutical lens.

In devising a solution to natural evil, the classic view adopts what is known as ‘Divine permission’, which entails that God could prevent evil but chooses not to so to bring about or preserve greater goods. A good commonly associated with this view is free-will, which for Augustine is the freedom to choose between different goods, this means it is *not* the freedom to choose sin, otherwise this would imply that God has no free-will, since God cannot sin.²¹ Therefore, God can prevent us from sinning without effecting our free-will, this is due to the fact, for Augustine, that true freedom is found when God “restore[s] our will from the bondage of sin...”²². God, therefore, on this view, must always have a morally sufficient reason for permitting the misuse of freedom.

An example may be that God permits moral evil for us to learn from their consequences, as Richard Swinburne explains “if God normally intervened to stop our bad choices having their intended effects, we would not have sufficient responsibility for the world.”²³ There is a sense in which character building in the face of suffering, caused either by our own moral failings or natural evil, would be lost. There are, Swinburne suggest, higher-order goods and values, that can only be attained in response to evil and suffering.²⁴ These include, but are not limited to: heroic actions, compassion for others, acts of charity and resisting temptation to demonstrate “our total commitment to the good.”²⁵ These acts would produce virtuous people: heroic, compassionate, charitable and dedicated members of society. It is likely also that we value certain things and people precisely because they are susceptible to damage; if the sun was always out, we may not appreciate it.

However, as Thomas Jay Oord points out there are certain kinds of evil, ‘genuine evil’, that it is difficult to see what good come from it. Oord considers a case where a young girl, walking home from school, is kidnapped, raped and murdered.²⁶ In the case he offers there is no one

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

²¹ St. Augustine, *City of God*, ed. by Betty Radice, trans. by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 1089.

²² Phillip Cray, 'A Classic View', p. 27.

²³ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 238.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 241.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Oord, 'An Essential Kenosis View', p. 83.

around to be heroic, no one to show compassion to the girl suffering, no one to be virtuous.²⁷ One may suggest that the mother of the girl would have a chance of heroic struggle in dealing with the death of her daughter, but this it seems would be no justification for God to allow it. It would benefit both the girl and her persecutor if God prevented the action from occurring.

There is a problem of divine calculation, what amount of evil justifies the good? It is difficult to see the good outweighing the bad in this situation. This is where the classic view proponents will make recourse to 'Divine hiddenness', we cannot know why God permitted it, but we must trust there was good reason in the Divine mind to do so. Evidently for Oord and others this is insufficient. It also assumes a sort of consequentialism on God's part, if maximal goodness always prevails then evil ought to be permitted. Moreover, in relation to the suffering prevalent in an evolutionary process then, on any view, it must be the 'only way' or at least the 'best way' for God to create or God should have created differently.

Before considering this, it is worth redefining the problem of evil in the light of scientific knowledge and what should constitute an evil by means of a good-harm analysis. We can categorise the problem into three: death, pain and waste, all caused by the evolutionary process.

1. *Death*, as Southgate has noted, may not be intrinsically evil in and of itself "if it follows a fulfilled life."²⁸ Indeed, Epicurus himself agrees "that death means nothing to us, since every good and every evil lies in sensation; but death is the privation of sensation."²⁹ Moreover, the science informs us that death "is also the prerequisite of 'regeneration' and of 'biological creativity'", the problem, then, lies in the unfulfillment of, for example, "the new born impala torn apart alive by the hyena..."³⁰; death "is a thermodynamic necessity" for biological life to exist and only constitutes a problem if that life is cut short from its fulfilment.³¹
2. *Pain* "is a necessary concomitant of a richer experience of the world in higher animals."³² For certain animals to evolve such as lions, tigers, eagles etc then pain must exist as it is "part of the way evolutionary process optimizes the fitness of organisms, and the fitness of ecosystems" which in turn develop more sophisticated mechanisms capable of surviving in the environment.³³ The problem then is in the pain of individual animals and humans that experience "all-pain and no richness".³⁴ Overall species may benefit but the individual pays dearly.
3. *Waste* : Southgate reasons that this should only include living organisms, and that the problem need not be exacerbated by the plight of "the star that must 'die' in order that heavy elements may form in a supernova", as it has no experience and therefore no innate value.³⁵ It is the value of all living things that must be considered. It may have been necessary for extinction of millions of species "(like the dinosaurs) [...] if mammals were to flourish."³⁶ However, while nothing in the biosphere is completely wasted, "since the free-energy content of one organism is at least partly recycled in the content of others", as Holmes Rolston III explains "plants become insects, which become chicks, which become foxes, which die to fertilize

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*., p. 8.

²⁹ Epicurus, *The Art of Happiness*, trans. by George K. Stodach (New York: Penguin Books, 2012)., p. 156.

³⁰ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*., p. 8.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 7.

³³ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

plants”, there is ‘The Circle of Life’ to quote Mufasa’s words.³⁷³⁸ However, extinction is always a problem as it removes a whole unique way of living from the biosphere.³⁹

The problem then, now re-defined, is not death *per se* nor simply suffering *per se*, it is more niche than that. It consists of death without fulfilment, individual suffering without individual reward and the extinction and loss of valuable ways of being in the world. Moreover, predation is itself a necessary cog in the evolutionary process and key component in the preservation of the biosphere as whole; not only is predation vital to prevent species from over populating, diminishing their resources and ultimately sending themselves extinct, it also provides the means for greater sophisticated adaptations, as Southgate notes “the cougar’s fang have carved the limbs of the fleet-footed deer...”⁴⁰.

Natural Selection may be responsible for a lot of death, suffering and extinction, but it is also responsible for all the beauty, diversity and supreme order of biological life. Thus, one must consider a good-harm analysis of the total, which has partly been demonstrated above. It will be left to the reader to ponder over some of the more sophisticated creatures and their development, knowing that there was necessary suffering to produce them and perhaps ask, was it worth it? It is worth noting at this point that “pain cannot be excessive, because counter productive pain would be nonadaptive and would therefore be selected against.”⁴¹

There are two questions that may arise now: 1) was this the only way *biological* life could immerge? 2) if so, what is God’s purpose? The latter asks whether there is a telos (purpose) to the evolutionary process, whilst the first is interested in whether Natural Selection was the only way, or at least the best way, to achieve that telos. It has often been noted that God’s trinitarian nature emphasises God’s being as fundamentally relational, acting out from eternity from The Father to The Son through The Holy Spirit. This being the case, it is reasonable to assume that God wishes to be in relationship to not just any creation but a creation that can offer free uncoerced reciprocal relation. This teleological concern of God’s is obviously made manifest in the human species; by writing any paper one may be said to be taking part in the Logos (The Word) and sharing somewhat in the divine life. However, it may seem difficult to some to see God as all-loving if other creatures, by whom we evolved, are simply a means to the Divine end. The teleological aspect of other creaturely lives must therefore be considered within soteriological and eschatological endeavours (see chapter three).

In answering question one, it must be decided that biological life specifically is of important value, insofar as some of the higher-order values that it produces couldn’t have been produced by other means. As far as we know biological life is the only life which experiences pain, normally attributed to our nervous system. As we saw earlier, Swinburne demonstrates that a certain amount of pain and suffering is necessary to build character. John Hick has also suggested that these character building values, play an ultimate role in forming ‘selves’; to make right choices, to learn from mistakes, to be faced with suffering, are all ingredients in the

³⁷ Holmes Rolston, ‘REDEEMING A CRUCIFORM NATURE: with Denis Edwards, “Christopher Southgate’s Compound Theodicy: Parallel Searchings”’; Ted Peters, “Extinction, Natural Evil, and the Cosmic Cross”’; Ro’, *Zygon(r)*, 53.3, (2018), 739-751, in <<https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12428>> [accessed 22 April 2020]., p. 744.

³⁸ ‘The Lion King, dir. by Rob Minkoff, Roger Allers (Walt Disney, 1994).

³⁹ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation.*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 8.

self or ‘soul-making’ process.⁴² Therefore, if Hick is correct, pain is necessary for God’s telos to manifest. Moreover, in the good-harm analysis above it was demonstrated that predation and loss of life is necessary for life to evolve and new life to immerge, as the saying attributed to Jesus goes “very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (Jn 12:24).

Finally, while theologians and philosophers may ponder over other ways God could create life, these may not reflect what is possible to achieve God’s telos. The ‘Only Way’ argument, as Michael Ruse has pointed out, gets a surprising endorsement from archnemeses of theologians, Richard Dawkins. Dawkins postulates “if there is no other generalisation that can be made about life all around the Universe, I am betting that it will always be recognizable as Darwinian life.”⁴³ Ruse concludes that “if God was to create through law, then it had to be through Darwinian law. There was no other choice”.⁴⁴

Thus far chapter one has expounded upon the traditional Augustinian approach to evil and has demonstrated its strengths and weaknesses. The traditional argument has dealt with moral evil as consequence of free-will, which is a kind of property-consequence argument, that defends free will as a higher-order value that overrides the evil caused: it is better to have free-will and suffering than to have no freedom and no suffering. However, as Oord makes clear it does not deal well with the kidnapped Amy and her perpetrator’s murderous rapist intentions, nor does perhaps the concept of Divine hiddenness, surely God could have and ought to have prevented it? Oord’s solution to this dilemma will be offered in chapter three.

The only way argument has demonstrated the necessity of suffering within the overall biosphere to produce greater forms and variety of life. It has not however spoken to individual suffering or extinction fully; these again will be taken up within chapter three. Chapter two will now consider scientific data on the rise of moral evil to see whether Darwin’s concern over the origin of moral evil was a necessary bioproduct of evolution. Indeed, since much of the traditional view depends on the concept of a ‘fall’, it seems reasonable to ask this question from a scientific perspective and see if such evidence of a primeval event can be found.

⁴² See John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴³ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, p. 48.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Chapter Two – The Scientific Argument

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die;⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. (Gen 3: 1-6).

The age-old mythological account of the fall might often be written off as a mere fiction given our current understanding of our origins, with its talking snake and magic-wisdom-trees. Indeed, it seems foolish to take this account as ‘gospel’; giving it a purely literalistic interpretation, granting rise to nonsensical claims that any scientist ought to reject. However, knowing more now about our prehistoric existence than ever before, we can ask a reasonable scientific question: had our behaviours as a species initially been one akin to a paradisaal state of living, one that the early Homo Sapiens happened to ‘fall’ from? In other words, can the palaeontological record give any credence to the notion that human behaviour went from gentle hominid to the most lethal creature on Earth? And, if we did, could we have taken another direction?

Human beings are responsible for nearly 450’000 deaths (murders) of other humans per annum, making us the deadliest amongst species after mosquitos.⁴⁵ This does not include the countless wars, where millions have perished under the hand of our fellow co-habitants. Our blame does not end there. It includes environmental crimes, torturing both animals and humans both physically and mentally, racism, speciesism and all manners of prejudicious behaviour. The list is by no means exhaustive. If all these actions were biologically determined, due to our *selfish genes*, then God has a lot to answer for.

For balance, human beings also exhibit great acts of generosity and sensitivity toward each other, one only need to think of the 750,000 volunteers willing to put their lives on the line to help with the current covid-19 pandemic in the UK to see the good in humanity.⁴⁶ This is also an example of disastrous events resulting in altruistic behaviours, which lends some credibility to the classic view. Of course, it does not take a disaster to see these behaviours, but the degree to which we exhibit such behaviour may increase when faced with tragedy.

It is the suggestion of this paper that it was not genetics that determined our fate, although it may play an non-determinative role, rather it was due to wanton competition, not simply for

⁴⁵ Lydia Ramsey, *These Are The Top 15 Deadliest Animals on Earth* (2013)

<<https://www.sciencealert.com/what-are-the-worlds-15-deadliest-animals>> [accessed 30 April 2020].

⁴⁶ Patrick Butler, *A million volunteer to help NHS and others during Covid-19 outbreak* (2020)

<<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/13/a-million-volunteer-to-help-nhs-and-others-during-covid-19-lockdown>> [accessed 30 April 2020].

survival, but for status, within a resource allocation game, driven by sexual selection; resulting in a memetic Evolutionary Stable Strategy (ESS) that need not have emerged.⁴⁷⁴⁸⁴⁹

An advocate of this view is Niahm Middleton who offers a revolutionary insight into the behaviour of early hominids and subsequently the first humans. Utilising the latest data from research in primatology and palaeoanthropology, Middleton identifies core evidence suggestive of a gentler human race that cooperates uncompetitively, or at least much less competitively than what has manifested within our species in history.

Middleton is keen to caution her readers that “a certain degree of aggression, selfishness, and competitiveness would have had to evolve and become part of human psychology for the species to survive, thrive, and, from a theological perspective, for virtue to be possible [...]”, presumably so as to temper readers’ expectations of what an *earthly* paradisaic state of existence might reasonably be.⁵⁰ Again, as expounded in chapter one, there is a certain degree of harm necessary for goods to flourish, in this case survival and virtue are the benefits gained at the cost of these traits. Thus, the degree to which “aggression, selfishness and competitiveness” are necessary this should not constitute evil. It is the superfluous ‘degree’ to which they manifest in our species that constitutes a genuine problem of evil.

Bonobos and chimpanzees are our closest genetic cousins and in many areas of life behaviourally equivalent.⁵¹ However, the difference of behaviour between the two apes is stark. The chimpanzee shares remarkable human-like behaviour, “particularly in cooperative male warfare and dominance over females [...]”.⁵² Male Chimpanzees form strong bonds with a definitive dominance hierarchy headed by a single alpha male who monopolises and guards the females, while the females rarely form strong bonds and are always subordinate to males in the group.⁵³ The males are generally territorially aggressive and will hunt and kill encroaching neighbours.⁵⁴

In contrast, bonobos are surprisingly tolerant and quick to defuse escalating feuds without recourse to violence, Middleton notes that “there appears to be little intracommunity or intercommunity conflict.”⁵⁵ Unlike chimpanzees, bonobos form a matriarchal-like society, consisting of a respected older female who creates her bonds with the weaker in the hierarchy, forming a sort of democratic coalition that is able to deal well with any potential disputes within

⁴⁷ Sexual Selection is the “struggle between the males [of a species] for possession of the females” and in female discretion of their choice of mate. See Darwin, *Origin of Species*, p.606.

⁴⁸ Memes are patterns of behaviours or ideas that are passed from one brain to another; memetic evolution then is the evolution of ideas either remaining constant as in a ‘stable state’ or undergoing change over time. It is through imitation that memes are passed on. See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 40th Anniversary edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.249.

⁴⁹ Evolutionary Stable Strategy is the term used to describe a stable state of behaviour within a given species produced by an evolutionary mechanism i.e. natural selection, sexual selection or memetic evolution. For an example see *Ibid* p. 261-301.

⁵⁰ Middleton, *Homo Lapsus*, p. 85.

⁵¹ HOMINOID PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP, *What is a Bonobo?* (2020) <<https://evolutionaryanthropology.duke.edu/research/3chimps/chimps-bonobos>> [accessed 30 April 2020].

⁵² Middleton, *Homo Lapsus*, p.108.

⁵³ HOMINOID PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP, *What is a Bonobo?*

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ Middleton, *Homo Lapsus*, p. 109.

the group.⁵⁶ Somewhat bizarrely, from a human perspective at least, is that disagreements in competitive situations are resolved by recourse to sex, “to avoid conflict and effect reconciliation”⁵⁷.

The two apes then, represent two sides of the same human psychological coin. We, like chimpanzees, form male dominant hierarchies and work extremely efficiently at making war for acquisition of land and other resources. Within human sexual selection there tends to be, like the chimp, males battling it out for status within the hierarchy and the most desirable females selecting those males from the top. It is important for any potential child-bearing females that they select the most competent males that are able to support them and their young, this is one reason why females are generally fussier about who they mate with than males are. However, in human-beings with modern societal infrastructure this necessity is eased somewhat; the males need to be competent but not necessarily of high rank, fidelity is perhaps of most import.

The other side of the metaphorical coin, then, is the bonobo who like humans are great at creating bonds across all levels of the hierarchy. We are able to interact well with members of other ‘tribes’ and develop a fair amount of societal cohesion between differing ideological groups. Although, as is suggestive of the chimpanzee, we often fall short of this overarching goal. Unlike chimpanzees, but akin to bonobos, human females can strike lasting bonds with each other and are less likely to fight over resources as men are.

There is a vast array of psychological traits across our species, ranging from unfathomable cruelty and aggression to deep care and sensitivity toward others. We are both bonobo and chimpanzee in temperament, but unfortunately, we seem too often to have displayed the latter over the former. The question now then, is which ape did we resemble more of in our genesis?

Anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* are suggested to have appeared around 200,000 years ago, with the earliest known skeleton, The Omo-Kibish, dating to around 196,000 years old, found in Ethiopia.⁵⁸ Outside of Africa lived our hominid cousins, *Homo neanderthalensis*, commonly known as the Neanderthals who “appear to have roamed Europe and southwest Asia unchallenged from about 200,000 years ago to about 40,000 years ago.”⁵⁹ Of particular interest is that paleoanthropological and archaeological discoveries indicate that our own ancestors cohabited with Neanderthals for at least 10,000 years, “sharing the same food, resources, cave shelters and technology”.⁶⁰

Middleton explains that paleoanthropologists make a distinction between anatomically modern humans and behaviourally modern humans, the former being *almost* identical in body structure and the latter reflective of our behaviour stemming from an abrupt leap in cognitive ability.⁶¹ Prior to our increase in cognition, the scientific data suggests that our anatomical ancestors, along with Neanderthals, “would, in general have been temperamentally similar to bonobos

⁵⁶ HOMINOID PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP, *What is a Bonobo?*

⁵⁷ Middleton, *Homo Lapsus*, p. 109.

⁵⁸ Ashley S. Hammond, Danielle F. Royer, John G. Fleagle, 'The Omo-Kibish I pelvis', *Journal of Human Evolution*, 108, (2017), 199-219, in <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhevol.2017.04.004>> [accessed 30 April 2020].

⁵⁹ Middleton, *Homo Lapsus*, p. 124.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 131.

and chimpanzees – playful, easy-going, affectionate, and hierarchal to a greater or lesser degree.”⁶²

Middleton speculates that it is reasonable to suppose, “due to the evolution of superior skills in hunting and food gathering”, coupled with the “control of fire for warmth, protection, and cooking would have led to social bonding, development in vocal communication, primitive forms of conviviality, and communal entertainment.”⁶³ These advances would give rise to higher levels of empathy, through forming more profound relationships, and as is indicated in the fossil record; this would have given rise to the capability to offer “practical long term assistance to those who needed it.”⁶⁴ Indeed, this is evident of the genus *Homo* prior to our development as a species, demonstrated in Spain where 400,000 year old remains of a Neanderthal child were found “with a deformed skull and brain who would have been mentally and physically disabled”, which was obviously not rejected “since it died naturally at around the age of eight.”⁶⁵ Thus, with new resources and the cooperative communal relations between species would have provided a safe haven for such unfortunate kin; resulting in behaviours far more indicative of, and even surpassing, the gentle caring nature observed in bonobos.

Male-female relations and their hierarchical positions within a given tribe represents the most fundamental difference between anatomically modern humans and behavioural ones. Anthropologist Mark Dyble has studied the behaviours of contemporary hunter-gather tribes and found that the hierarchical structure is akin to an egalitarian regime, consisting of both alpha-males and alpha females.⁶⁶ This equality amongst sexes means that both parties participate in the gathering of resources for their kin and tribal members. Dyble supposes that “a possible clue for the evolution of sex equality in the hominin lineage was the increase in the cost of human reproduction associated with larger brain sizes in early *Homo*. Higher offspring costs would require investment from both mothers and fathers.”⁶⁷

The fact that the females in early human populations had an equal role in the attainment of resources, and the males in offering equal parental care, means the attributes each sex would select for their ideal mate would likely be cooperation, caring and fidelity. Thus, these behavioural traits would multiply in the *meme pool*; that is to say, the young would imitate these behaviours and would be maintained within the population of each generation. It would become an Evolutionary Stable Strategy. Sexual selection then, must have produced specific attributes to make these traits obvious to each sex.

Darwin postulated two types of sexual selection, intrasexual selection and intersexual selection. The first type, as Middleton explains, “results from a competitive struggle among males ‘to drive away or kill their rivals’”, whereas the second, “is based on female choice [...] [to] choose as mates those who are best able to ‘excite and charm’ them.”⁶⁸ It is suggested that sexual

⁶² Ibid., p. 140.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

⁶⁶ See Dyble, Mark & Salali, Gul Deniz & Chaudhary, Nikhil & Page, Abigail & Smith, Daniel & Thompson, J & Vinicius, Lucio & Mace, Ruth & Migliano, Andrea. (2015). Human behavior. Sex equality can explain the unique social structure of hunter-gatherer bands. *Science* (New York, N.Y.). 348. 796-8. 10.1126/science.aaa5139. [Accessed 01 May 2020]

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 798.

⁶⁸ Middleton, *Homo Lapsus*, p. 164.

selection impacts the evolution of male genes more so than females, this is because males generally, with some exception, have a higher sexual drive than females and thus they do the seeking out of a mate.⁶⁹

The first type, intrasexual selection, results in increased body mass, strength, “natural weapons (such as stag’s horns) and pugnacity”, propagating in the male gene pool.⁷⁰ The second, intersexual selection, produces brighter colours “and ornamentation (such as a peacocks tale)” as well as courtship skills used to “allure the females by various charms”.⁷¹ Darwin also speculated, in the latter case, that the evolution of singing may have appeared due to intersexual selection as it would have no other function than to impress females, this is something that has been observed, and was observed by Darwin, in birds in particular.⁷²

It seems reasonable then that the early humans, once advanced enough to engage in conviviality and develop higher levels of empathy, coupled with the need for equality amongst the sexes, would have engaged in intersexual selection rather than intrasexual. As has already been argued this would have been evolutionary stable. What, then, could have occurred to change this dynamic in exchange for the more aggressive selection process? It certainly doesn’t seem to have been inevitable nor necessary.

Dyble suggests that it was due to the invention of agriculture and the vast amounts of resources that could be developed that led to decline in male-female equality, as the families would no longer be dependant on cooperative hunting with other family members or non-familial aid from other tribes.⁷³ Indeed, having enough resources to maintain many children would perhaps lead males to break with fidelity and seek as many mates as possible, to propagate their *selfish genes*. However, whilst this may have played a determinative role in the increase of territoriality and war for acquisition of land, we have no evidence of agriculture before, at the very earliest, 23’000 years ago.⁷⁴ Whereas, there is an abundance of evidence that these competitive behaviours began much earlier, around 60-40’000 years ago, part of the results of which arguably led to the extinction of Neanderthals, particularly as we became more skilful at acquiring resources than our deceased cousins.

The seemingly sudden emergence of articulated language in our species, along with the enormous capacity for abstract thinking; including art, music and symbolism was likely fundamental in our success as species and our development from anatomically modern to behaviourally modern humans. The explanation for the abrupt appearance of these abilities is a hotly debated topic. Neo-Darwinists assume a gradual evolution of such cognitive abilities, attempting to trace back incremental transformations before our journey out of Africa. However, as Middleton points out, “the fossil and archaeological records don’t support this view”.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 164-165.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 164.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 164-165.

⁷² Ibid., p. 165.

⁷³ Dyble, *Sex equality can explain the unique social structure of hunter-gatherer bands.*, p. 798.

⁷⁴ American Friends of Tel Aviv University. "First evidence of farming in Mideast 23,000 years ago: Evidence of earliest small-scale agricultural cultivation." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 22 July 2015.

<www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/07/150722144709.htm>. [Accessed 02 May 2020]

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

From a theistic point of view, we may suggest that this was the moment that God breathed on Adam and created him an immortal soul, embodying now the true icon of God, The Logos. Indeed, Noam Chomsky and Robert C. Berwick suppose that modern language was a product of a mutation in perhaps just one individual or group initially, of which we are all decedents.⁷⁶

Whatever the ingredients were that led to language, most experts agree that its full capacity would only have been realised in as small group initially. Interestingly, as Middleton elucidates, Darwin thought that “the flowering of our language abilities occurred during a peaceful phase that was prior to but crucial to the attainment of our full cognitive abilities”.⁷⁷ It has also been suggested by Chomsky and Berwick that language would have formed, if not the prerequisite, a key component for “man’s intellectual and moral nature.”⁷⁸

The first leaders of the tribe, which for arguments sake will be refereed to as Adam and Eve, would have had at this point moral choice. The choice we can suppose, since the key to reproductive success would have been the higher acquisition of resources, may have been the choice between, exerting their power and influence for good i.e. continue with the cooperative and fair sharing of resources, or for ill by keeping more for themselves and subsequently deceiving members of the tribe. The latter would lead to the sort of scenario laid out by Dyble earlier, whereby alpha males would now be free to engage in more sexual relations with females and the competition would explode between males in the fight for such resources.

What is not clear is whether it would have been the females desire for high status males once this uneven distribution began, or that this desire arose prior to it, creating sexual pressure on the males to acquire these resources. The Genesis account seems to suggest it was, more or less, a co-conspiracy move. An attempt will be now made to make sense of the fall account with our new scientific hermeneutical lens.

The snake, we can assume, represents the temptation to gain a higher unequal status within the tribe. Indeed, the serpent’s promise is that they will “become like God”. The fruit taken from the tree symbolises the resources needed to achieve this goal, which coincides with the power to know good from evil i.e. Adam and Eve were aware of the devastating effect on the rest of the tribe should they chose evilly, once they had taken the resource for themselves. Eve is tempted by the serpent and takes the fruit and immediately offers it to Adam; Adam’s consent symbolises his propensity and high sex drive to please Eve which gave-rise to intrasexual selection. Adam must now compete to win Eve’s favour in the resource allocation game. These behaviours would begin to be imitated in the group leading to the rise of a new Evolutionary Stable Strategy: one where the female selects the male with the most resource and ability to gain it.

Over time this new strategy would lead to the selection of more and more aggression, competitiveness and infidelity. Thus, evolution would now favour strength, natural weapons and pugnacity over the more charming attributes originally monopolising the gene pool. This strategy wouldn’t completely kill off intersexual selection, as females will start to realise that they are being left on their own to child-bear and would again start to favour courtship

⁷⁶ See Robert C. Berwick, Noam Chomsky, *Why Only Us: Language and Evolution*, Reprint edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017).

⁷⁷ Middleton, *Homo Lapsus.*, p. 144.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

behaviours that represent fidelity. However, the damage would have been done and these behaviours would be imitated throughout the generations, resulting in a memetic evolution of selfish and greedy humans.

Once agriculture began, as Dyble pointed out, this would have led to more inequality amongst the sexes and led to more murderous behaviour. Which is perhaps symbolised in Genesis where God instructs Adam, after being expelled from the garden of Eden (Eden representing the harmonious tribal relations, with both its members and God) that he must now “till the ground from which he was taken” (Gen 3:23). Fascinating is what follows, Cain and Able are born, Cain offers “the fruit of the ground” to God, while Able offers “the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions”, with Cain’s method symbolising that of hunter-gatherer, no longer as effective since the fall, and Abel’s offering perhaps produced via farming; God is impressed with Able, but not with Cain; this perhaps represents Able’s resources as more numerous, giving him a potential for greater reproductive success, than Cain’s, resulting in Cain become jealous and angry and finally, leading him to kill his brother (Gen 4: 1-9).

Thus, considering the scientific and biblical account are almost identical, the theist is perhaps on much firmer ground than Darwin initially supposed. A theist need not negate the science, nor perhaps can scientists, such as Dawkins, be so sure in their assumption that religion has nothing to offer and that genetics has all the answers. This revelation also offers some ethical considerations: Should we stop acquiring unneeded resources to compete with our fellow man? Should we be taking equality of the sexes more seriously, and balancing out hierarchal systems? The discoveries in this chapter, seem to say, emphatically, yes! Indeed, that is our route back to Eden.

Can we learn something from the person of Christ? What does his divine image say about God? And how does this help us better understand why evil exists? To these questions, we turn to chapter three.

Chapter Three – The Theological

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied (*kenosis*) himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross. (Phil 2: 6-8)

This poetic hymn-like exhortation of Paul's represents the fundamental basis of all kenotic theology – a theology representative of the incarnation and of the ethical plea to not seek equality with God – which expresses the nature of God in Christ. Most theologians and exegetes view this passage as one of the earliest declarations of the pre-existence of God the Son and His subsequent incarnation (including his human-God nature), obedience and death on the cross. Indeed, it was likely a frequent passage used in the early Church to argue for, the now, Orthodox Christology of both the human and divine nature existing in one person (Christ) as defined at the council of Chalcedon (451 AD).⁷⁹ An alternative interpretation is that like Adam, as the second Adam, Jesus was made in the image (form) of God but forwent equality with God and was obedient to God, even to death, unlike Adam.⁸⁰

The view of this paper, although it will not be fully argued for, is that both interpretations are valid and rather than competing, complement each other. The context of which Paul writes is to plead with the Philippian Church that in their minds they “must be the same as Christ Jesus” and empty (*kenosis*) themselves of pride (Phil 2:5). However, the chronological ordering of the creedal-like statement indicates stages of emptying that support the common metaphysical interpretation, starting from the form of God, to taking the form of a slave and then being born in “human likeness”, to eventual death on the cross. Thus, indicating Jesus's pre-existence prior to birth. This both and approach, allows for both the metaphysical pondering on God's nature and subsequent ethical implications for human-beings.

The term *kenosis*, since Paul uses it within a poetic genre of literature, as Oord explains, “allows for a wide range of interpretations.”⁸¹ The translations include “self-emptying,” “self-withdrawing,” “self-limiting,” or “self-giving.”⁸² Oord opts for the latter translation, “self-giving”, as he feels “it better describes the relational nature of love [...] described in the larger context of the passage.”⁸³ This leads him to ponder on the metaphysical nature of God as love, and to explore the implications and possible limitations this places on divine power.

⁷⁹ See Francis Schaefer. "Council of Chalcedon." The Catholic Encyclopaedia. Vol. 3. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03555a.htm>>. [Accessed 11 May 2020]

⁸⁰ See footnote to *The CTS New Testament and Psalms*, ed. by Henry Wansbrough (Vicenza, Italy: Catholic Truth Society, 2012), p. 360.

⁸¹ Oord, 'An Essential Kenosis View ', p. 87.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

Oord postulates that the pre-eminent nature of God is love, as attested to in many biblical passages and most emphatically in a letter attributed to John (1 Jn 4:7). Thus, for Oord, kenosis is essential, it is the self-giving-love “logically primary and necessary in God’s eternal essence.”⁸⁴ Following kenotic-theologians of ‘Process Theology’ – “that [state] the limitation of God’s power should not be thought of as voluntary self-limitation” – Oord posits that God, due to his *a priori* nature, “necessarily gives freedom, agency and law-like regularities to creation.”⁸⁵⁸⁶

Describing God as causally determined, even if inwardly determined by God’s own nature, will likely make many theologians bulk and feel uneasy in their core. Surely, one praises God precisely because one assumes that God, by virtue of God’s freedom, has lovingly offered them something of infinite worth? This is not to say that we always chose whom we love, but rather the gifts we grace them with we freely-give. Love has a forceful power, but we surely must co-operate with it freely for it to mean anything. That said, there is a lot Oord’s position can offer to a theodicy that is worth taking seriously.

There are five dimensions to Oord’s overall solution to the problem of evil, labelled the empathetic, didactic, therapeutic, strategic and sovereignty dimension.⁸⁷ It is with the latter that embodies *Essential Kenosis* and to which we will concentrate. Aside from the initial Pauline passage presented, Oord turns to another on which to base his view: “If we are faithless, [God] remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.” (2 Tim 2:13). Oord suggests that for God to remove the gifts bestowed upon creation it would involve a logical contradiction; if God bestows *x* upon creature *y* in accord with God’s pre-eminent giving nature, then to remove *x* from *y* would involve God denying himself, which God cannot do. This allows Oord to say that for God to “prevent unilaterally the evil done to Amy, God would have to deny himself. But God cannot do this.”⁸⁸

Viewing this from the context of evolution, it overcomes problems associated with death and suffering in the process of natural selection by stating that God “necessarily gives the gifts of agency and self-organisation” to all entities, meaning that God cannot override or withdraw these gifts. Moreover, it shows God’s love as un-controlling. Therefore, we cannot “accuse God of causing or allowing birth defects, cancer, infections, disease, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, or other illness and catastrophes. Such calamities do not represent God’s will.”⁸⁹ It is not that God is un-willing, but that God is unable.

The position that God cannot do something, on the Classic View, refers to logical impossibilities, such that, as Augustine demonstrated, God cannot create God, invent married bachelors, or make $2 + 2 = 5$, while leaving open all logical possibilities for omnipotent power. Southgate reasons, taking a quote from Herbert McCabe, that divine abilities; omnipotence, omniscience, impassibility etc, should be seen as negative theology, rather than positive

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

⁸⁵ Ian Barbour, 'God's Power: A Process View ', in *The Work of Love: Creation As Kenosis*, ed. by John Polkinghorne, Kindle edn. (United States: SPCK, 2001)., p. 72.

⁸⁶ Oord, 'An Essential Kenosis View ', p. 89.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

statements, which is to say that, “perishability, decline, dependence, alteration, the impersonality that characterises material things, and so on [must be] excluded from God.”⁹⁰

These ‘apophatic formulations’ saying nothing of what God is actually capable of, nor, it could be argued, do they say what God could not do. The point though is that when we talk about God, by attributing Platonic idealism to God’s nature, we are guilty of attributing knowledge to ourselves that we do not, and cannot, know, as John Polkinghorne has said we ought to move away from the hubris involved in confidently asserting attributes to God: “all theology is ‘humility theology,’ as we confess our limitation and ignorance of the divine mystery. The infinite will not be caught in the finite meshes of our rational nets.”⁹¹

This does not mean we are completely void of knowledge of God, surely as a Christian, believing that God became man and that whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father (Jn 14:9), one ought to be able to say something. Though, perhaps it is precisely through this lens, looking to the person and actions of the Son, and no other, that we can acquire knowledge of the Father. In this respect Oord seems to stand on solid ground. In Christ one sees a God who *freely* and powerfully ‘self-gives’ wholly to others, not through coercion but through empowerment to others, freeing them from the bondage of sin but not preventing them from making their mistakes, even if those ‘mistakes’ include his murder.

It is suggestive in Scripture that Christ in his human nature *freely* choses to do the divine will, which makes sense in the context of Phil 2:6-8. This raises an objection to Oord’s *Essential* aspect in his kenotic assumptions; to attribute freedom to humanity and not to God seems to suggest that God lacked the capacity prior to taking on ‘human form’. But if God in his nature is perfect love fully self-actualised within the trinitarian Godhead, surely God has no need to create to fulfil or express his nature? Thus, the created act must have been one of choice and in the libertarian sense; he could have done otherwise.

Nonetheless, certain conditions may need to have been met to allow for the causal space for creatures to self-actualise outside of the mind of God. As Polkinghorne says, “such an understanding is basic to the interpretation of evolutionary history as creation’s making of itself.”⁹² Moreover, it is the prerequisite to human freedom that “divine power is deliberately self-limited to allow causal space for creatures” to act out their own volitions.⁹³

Oord is at loggerheads with this view, he reasons that “the God who voluntarily self-limits ought to become un-self-limited, for the sake of love, to prevent genuine evil.”⁹⁴ Thus, in the case of Amy, God *ought* to have taken back his power and prevented the rape from occurring. On Oord’s view God cannot do this because divine power derives *from* and is conditioned *by* self-giving love. In opposition, Cary, who takes a classic approach to theodicy, believes Oord’s theodicy attempts to explain too much and is “based on a firm understanding of God’s ‘nature of love’.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*., p. 56-57.

⁹¹ John Polkinghorne, ‘Kenotic Creation and Divine Action’, in *The Work of Love: Creation As Kenosis*, ed. by John Polkinghorne, Kindle edn. (United States: SPCK, 2001)., p. 1347.

⁹² Ibid., p. 1312.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Oord, ‘An Essential Kenosis View’, p. 87.

⁹⁵ Phillip Cary, ‘The Classic Response’, in *God and The Problem of Evil: Five Views*, ed. by Chad Meister (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017)., p. 132.

Be that as it may, Oord offers a solution that provides an answer to why God cannot intervene to prevent evil from occurring. A further objection at this point is if God cannot prevent evil or interrupt created order then what can be said about God's actions in the world; how does God relate with creation?

Polkinghorne suggests a *Kenosis of simple eternity*, whereby God, while not setting aside the "timeless and eternal nature of divine Being, ...has 'added' to that [...] a temporal pole of divinity that corresponds to the Creator's true engagement with created time."⁹⁶ This is at odds with Classical Theology that sees God as entirely outside time. However, Polkinghorne points out, the Incarnation involves such a radical divine involvement with creaturely time that it might be natural for "Christian theology to expect that time is not wholly foreign to the divine nature in itself."

This allows God to be present to all creation as temporal reality unfolds, having established laws of nature, some likely unbeknown to us, God has provided the necessary framework for creatures and God to act within. By entering creation, God has not sought to over-rule the laws governing it, but to co-operate with the self-governing universe and those creatures within it. Thus, it is the suggestion of this paper that all miracles and displays of divine action involve creaturely co-operation.

Reading these insights into the biblical text, we see in the flood account that those who were saved were those who co-operated with God: "Noah walked with God." (Gen 6:9). We may say that the waters were inevitable, a consequence of treating the planet badly, a lesson sorely needed in today's climate crisis, God warned people but only those who co-operated with God heard God's cry. Noah is saved, not through divine coercion but through co-operating and building the ark. The account need not be taken as historically accurate, but rather an indication as to what salvation involves; the coming together of both humanity and God, which is fully realised in the person of Jesus Christ. However, what of the creatures unable to co-operate, who lack the capacity for reciprocal relationship, where is God in their suffering? And those human beings, like Amy, who no doubt call upon God for help but seem to be unanswered?

It has already been suggested why God may not be able to interfere in Amy's case, to do so would be to interrupt created order, by dropping a tree branch onto the perpetrators head, for example, or by removing the free-will of the criminal. However, God may have called out into the heart of a passer-by to intervene upon hearing Amy's scream. Indeed, Oord informs his reader that "a passer-by reported having heard a female voice say, 'Please, no! Help me, God!'" but the passer-by did nothing."⁹⁷ Thus, Amy's plight must be dealt with in our eschatological considerations to assure readers God did not abandon her. It might be suggested now that the anguish felt by Amy, when God could not intervene, was also felt by God as God co-suffered with her.

Southgate notes that since the World Wars it becomes increasingly difficult to hold onto the classical doctrine of the *apatheia* of God, which led from Aristotle's notion of a golden mean, to stoicisms rejection of all emotions, and finds its Christian equivalent in the rejection of 'patripassianism'; "the real suffering of the Father at the passion of the Son."⁹⁸ It must be noted

⁹⁶ Polkinghorne, 'Kenotic Creation and Divine Action', p. 1312.

⁹⁷ Oord, 'An Essential Kenosis View', p. 83.

⁹⁸ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, p. 56.

that the rejection of The Father's suffering was in part a rejection of Sabellianism; a heresy based on the understating of God being one person appearing in different modes or forms, so that the Spirit, Son and Father are manifestations of the same person, God.⁹⁹ However, it has gained much support in classic theology, outside of this understanding. Against this view is the anthropomorphic tones of the Bible that reveal God as "both approachable and responsive, who grieves over the sins of the people" and takes on human form to fully share in the laments of creation.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the concept of impassibility should be viewed as an apophatic statement that God does not suffer change, but that God freely allows creation to affect God and this is entrenched in God's trinitarian eternal nature as relational. Therefore, in the case of human and non-human suffering, God is there in its very midst offering console to all who suffer, from the non-human organisms struck by predation, mal-adaptation and disease to the horrific suffering of the Holocaust; God is truly Immanuel (God with Us).

Finally, the hope of salvation and coming of the 'new heaven and new earth'. As Southgate explains, it is near certain in the light of modern cosmology that "this universe will not persist forever; it will either collapse in on itself (the so-called 'big crunch'), or expand away to infinity (so-called 'heat death')." ¹⁰¹ This is true also of the apocalyptic literature found in the bible: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away" (Rev 21:1). The difference being God's promise to bring about a new creation. It has already been suggested in chapter one why God did not create heaven initially, due to the necessity and higher-order values that can be gained through biological life to create persons: persons that can freely chose an eternity with God.

Persons, according to Peter Singer, following John Locke, are self-conscious beings who are aware of themselves as being "a distinct entity with a past and a future."¹⁰² This, for Singer, includes any animal, human or non-human, that is self-aware. Unfortunately, Singer uses this definition to strip human infants under two of the 'right to live' since, for Singer, only a being with preferences for the future has such a right. That aside, Singer does believe that any creature who can suffer pain ought to take our moral consideration when acting in the world. Moreover, a creature that does not qualify for personhood, may still have instinctive preferences for the future. Taking Singers view into account, with addition of some theological assumptions, we can ponder on God's eschatological considerations.

In the case of organisms that do not suffer pain, are not sentient and have no preferences for the future, we need not include them in God's ethical consideration, but just as beautiful plants and trees do, they may play an aesthetic role in God's plan. Those that feel pain, but are not sentient and do not have preferences for the future, apart from the obvious preference of not feeling pain, will, on this paper's view, be consoled and at peace in God's divine co-suffering presence, and since, as was pointed out in chapter one, death in and of itself is not evil unless it prevents fulfilment of life, entities with no preference for the future need not be included. Thus, the considerations of other life forms that have preferences for the future and, not only

⁹⁹ Thinley Kalsang Bhutia, *Sabellianism* (2018) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sabellianism>> [accessed 11 May 2020].

¹⁰⁰ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation.*, p. 56.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁰² Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd edn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 76.

that, but in the case of human beings, particularly of young babies and infants, their *telos* must also be considered.

In contrast to Singer, Judeo-Christian theologians have always seen humankind made in God's image (Gen 1), with their *telos* being full communion with God in eternity. As Southgate writes, it is not debated amongst theists that redeemed human life is destined toward God, the question is, "do we want to say any less for other creatures?"¹⁰³ As was made evident in chapter one, the 'all pain, no gain' of creatures in an ever hostile evolutionary world cannot simply be a means to the divine end.

One of the stumbling blocks to an eschatological vision of non-human animals is the predator/pray relationship, as Rolston notes in response to Isaiah's poetic vision (Isa 11:7), "a lion without canines that eats straw has not been redeemed; such a lioness has been eviscerated."¹⁰⁴ Rolston points out that redemption and fulfilment of a given creature should not be at odds with its nature in this world. It is likely many ideas have been flouted due to the unrealistic ponderings of poets. However, it may be exactly through poetic imagination that a fruitful afterlife for animals can be pondered:

More deadly than they can believe.
They stalk more silently,
And crouch on the limbs of trees,
And their descent
Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years
In a sovereign floating of joy.
And those that are hunted
Know this as their life,
Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge
Of what is in glory above them,
And to feel no fear,
But acceptance, compliance.
Fulfilling themselves without pain

At the cycle's centre,
They tremble, they walk
Under the tree,
They fall, they are torn,
They rise, they walk again.¹⁰⁵

This excerpt from a poem by James Dickey depicts a redeemed creation where both prey and predator live in a perpetual cycle of 'hunter' and 'hunted', where "no fear" is felt but "acceptance" of the created other, in awe of each other's "glory." There is no death or suffering, for although "they fall...they rise, they walk again." Of course it is impossible to know exactly what a redeemed creation may be like, but as Southgate notes, we need not know what a

¹⁰³ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*., p. 85.

¹⁰⁴ Holmes Rolston, 'REDEEMING A CRUCIFORM NATURE', p. 746.

¹⁰⁵ James L. Dickey, *The Heaven of Animals* (2020) <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42711/the-heaven-of-animals>> [accessed 11 May 2020].

resurrected animal life entails, we can have confidence there will be some form of after-life for them for “three telling reasons”: scriptural passages of humanity redeemed in relation to other creatures, our own sense that fullness of human life is predicated on the wonders of the created world and the relationships we have with animals, “and the need to marry a sense of the goodness of God with the evident lack of blessedness in the lives of many creatures.”¹⁰⁶

In summation, this chapter has presented some of the flaws in the classic approach to theodicy, demonstrating that terms such as omniscience and omnipotence need not reflect the deepest elements of God’s nature. Rather, it has shown that love is the fundamental eternal source of God’s power, which is not the sort over-ruling power suggestive of Augustine. Moreover, in reflecting on the nature of the incarnation, specifically in the light of Paul’s declaration to the Philippian Church, we see the true image of God as one that is self-giving, and, if we are to return to the paradisaal state articulated in chapter two, then it is precisely this image that we ought to imitate. Seeing God as non-coercive and non-controlling, which is not to say that we don’t rely on God to hold us in existence, as both the first cause and source of our being, but that God’s relationship and action with the world is both consoling and co-operative.

Finally, God’s kenotic love provides not only an answer to the problem of evil but also assures us of a redeemed creation for all creatures that have and will exist, whatever that may look like.

¹⁰⁶ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*., p. 89.

Conclusion

What is evil? And Why does God not *always* prevent it? Does God care? This paper has attempted to deal with all these pertinent questions in the light of the suffering caused by the evolutionary mechanism, natural selection. The classic view presented in chapter one understood moral evil to be a consequence of human sin, rather than a necessary consequence of evolution that concerned Darwin so much. This theory was found to be tenable in chapter two, where discoveries in contemporary science seem to suggest that it was not inevitable that *Homo Sapiens* would become a war-like ape, instead, behaviourally speaking, it seemed more likely that our species would have remained peaceful egalitarians. Moreover, the parallel with the fall account in genesis gives credence, for the theist at least, to a free-will event, considering genesis predates our scientific findings by thousands of years.

The classic view was then demonstrated to be flawed when speaking of ‘genuine evils’ such as Oord’s ‘Amy example’ and although it valiantly attempts to hold onto a traditional view of God, who is omniscient, omnipotent etc, its recourse to divine hiddenness seemed unsatisfactory. Therefore, chapter three sought to describe God’s attributes as merely apophatic statements and introduced the idea of *Essential Kenosis* that gave explanatory power, based on the description of Christ by St. Paul, that God’s nature of love is necessarily self-giving, non-coercive and co-operative, meaning God cannot over-rule creation to prevent evil.

Chapter one also re-defined the problem of evil and found it to be based firmly in the loss of ways of being in the biosphere, and individual fulfilment of life, of which God would, it was suggested in chapter three, bring around a ‘new heaven and earth’ and bring those lives into a redeemed world. The reason heaven is not created first, chapter one proposed, is that biological life offers higher-order values, a process for ‘soul-making’, freedom and free-will, for humans at least, to choose an eternal relationship with God: it was the ‘only way’. Chapter three went on to argue that God will always be present to creation in the temporal events as consoling, co-suffering and co-operating to bring heaven around on earth, but we must play our part.

This indicates a unique call to humanity, to co-operate and become co-redeemers on earth. St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians is a calling to be like Christ: to be self-giving to others. The knowledge of creation and our history we have today puts us in a unique position to be ‘new Adam’s, and Eve’s’; including looking out for our fellow co-habiting animal friends, after all evolution tells us they are our family! Unlike Cain, we ought not to seek to gain resources by war, but self-give to those who have nothing, giving us a chance to start a new memetic cycle, where our behavioural traits bring the status of man and woman back to its former equality, with reward of being in Eden again.

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