Theodicy and Challenges of Science

Understanding God, Evil and Evolution

Edited by

Piotr Roszak and Sasa Horvat

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About the Editors

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Piotr Roszak is an adjunct professor of Fundamental Theology at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland; associated professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain, where he obtained his PhD in 2009; member of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas; Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Scientia et Fides*, dedicated to science–religion debate; and director of the series Scholastica Thoruniensia, where the Polish translations of medieval biblical commentaries are published. Together with Mateusz Przanowski OP, Roszak is leading the project of "Opera Omnia" of St. Thomas Aquinas in Poland. In 2021 he received the Medal for Excellence in Christian Philosophy, awarded by the International Étienne Gilson Society. He has obtained several grants from the Templeton Foundation and the National Science Centre in Poland and in Spain. He is an honorary member of the Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis and Comité Internacional de Expertos del Camino de Santiago in Spain. He recently published (with Jörgen Vijgen) *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas. Historical and Systematical Perspectives* (Brepols: Turnhout 2021).

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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue: Theodicy and Challenges of Science: Understanding God, Evil and Evolution

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In these "pandemic years" a number of scientific and humanistic questions arise. Some of them are entirely new, while others are already well known. However, in the theological and philosophical realm, a question almost as old as the disciplines themselves is emerging with full force: If God is infinitely good, how can there be so much pain and suffering in this world? The goal of this Special Issue was to address this challenging question of theodicy, but with a special emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach to this problem—taking into account perspectives not only from theology and philosophy, but also from evolutionary theory, biology, medicine, anthropology, cognitive science, and many other related fields. This allowed our thirteen (13) authors to reflect on the intertwining of fundamental concepts such as evolution, nature, suffering, pain, values, evil, and good. Of course, the studies included cannot and did not aim to address and answer the theodical question once and for all in this interdisciplinary mission. The new challenges that will come to humanity will provide a new framework for addressing this ancient question. Therefore, the valuable studies presented here are an interdisciplinary contribution of our own *sitz im leben* to the theodical question.

The first contribution is by Georg Gasser, who discusses the question of animal suffering through reflections on a Darwinian image of nature and on God as a moral agent, taking into account the Book of Job.

The second contribution is by Lluis Oviedo and Josefa Torralba, who consider the field of cognitive science of religion (CSR) in relation to compassion, spirituality, and scandal before unjust suffering through a survey with an exploratory questionnaire.

Lari Launonen and R. T. Mullins also address the field of CSR in their paper by taking up the hypothesis that open theism is natural and classical theism is not.

In the fourth paper, Franjo Mijatović tries to show how Christianity, which describes suffering and pain as physiological fact and subjective experience, can be gathered to form a meaningful whole and a powerful sense of the *(in)active* God.

In their article, Martyna Koszkało and Robert Koszkało reflect on two concepts of the sources of morality in evolutionist traditions and on a modal argument against the evolutionist theory of morality based on the history of the fall of angels in classical theism.

In the sixth article, Krzysztof Krzemiński reflects on advances in technology and their impact on theological anthropology and whether cyborgs can be recognized as an image of God. In this way, the author defines the relational distinctiveness of the human being who is able to know God as Trinity, which is the criterion for further debates.

A more general view of the relationship between contemporary science and religion is developed by David Torrijos-Castrillejo in his paper on divine Providence and free will. His critique of determinism as implicitly contained in Molinism leads him to recognize the alternative approach in Thomism, which seems better suited to understanding Providence and cosmic contingency.

Another way of approaching the anthropological theme is presented in the paper of Arkadiusz Gudaniec, who analyzes man's intention to go beyond contingency as a way of

discovering the presence of God as an object of hope. This is related to the experience of someone who loves and gives meaning to transcendent reality. It seems a very promising way to include the metaphysics of the person in theodicy.

Michał Oleksowicz and Tomasz Huzarek take issue with cognitive science of religion and its naturalistic explanation, which dominates contemporary discussion. The case of forgiveness and reconciliation offers an interesting starting point for reflection on religion that takes into account the complex patterns of thought and behavior.

In the tenth paper, James D. Madden considers the evolution of suffering, epiphenomenalism, and the phenomena of life. He develops arguments for the conclusion that the facts of pain present at least as great a challenge (if not greater) to the atheist as they do to the theist.

The problem of evil, which runs throughout evolutionary history, is the subject of the eleventh contribution, in which Matthew J. Ramage recalls Ratzinger's approach to evil as the means by which the love of God is manifested. Once again in this Special Issue, hope for a new heaven and a new earth appears as an explanation for human suffering, but with an emphasis on the meaningful embrace of suffering as shown in the kenosis of Christ and in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the twelfth article, Hans Van Eyghen addresses the issue of biases for evil and moral perfection in the field of cognitive (neuro)science, arguing that deeply ingrained dispositions to do evil do not make moral perfection impossible.

In the final, thirteenth article, Enrique Martínez argues for the importance of the notions of truth and the person as indispensable tools for theodicy. Metaphysical reflection, based on analogical reasoning, can provide a complete theoretical framework for detailed questions raised by contemporary scholarship.

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Article

Animal Suffering, God and Lessons from the Book of Job

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Abstract: Nature shows itself to us in ambivalent ways. Breathtaking beauty and cruelty lie close together. A Darwinian image of nature seems to imply that nature is a mere place of violence, cruelty and mercilessness. In this article, I first explore the question of whether such an interpretation of nature is not one-sided by being phrased in overly moral terms. Then, I outline how the problem of animal suffering relates to a specific understanding of God as moral agent. Finally, in the main part of the argumentation, I pursue the question to what extent the problem of animal (and human) suffering does not arise for a concept of God couched in less personalistic terms. If God's perspective towards creation is rather de-anthropocentric, then moral concerns might be of less importance as we generally assume. Such an understanding of the divine is by no means alien to the biblical-theistic tradition. I argue that it finds strong echoes in the divine speeches in the Book of Job: They aim at teaching us to accept both the beauty and the tragic of existence in a creation that seen in its entirety is rather a-moral. Finally, I address the question what such a concept of God could mean for our existence.

Keywords: (dis)values in nature; animal theodicy; God in the Book of Job; non-anthropocentric view of God; holistic understanding of creation

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1. Introduction

To many modern eyes it seems obvious to describe nature as a place of violence, cruelty and mercilessness. We are aware that life emerges and continues to exist by destroying or displacing other life. We know that mass extinctions are part of natural history, that it is primarily the strongest and best adapted individuals to the environment that survive, that most young animals do not reach adulthood and that a quick death is not the rule but rather the exception (Schneider 2020, chap. 1).

There are no moral principles at work in nature, but the right of the strongest prevails, whose existence is ruthlessly based on the expense of others. Those who describe nature in this way do not normally assume that this is a purely subjective description owed to a human perspective. The claim made generally is stronger: Many natural processes are intrinsic disvalues and, thus, evil per se. For instance, Thomas H. Huxley writes a few decades after the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*: "Thus, brought before the tribunal of ethics, the cosmos might well seem to stand condemned. The conscience of man revolted against the moral indifference of nature, and the microscopic atom should have found the illimitable macrocosm guilty" (Huxley 1894, p. 59).

While for centuries imitating nature was considered desirable because it was assumed that nothing happens in nature for no purpose, Huxley identifies a stark contrast between nature and (human) culture in the light of evolutionary theory: Culture is characterised by morality or at least by a striving for it. Nature, instead, is morally indifferent and thus, we find no docking points for moral categories in natural processes.

The influential evolutionary biologist George C. Williams goes even one step further and emphasises that "[m]odern sociobiological insights and studies of organisms in natural settings support Huxley and justify an even more extreme condemnation of nature and an antithesis of the naturalistic fallacy: what is, in the biological world, normally ought

not" (Williams 1988, p. 383). Similarly, the philosopher Mark Sagoff concedes: "The ways in which creatures in nature die are typically violent: predation, starvation, disease, parasitism, cold. The dying animal in the wild does not understand the vast ocean of misery into which it and billions of other animals are born only to drown" (Sagoff 1984, p. 303).

Such a negative understanding appears particularly problematic against a theistic background, since it seems highly questionable how a morally perfect God would allow or even consciously will the existence of a world containing so many evils. In this paper, I address this question by arguing for the following theses:

- An account of widespread disvalue in nature is not persuasive. Rather, we should remain neutral about it as different interpretations of nature suggest a rather ambiguous picture.
- Classical theodicy presupposes a framework that operates with decidedly human moral categories. This framework is by no means the only possible conceptual scheme for dealing with the problem of suffering.
- A non-anthropocentric understanding of God provides a fundamentally different framework for tackling the problem of animal (and human) suffering. Such an understanding of God is not the mere consequence of philosophical speculation but is at least partially rooted in the biblical tradition as the divine speeches in the Book of Job suggest.

In my following considerations, I will address these points in sequence.

2. Disvalues in Nature?

Talk about (dis)values in nature needs some preliminary clarification because it involves different normative concepts (McShane 2007). As the term is used here, it basically means that natural facts have intrinsic value, that is, they dispose of properties which make them valuable apart from any relations to other states. Natural facts can be quite different things such as individual living beings, certain eco-systemic relations or untouched natural areas. Often is invoked a supervenience relation for explaining how such things are connected to value: If there is a certain natural fact X, then a normative fact N supervenes upon it. Claiming that X has intrinsic value N says that the value N of X exists prior to any human (or other) conceptualisation and perspective on the world. In other words, the view that X has intrinsic value N involves the claim that X has a normative standing which ought to be taken into consideration in any adequate grasp of X. Thus, we should think of these parts of the natural world as appropriate objects of wonder, awe, admiration, beauty or respect independent from subjective preferences and interests. The same applies to disvalues. If X has intrinsic disvalue, then the appropriate reaction is disgust, horror and moral rejection because X involves objective features which are bad.

A list of possible candidates of disvalues in nature contains a whole range of different phenomena such as predation, parasitism, selfishness, randomness, blindness of natural processes, disaster, indifference, waste, struggle, suffering and death (Rolston 1992; Schneider 2020, chap. 1). I will limit myself to discuss three of the phenomena mentioned: predation, parasitism and disaster. Taking off from environmental ethicist Holmes Rolston III's reasoning, I argue that the thesis of widespread disvalue in nature is questionable at least.

2.1. Predation

Obviously, predation is bad for the prey. If a predator catches a prey animal, pain and death are the result. One can consider predation to be lamentable and thus demand that humans should assist animals in preserving their lives when it is within human power to do so. However, from the lion's perspective, a prey animal is a resource that contributes significantly to the lion's good life. The lion must hunt in order to be able to provide food for itself and its offspring, since hunting is without alternative for a lion's survival. Therefore, Rolston argues: "The disvalue to the prey is, however, a value to the predator,

and, with a systematic turn, perspective changes. The violent death of the hunted means life to the hunter. There is no value loss so much as value capture; [. . .]. The pains of the prey are matched by the pleasures of the predator" (Rolston 1992, p. 253).

The idea Rolston proposes is not a utilitarian trade-off between the pleasure of the predator and the pain of the hunted animal but rather value supervening upon a complex natural state of affairs. The skillful manifestation of the lion's hunting capacities can be seen as an intrinsic good as well as the successful escape tactics of the zebras. Since older, sick or otherwise impaired animals often fall prey to predators, instrumental value is also involved since successful hunting brings a benefit to the species involved.

Rolston points out that we commonly admire the strength, camouflage, endurance, instinct and hunting skills of predators and flight animals alike. Without predation, these complex skills would never have evolved. Philosopher of science Peter Godfrey-Smith describes how these more complex abilities probably begun to develop in to the so-called "Cambrian explosion" some 540 million years ago and how nature changed subsequently. Before this crucial evolutionary step, animals were rather simple and relatively self-contained beings. With the Cambrian explosion, however, Godfrey-Smith emphasises that "animals became *parts of each other's lives* in a new way, especially through predation. This means that when one kind of organism evolves a little, it changes the environment faced by other organisms, which evolve in response" (Godfrey-Smith 2018, p. 34).

The consequence of this entanglement of one life in another is the evolution of the mind in response to the minds of other animals. The evolution of predators and prey lead to the development of animals with more and more complex perceptual and cognitive capacities. Our own evolution is based on the fact that as omnivores we were also successful hunters. Thus, from a peculiar human perspective of individual suffering, nature appears to be full of disvalues; from a more general systematic evolutionary perspective, instead, it is less clear whether these disvalues are not necessary means for goods, to which we generally assign a high axiological value such as a rich subjective life and a broad array of complex cognitive and agentive faculties.

One may consider such axiological value ascriptions as anthropomorphically inspired. However, from the perspective of moral realism one can argue that these natural state of affairs go hand in hand with intrinsic values and that we do well to recognise these features of reality from our specific human perspective as well (for a sophisticated defence of moral realism, see Shafer-Landau 2003). Provided, one is willing to accept this line of reasoning, then one might wonder what to do with parasitism as all skilfulness, elegance and beauty in the behaviour of predation and flight seems to be lost.

2.2. Parasitism

Parasitism can be regarded as a form of predation as it infects its host and feeds on it. The problem, however, is that parasites, in stark contrast to "real" predators, have not developed any sophisticated skills for predation; rather, they regressed to degenerative forms of life. Thus, there is nothing to admire when it comes to parasites. The well-known ornithologist Alexander Skutch writes: "The peculiar faculties of animals are the directive senses and the power of locomotion. The host of flukes, tapeworms, cestodes, and other animals that live entirely within the bodies of bigger animals—unpigmented, sightless, deaf, practically devoid of the power of independent locomotion—are parasites of the highest degree" (Skutch 1948, p. 514).

Evil is therefore twofold: On the one hand, we have the degeneration of the parasite, and, on the other hand, it causes pain and destruction in the host. According to this interpretation, parasitism results in a major step backwards in evolutionary development, since the parasite, by adapting to the host, becomes increasingly dependent on it and increasingly loses the abilities for an independent biological existence.

Again, this view is just one side of the coin. It is rarely the case that the ecological system of parasite and host as such degenerates. Rather, the skills lost by the parasite are borrowed from the host. The parasite has lost locomotion because the host moves

for the parasite; the parasite has a reduced spectrum of sense perception because it is sufficient if the host has it. From a biological perspective, such a way of living provides an optimal adaptation to the environment because it increases the survival of the species or the individual. In addition, it involves skilfulness to achieve it. Thus, with parasitism might come more value than would exist in its absence because the value of the life of parasitic creatures themselves and the frequent beneficial impact on hosts could well exceed the disvalues to the creatures parasitised upon (see also Rolston 1992, pp. 255–56). Let us therefore turn to a third point: What about the many natural disasters, which cause so much animal suffering or even the extinction of entire eco-systems?

2.3. Disaster

We are all familiar with the destructive forces of nature. Hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes or floods cause much damage and suffering among humans and in nature. However, from a larger perspective, these negative forces are part of a systemic whole that has positive value overall. Rolston writes: "Floods, windstorms lightning storms, and such violence would be more or less like wildfire in ecosystems, a bad thing for individuals burned and in short range, but not really all that bad systemically in long range, given nature's restless creativity" (Rolston 1992, p. 265).

Analogous to this observation, early environmentalist philosopher and advocate for the preservation of wilderness, John Muir, describes an earthquake in Yosemite in 1872, emphasising not so much its destructive as its creative power: "Nature [. . .] then created [. . .] a new set of features, simply by giving the mountains a shake—changing not only the high peaks and cliffs, but the streams. As soon as these rock avalanches fell every stream began to sing new songs [. . .]. Storms of every sort, torrents, earthquakes, cataclysms, „convulsions of nature" etc. however mysterious and lawless at first sight they might seem, are only harmonious notes in the song of creation, varied expressions of God's love" (Muir [1912] 1954, p. 169).

Muir reminds us that the positive side of nature's destructive forces must be taken into account. Forces in nature causing annihilation and death are at the same time those forces that give rise to new life-promoting landscapes. Although Muir's interpretation of nature may have a romantic tendency, it is ultimately a scientific insight that life quickly returns to landscapes destroyed from earthquakes, floods, fires or volcanic eruptions and that these destructive forces help to create new environments, ecosystems and species in it.

Seen in this light, the view of nature as place of disvalue appears to be increasingly partial. There is no doubt that the aforementioned evils exist, but ecological theory suggests that without them, nature as we know it would probably not exist at all; instead, we would probably be confronted with a planet unable to generate any more complex forms of life. Once we extend our focus away from individual destinies towards a holistic perspective on ecosystems and the place of the species in it, patterns of stability, order and beauty come into view. From a systemic point of view, disvalue can mutate into value. The tragic loss of an individual is the consequence of prolific life-cycles that cannot exhibit their generative forces in a fundamentally different way. Robin Attfield observes: "Certainly nature does not observe social justice or compensate individual sufferers, but the overall system is not one of unalleviated misery, and would seem to embody greater value than would be predictable for any system devoid of suffering" (Attfield 2000, p. 294; see also Zamulinski 2010).

Someone who is familiar with the relevant ecological details is likely to broaden the parochial perspective from individual destinies to a holistic view of evolutionary processes. This shift in perspective undermines a disvalue-account of nature. First, one has to note that there are goods that could hardly have come into being without the evils under consideration. Reference to these goods, however, is less about a classic higher-goods defence and more about a view of nature in the sense of a complex system, where stable natural forces, evolutionary creativity, the beauty of the living or the adaptation to the most diverse environmental conditions are in the foreground. Second, such a holistic view of

nature promotes non-moral and, thus, non-anthropocentric standards of understanding and, consequently, a picture of nature emerges which is axiologically ambiguous at least. It provides the possibility to consider a natural process as inherently positive even though often not good for an individual creature involved in it. Finally, one should keep in mind that natural processes are often too complex to be captured by a one-sided perspective. Symbiotic relationships, states of equilibrium or even cooperative behaviour are also central evolutionary driving forces that, unlike hostile competitiveness resulting in suffering, can be classified as mainly positive (wide range of philosophical and theological interpretations of natural processes apart from orthodox Darwinian accounts are provided by Moritz 2014).

3. Animal Suffering and Theism

The aim of the argumentation so far has been to show that the view that evil is to be located at the very core of evolution is questionable, at least. Most probably, as in many other philosophical debates, also here is little consensus as to what facts count as values and disvalues, and furthermore, which costs and benefits should be assigned to them. In whatever way this may be categorised, what seems obvious is that a theist faces greater problems in ascribing overall value to nature than a non-theist. For a non-theist, the fact that many animals suffer or most organisms die prematurely may be tragic, but ultimately, this fact can be accepted with a regretful sigh: Nature is apparently a bit clumsy, wasteful and not particularly elegant. However, what should one expect from blind forces of nature?

The picture is radically different for a theist. By a theist, I refer to a person who assumes the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and morally perfect creator who is part of the moral order. The concept of God involved here may be described as the God of the philosophers in contrast to the God of biblical revelation. However, one has to bear in mind that this concept is not competing with the biblical tradition but is rather based upon it and clarified by philosophical analysis. In the light of such a perfect being in theology, the problem of evil becomes particularly problematic because in a world created by a perfect, not only supreme being, the multitude of suffering and its intensities are phenomena that we do not expect. The claim is not that there should be no evils at all in a world created by such a God, but that there should not be so many terrible evils, since it is difficult to see that possible goals of creation cannot also be realised in an alternative world containing less evil.

Against this background, the problem of animal suffering is a variant of the traditional problem of evil. A particular challenge, however, is that many of the answers developed in the context of human theodicies such as the free will defence or the soul-making theodicy seem less convincing when it comes to animals because they do not possess the cognitive and moral capacities required for these accounts to work. In light of this challenge, Joshua Moritz, for instance, argues that a gradualist account to evolution may be helpful here because "animal choices, though perhaps not as self-conscious, free, or morally culpable as those of humans, are still theologically significant insofar as they influence the degree and specific types of evolutionary suffering that are brought into existence through such choices" (Moritz 2014, p. 373). However, it is questionable what the term "animal choice" is supposed to mean here as the range of possible behaviours in a given situation is quite limited for most animals. Cognitively complex animals can change behaviours through learning within a limited framework, but a (sub-conscious) decision against a behaviour causing suffering that was so far typical for individuals of this species is likely to be too demanding for most animal species. I do not mean to suggest that such an assumption is entirely out of the question or that it cannot be argued for with the help of additional theological assumptions. Rather, the thrust of my argument points to the fact that an extension of a classical free will defence to animals must be supported by significant auxiliary hypotheses coming along with argumentative costs that appear difficult for many to accept.

The same problem applies to the soul-making theodicy, since an inner psycho-moral maturation process or a reorientation of one's own way of life towards the morally better through a process of suffering can hardly be assumed in the animal kingdom. John Hick, for instance, openly admits: "To some, the pain suffered in the animal kingdom beneath the human level has constituted the most baffling aspect of the problem of evil. For the considerations that may lighten the problem as it affects mankind—the positive value of moral freedom despite its risks; and the necessity that a world which is to be the scene of soul-making should contain real challenges, hardships, defeats, and mysteries—do not apply in the case of the lower animals" (Hick 1966, p. 309).

Similarly, McCord Adams excludes (most) animals from her soteriological account to theodicy because they are not cognitively capable of perceiving experienced evils as possible sources of meaning and positive transformation (see also Stump 2010, p. 4). McCord Adams explicates: "If all mammals and perhaps most kinds of birds, reptiles, and fish suffer pain, many naturally lack self-consciousness and the sort of transtemporal psychic unity required to participate in horrors" (McCord-Adams 1999, p. 28).

The idea is that even if God would redeem the suffering experienced in this life by resurrecting animals in a zoological garden of Eden, they would not dispose of the cognitive powers to connect their past experiences with the present ones. Present suffering might enable one to experience future pleasant states in a more conscious and intense way. Since most animals do not have the required psychic unity connecting past with present, they would be unable to realise that God positively transforms past suffering in the resurrected state.

As indicated above, this limited scope of classical theodicies has been responded to by the development of new accounts that explicitly claim to include animals (e.g., Murray 2008; Moritz 2014; Aguti 2017; Dougherty 2014; Crummett 2017). There are a number of suggestions as to why, from a theistic perspective, an eschatological perspective including animals (or at least more complex types of animals) should be welcomed (e.g., section III in Hereth and Timpe 2020).

Of central importance for our considerations is the insight that both classical accounts to theodicy and those that want to include animals presuppose moral categories that are familiar to us: If God is a loving person and morally perfect, then it is hard to imagine that God can simply pass over all these different forms of suffering. Rather, we must assume that suffering is a necessary means to a higher good, and what makes the theodicy problem so intractable for us is that we have great difficulties identifying these higher goods. What is often lost sight of is that this concept of God as a morally perfect agent is by no means the only idea of the God that theism has produced. So called "classical theism" is a powerful alternative tradition that is not oriented towards the concept of God as a person, but at most ascribes certain personal properties to God, which are, however, supplemented by a range of non-personal properties.

4. Beyond Anthropocentrism

Classical theism is often contrasted with personal theism. Personal theism thinks that among God's primary and foremost interests is to enter into a loving relationship with each sentient creature. Proponents of classical theism, instead, point out that classical theism proposes a concept of God that is difficult to connect with our concept of person. John Cooper, for instance, writes: "[C]lassical theism asserts that God is transcendent, self-sufficient, eternal, and immutable in relation to the world; thus he does not change through time and is not affected by his relation to his creatures" (Cooper 2006, p 14).

As understood here, then, "far more central" to classical theism than the so-called person-like omni-properties omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence are the doctrines of divine transcendence, simplicity, eternity or immutability. These are what mark out classical theism from other versions of theism that think of God more in personal categories. According to Brian Davies, for classical theists, "God is primarily the Creator.

God is [...] causally responsible for the existence of everything other than himself" (Davies 2003, p. 2).

Taking God as the transcendent and sole creator means that everything other than God is radically dependent on God for its very existence. Prioritising God's role as creator has wide-ranging implications for the question in what sense personal categories can be ascribed to God. For instance, one (metaphysical) implication is that God bears no real relations to creation because no creature can have any kind of impact on God, however minimal this impact might be. Creation is entirely dependent on God but God is in no way dependent on creation. Because becoming related to any created entity would be a change, classical theists maintain that no creature can cause God to change. Thus, radical metaphysical independence implies immutability and existence outside time because existence in time would, again, constitute some form of dependence from it.

It should be apparent that the conceptual scheme of classical theism puts into question the view of God being a moral agent analogous to humans. Accordingly, the overall framework of the problem of evil changes: If God is in no way dependent on the world and cannot be influenced by it, the moral standards obvious to us are hardly applicable to God. Since the problem of evil lives from these standards, evils in the world no longer count as direct counter-evidence to God's existence as it might be the case that our moral concerns are in no way God's concerns. Ordinary moral questions have an essential anthropocentric direction which no longer are in place when it comes to God.

Taking such a non-anthropocentric view of God seriously raises the question what alternative possibilities for conceptualising God's relationship to creation are at hand. In the light of the arguments in the previous sections, one could say that God's view of creation is similar to the understanding of nature proposed by Rolston or Muir: God takes delight in the creative fecundity, beauty and order of creation, even if the individual suffering of animals and humans is an integral—and most likely unavoidable—part of it. God's view on creation is primarily holistic whereby such a perspective does not automatically imply that individual suffering is completely overlooked or considered of no further importance.

One can grant that nature clearly has its negative aspects, in particular if the focus is on the individual fate of specific living beings. However, as has been argued, such a view is one-sided, and the positive features ought to be considered as well, which are more likely to come into sight from a more systemic and holistic view. Within a theistic framework, one can presuppose that God has created the universe because the positive sides ultimately prevail and are particularly prominent in God's perspective. God is less the comforting person-like perfect agent who acts within the world to realise its purposes set by providence. Rather, God is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe, which is a morally deeply ambiguous blend of pleasure and pain.

Perhaps God's perspective can be expressed with the help of scholastic terminology as follows: God does not want these evils in the antecedent will, but he allows them in the consequent will in order to be able to be creatively active and to realise the goods that come with a universe full of life. The fundamental laws of creation involve a dynamic exchange of matter and energy, determine becoming and decaying and indicate that struggle, competition and death is at the very heart of the living. Moral categories do not have to be completely abolished from this picture, as also classical theism attributes personal characteristics to God, but these categories are no longer at the centre of the problem, or at least they are no longer the sole determinants of it.

The crucial point is the broadening of the perspective from individual instances of suffering to goods that characterise the universe as a whole. In the philosophical tradition, Leibniz, for example, proposed such a view: According to him, the suffering of living beings is less a moral question than the inevitable consequence of creaturely finitude. The intrinsic imperfection of individual living beings is to be related to the more comprehensive perfection of the universe and placed in a corresponding relationship to it. God has to accept the necessity of suffering in nature if he wants to create such a dynamic and creative nature as the one familiar to us. Leibniz writes: "But one must believe that even sufferings

and monstrosities are part of order; and it is well to bear in mind not only that it was better to admit these defects and these monstrosities than to violate general laws [. . .] just as sometimes there are appearances of irregularity in mathematics which issue finally in a great order when one has finally got to the bottom of them." (Leibniz 2009, pp. 276–77).

At this point, one may wonder how the biblical understanding of God fits into this picture. Is it not the case that the biblical God is primarily conceived in personal categories and moral standards related to them? An essential motivation for thinking of God in personal terms is precisely that we can only imagine a personal relationship with such a God as Richard Swinburne, for instance, explains: "If [. . .] God were immutable in the strong sense, he would be a very lifeless being. The God of the Hebrew Bible, in which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all have their roots, is pictured as being in continual interaction with humans [. . .]. A totally immutable God is a lifeless God, not a God with whom one can have a personal relationship—as theists have normally claimed that one can have with God" (Swinburne 2016, p. 233).

However, the God of classical theism is not merely a consequence of philosophical reflections opposed to the biblical tradition. Rather, in the biblical tradition itself, references can be found that recoil from an overly personalised and relational God, or so I will argue by referring to the story of Job. Taking off from a line of interpretation to be found, among others, in the work of philosopher Wes Morriston and in the theological commentary of Carol A. Newsom, I argue that the divine speeches to Job draw attention to the fact that God is primarily creator and sustainer of a vast, wild and awesome universe where anthropocentric moral standards do not lead to an adequate understanding of God's relationship to creation: Creation as a whole is valuable, not only or primarily because of the humans in it. If this line of interpretation is correct and a central message of the story of Job is to shift from an anthropocentric to a non-anthropocentric and holistic view of creation, then this view directly affects the problem of animal suffering. As soon as moral standards fade into the background, a theist is able to assign to suffering—though still existentially challenging—an integral place in creation. This does not mean that the world becomes a better and less tragic place; rather, certain questions we tend to ask, seem misplaced because a change of perspective is needed. This is what the divine speeches call for, and this is the difficult lesson to learn for Job (and for us). I unfold this argument in the following sections.

5. The Divine Speeches in the Book of Job

Since the story of Job is well known, I turn directly to the divine speeches. My aim is to argue that they display a concept of God as creator and sustainer of the universe but not as guarantor of moral rules determining the course of history. For this purpose, it suffices to keep in mind that the central theme in the dialogues between Job and his friends is the question of retributive justice. A dispute over justice dominates the unfolding of the story till to the divine speeches. As Job is unable to see any mechanism of divine justice at work in his tragic fate, he desires to confront God directly with this issue. Moreover, God meets Job's desire but not in the way he had expected: God does not refer to any reasons for Job's suffering. Instead, God asks Job to answer a series of questions: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? [. . .] Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?" (Job 38,1-2; 4-5a).

As Carol A. Newsom points out, the two divine speeches direct Job's imagination to the remote points of creation beyond the sphere of human influence: to the foundations of the earth, the horizon, light and darkness, the gates of the underworld, the desert, barren mountains and nature where wild animals live (Newsom 2003, pp. 241–52). The aim of these speeches is to widen Job's perspective from places of secure boundaries to places where human culture and an ordered universe is put at risk and the "primary symbol of the

chaotic" (Newsom 2003, p. 243) is experienced. God presents creation in all its splendour, wildness and impenetrable complexity (see also McLeish 2020).

With astute biological knowledge is described how lions care for their cubs, young ravens search for food, hinds give birth to their offspring, the ostrich hatches its eggs in the sand or the eagle brings prey into its nest in the rocks. The places and creatures represent the alien other to human culture and domestication. Creation seen in this way evokes wondrous estrangement, attraction and anxiety at the same time. The detailed description of Leviathan as primordial beast that no human can capture and dominate continues this theme. Among the many points one can identify in the divine speeches, Wes Morriston finds three of particular importance (Morriston 1996, pp. 342–43):

First, God is the creator of everything and fully in control of all of creation, which also includes wild and chaotic elements. Even the primordial beasts, which no human can control, are no threat to God.

Second, the theophany contrasts God wisdom and Job's ignorance. The numerous questions in the first speech almost ironically point out that Job cannot give any answers because he has no deeper understanding of the workings of creation.

Third, the theophany celebrates the wisdom of the created order. It offers a "breath-taking vision of the majesty and beauty of the Creator's design" (Morriston 1996, p. 343) and, as Newsom puts it, of "the tragic sublime" (Newsom 2003, p. 251).

6. A First Interpretation: Skepticism

A common line of interpretation of the divine speeches focuses on the second point. God has reasons for letting Job suffer, but Job, due to his limited human knowledge, should not expect to have insight in any of these divine reasons. You might call this interpretation a "sceptical theist's account" (Gomarasca 2013). Sceptical theists argue that not being able to imagine what reasons God might have for letting people suffer does not imply that there are not any reasons at all. Due to our limited cognitive capacities, we might simply not be able to see these reasons. This is exactly the case with Job. Although readers of the book are aware of these reasons, Job himself is kept in the dark about them. He is not able to find these reasons and God does not inform him about them. As human being, so this interpretation goes, Job cannot leave the inner-worldly realm, and therefore it is also not possible for him to access any reasons beyond it.

The problem of such a sceptical interpretation is twofold: First, the divine speeches do not point at the possibility of any reasons for the way God treats Job. Questions of morality and justice are not mentioned at all. Thus, a sceptical interpretation has few points of connection in the text itself. Second, the reasons given at the beginning are anything but good. If these are the only reasons, then we are left with the impression that either God's character is of problematic nature or, if divine justice is of any concern here, then it is inscrutable to us. As a consequence, if there is divine justice, then we are confronted with a moral scheme we do not know how to connect in any meaningful way with human moral standards.

7. A Second Interpretation: Humble Submission

Another, more literal interpretation of the text is, as Newsom argues, that God draws Job's attention away from the human realm and the question of the moral order of creation. The divine speeches no longer continue the dominant theme of justice but present an image of creation in all its majesty, wildness and violence where human life and culture are present in a marginalised way at best. Job was looking for a creation of order, value and meaning where human experiences make sense and are conducive to a rational explanation. God, however, by presenting Leviathan, highlights the nonmoral and chaotic aspects of creation. Newsom writes: "The face of Leviathan exposes the hubris and the self-deception of the human rage for order" (Newsom 2003, p. 253).

Job's responses after the first and second divine speech are brief and then he falls silent. This attitude deserves particular attention. Some interpreters read this as an expression

of Job's regretful and humble submission in the face of an omnipotent and omniscient God. John E. Hartley, for instance, concludes that Job "humbles himself before God, conceding that he has misstated his case by speaking about things beyond his ability to know" (Hartley 1988, p. 536). According to Hartley, Job's reaction after the divine speeches marks a new direction in his relationship with God because he locates his self-worth not anymore in his own moral-spiritual behaviour and innocence but exclusively in God. The idea is that continuing to pursue justice in this case would eventually distance Job from God because Job would hold on to an image of God that must be overcome. Communion with a mysterious and fascinating God is more important than understanding one's own fate and suffering in terms of merit and justice, and therefore, Job does not reply to the divine speeches anymore.

8. A Third Interpretation: Creation beyond Justice

Although the above interpretation does have its merits, I think that we have to go a step further. Job's reaction seems quite unlikely when one considers how steadfastly he held on to his own innocence in the dispute with his friends. He demanded an encounter with God to prove his innocence and now, after a demonstration of God's power, he is supposed to simply back down without having received an answer to his nagging questions?

Morriston proposes another interpretation that seems more appropriate in the light of the celebration of the overall cosmos and wild animal life as put forward in the divine speeches: "[Job] sees that he counts for no more (and of course for no less) in the total scheme of things than, say, the wild ox or the eagle. But while he is deeply moved by the wonder of it all, he is also bewildered. He does not (yet) see how his complaint has been answered, and he doesn't know how to respond to God's demand for a reply" (Morriston 2017, p. 235).

The same goes for Job's reaction after the second speech when he declares: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42: 6). For Morriston, the first line refers to traditional wisdom about God as expressed in Job's and the friend's discussion about divine justice and goodness. What, however, can it mean that now Job sees God? Quoting Rudolph Otto, Morriston thinks that liberated from conventional platitudes about God, Job newly experiences "the downright stupendousness, the well-nigh daemonic and wholly incomprehensible character of the eternal creative power"—a power that "mocks at all conceiving but can yet stir the mind to its depths, fascinate and overbrim the heart" (Morriston 2017, p. 237; quoting Otto 1936, p. 82).

This interpretation is supported by Newsom's suggestion that Job makes the illuminating and at the same time tragic insight that man finds himself in a creation full of tension and fracture. Man must work out structures of order in creation to be able to live according to his rational and moral nature, but at the same time, this creation also contains untamable elements hostile to man, which can have tragic effects on human (and animal) existence. Newsome says: "What Job has just heard in the divine speeches, however, is a devastating undermining of his understanding of the unproblematic moral continuity between himself, the world, and God. It is a profound loss of unity, a recognition of the deeply fractured nature of reality" (Newsom 2003, p. 255).

The idea is, thus, that Job leaves behind his claim to find a moral justification for his suffering, since he has realised that creation does not follow moral principles that commonly apply to the human social realm. As long as Job was searching for a moral order in creation, he could not yet free himself from his overly anthropocentric image of God. The divine speeches widened his focus by directing his attention away from his own fate and question of justice towards the splendour and tragic beauty of all creation.

Accordingly, Job does not receive any new information about the why of his own suffering; rather, his paradigmatic view on creation and the creator radically changes. By no longer holding to the traditional insight that God rewards the just and punishes the unjust, Job is able to accept his own fate and experience God directly as a sublime power in nature who does not rule the world in accordance with a moral order. God is neither just

nor unjust as these categories simply do not apply. Job accepts reality as it is, and in doing so, he sees God's presence in creation.

It should be noted that this insight is different from the sceptical theist's view. As Hartley has also noted, continuing to ask for divine justice makes no sense; the reason for stopping to do so, however, is different. It is less the understanding that we have to renounce all personal claims because they might erect a barrier between us and God. Rather, the idea is that creation is not ordered according to any principles of justice and therefore it makes no sense to demand them. God is the transcendent Other beyond good and evil, and once this is recognised, one is also able to accept that "[t]ragic rupture is the figure at the heart of human existence" (Newsom 2003, p. 257). This acceptance reorders and deepens Job's previous relationship with God. Morriston puts it this way: "He has been liberated from the futile craving for divinely guaranteed moral order that had fueled his rebellion and bound him in misery, and freed for the wild wonder and beauty of what is (Morriston 2017, p. 240).

This interpretation has clear advantages over the other outlined interpretations. First, it is able to make straightforward sense of the divine speeches without taking it as metaphor for something else. Second, it explains Job's attitude of repentance and silence without having to assume that Job was humbled and silenced by God's superiority and might. Rather, Job's behaviour is in continuity with his previous desire to encounter God for understanding God's behaviour towards him. This desire is met, but Job has to learn that it does not correspond to what he had originally expected. Thus, Job's trials can be seen as a spiritual journey one outcome of which is the insight that creation is a sphere that "carries with it no purely human-centered answers" (Chase 2013, p. 280). This reading, finally, makes sense from a spiritual point of view: When we gain a deeper understanding of our own existence in the experience of the sublime, we may feel a kind of a liberation and joyful peace that takes away any form of anxiety or sorrow related to worldly things, at least for a moment. Worldly trials seem less burdensome than before, as one's entire attention is absorbed by the experience of the sublime. Instead of asking questions concerning one's existence, one simply "is" in the presence of the divine.

9. Two Objections and the Outline of a Proposal

No doubt, this reading is controversial and faces various objections. A first objection is that it does not take individual suffering seriously enough because the main focus is on creation in general. A second objection raises the question of the extent to which such a God is worthy of worship.

I reply to these criticisms in turn. First of all, there is a certain tension in monotheistic conceptions of God, as the difference between classical and personal theism indicates. Classical theism sees God as the wholly transcendent creator of everything that exists, as the source of all being that is in no way dependent on anything. Personal theism, instead, highlights that religious experience and the biblical tradition tells us that God aims at entering in a personal relationship with creation and is deeply concerned about the life of every single human being. It seems that the concept of God in the Book of Job oscillates between these two conceptions. On the one hand, God's interests seem to be directed towards the whole of creation, while individual destinies play a subordinate role therein, and on the other hand, God cares about the life of a particular creature such as Job and even speaks to him. This tension is not resolved, and maybe a first lesson is that we have to live with it. Faith goes hand in hand with the demand for justice and compassion, but at the same time, it must also recognise that our world is a place of beauty containing tragic moments of suffering and loss that cannot be adequately captured and explained in the categories of justice and morality.

Newsom proposes how such a reading connects to the happy ending where Job has his fortunes restored. The ending expresses that Job is now able to embrace the goodness of life in all its fragile, vulnerable and tragic dimension: "Read in dialogic relation, the sublimity of the divine speeches and the beauty of the prose epilogue gestures toward the

human incorporation of tragedy into the powerful imperatives of desire: to live and to love" (Newsom 2003, p. 258). Similarly, Steven Chase argues that the explicit statement in the epilogue that the three daughters receive an inheritance along their brothers means a significant departure from the culture of that time. It indicates that within the awareness that there is no guarantee of a life that is just and free from tragic events, for Job, "*all* things are precious, *all* things are to be loved" (Chase 2013, p. 275).

Against this background, an answer to the first objection can be given: The story of Job can be seen as a critique of any conception God with overly anthropocentric interests. God sees all of creation as valuable and human creatures are one, but not the only or central, aspect of this holistic picture of a value-laden nature. God is responsive to values, but these values may not make an exclusive reference to us. Just as Job ends up loving and caring equally for all his children, God considers all life to be precious and is at the same time fully aware that suffering and death are intrinsic parts of the cycle of the living.

Mark Wynn draws attention to the fact that often "our conceptions of value fail to capture certain systematic features of the goodness of the world" (Wynn 1999a, p. 36). Wynn argues that one way to remedy this deficiency is "to have extensive first-hand experience of nature" (Wynn 1999a, p. 36). I take this to mean that certain axiological aspects of creation require a non-anthropocentric view on it. Consider, for instance, the description of the heavy windstorm by John Muir: "Nature was holding high festival, and every fiber of the most rigid giants thrilled with glad excitement. [. . .] Even when the grand anthem had swelled to its highest pitch, I could distinctly hear the varying tones of individual trees [. . .]. Each was expressing itself in its own way, singing its own song, and making its own peculiar gestures, manifesting a richness of variety to be found in no other forest I have yet seen" (Muir [1912] 1954, pp. 185–86).

John Muir is completely absorbed in this natural spectacle. Experiencing the threatening majesty of nature can contribute towards a significant rethinking of our own concerns. The divine speeches call for a self-transcendence and redirection towards the worth of things in themself, independent from their instrumental value for specific human purposes. They relativise our natural egocentric perspective and call to complement it with one that assigns an intrinsic value to nature in its beautiful as well as dangerous and violent peculiarities. Job is drawn, so to speak, into a deeper understanding of the very nature of things—into their very dependence from God and "exhibition of divine glory" (Southgate 2014, p. 801).

Such an attitude towards nature does not imply that moral questions are suspended or should no longer have a genuine place in our understanding of reality. It is part of human nature to be endowed with moral capacities, and therefore, this central aspect of our existential constitution cannot be ignored. However, the Book of Job reminds us that this perspective is not the only one with which we should look at the world. The world as such is valuable to God independently of any ultimate moral order. God wants us to live a life immersed in such a world by accepting the beautiful as well as inexplicable tragic dimensions of creation and our existence in it.

This brings me to the second objection whether such a God is worthy of worship. Referring to Mark Wynn's use, worship can be defined as an attitude where "the believer relates herself to the marvel of existence, by placing herself in wonder and adoration before the one in whom all existence is contained" (Wynn 1999b, pp. 151–52). It should be noted that Wynn is not referring here to God as a maximally perfect being but to the ground of all existence. An attitude of reverence and gratitude is appropriate when one comprehends the wonder of one's own existence as of existence in general. Take again Muir's intense experience of the heavy windstorm: Muir feels himself deeply immersed in the marvel of existence, the power of nature, the sublime process of creation and destruction. Muir surely senses admiration and reverence for this spectacle of nature. Whether nature as a non-personal system is also an appropriate object of worship is a matter of dispute but surely an open question (see Cockayne 2020), and many representatives of a pantheistic understanding of reality or a religion of nature are likely to answer it in the affirmative.

God in the Book of Job appears to be worthy of worship because he holds the order of the entire cosmos, including its chaotic elements, in his hands. This cosmos is an ambiguous blend of beauty and suffering. The spiritual calling is to accept the reality of this image of the cosmos and of its creator and sustainer without any delusions. In addition, it has to be kept in mind that this God does not show himself closed to human longing but has a genuine interest that people are able to form an appropriate image of God—even if the grasp of this image entails a profound and painful transformation towards less anthropocentric categories of the divine.

10. Conclusions

The view proposed may not be easy to accept. Like Job, we desire a world in which our fundamental moral intuitions are preserved and respected. Perhaps, however, our world cannot meet this demand. I have argued that the story of Job suggests such an interpretation. Such an insight may be disappointing but it can also be liberating: It makes clear why we cannot give a satisfactory answer to the various facets of the problem of evil. It does not make this problem disappear, but it no longer makes us despair in front of a God we try in vain to understand. The crucial categories for looking at nature are less moral than the creativity, richness and fragile beauty of life as such. For philosopher of religion Wesley Wildman, such a view provides relief: "It ends the scourge of incoherent and morally desperate anthropomorphism in God ideas. It dissolves the problem of divine neglect. And it poses a bracing moral challenge to human beings to take responsibility for themselves, for each other, and for the world" (Wildman 2017, p. 225).

Interestingly, in recent debates in the philosophy of religion, one can notice a turning away from personalistic images of God. A central motivation for this is the unresolved problem of evil (see, e.g., Mulgan 2015; Bishop and Perszyk 2017; Wildman 2017). These accounts favor conceptions of the divine responsive to objective values such as existence, life, beauty, creativity, diversity and—in the human case—a striving for goodness. In the light of the considerations proposed here, one could say that such an understanding of the divine is an integral—though rather neglected—strand of traditional theism as the Book of Job makes clear. The exceedingly diverse dimensions of reality, from the moral impenetrability of wild nature and the indifference of the dark cosmos to the fascinating diversity of animal cooperation and human altruistic concerns, cannot be grasped without tension. Taking seriously that God is the creator of all there is implies considering more closely what it would mean for our understanding of God and our religious practice if God were primarily to care for the welfare of all creation and not only or mainly for the manifold sufferings of animals and humans.

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Article

Relating Compassion, Spirituality, and Scandal before Unjust Suffering: An Empirical Assessment

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Abstract: Recent studies in the field of cognitive science of religion have proposed a connection between religious beliefs, theory of mind, and prosocial behaviour. Theory of mind appears to be related to empathy and compassion, and both to a special sensitivity towards unjust suffering, which could trigger a religious crisis, as has often happened and is revealed in the "theodicy question". To test such relationships, adolescents were surveyed by an exploratory questionnaire. The collected data point to a more complex, less linear interaction, which depends more on cultural factors and reflexive elaboration than cognitive structures. In general, compassion and outrage before unjust suffering appear to be quite related; compassion is related to religious practice and even more to spiritual perception.

Keywords: compassion; spirituality; religion; evil scandal; religious crisis

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1. Introduction and State of the Art

A widely assumed tendency links compassion with a sharper sensitivity before unjust suffering and evil. It is less clear how both feelings are related to a more religious or spiritual sense, but intuitively, we presume that religious believers should be more affected by the scandal than unjust pain could elicit. Several questions arise in those cases, and the relationship between compassion/empathy, religion/spiritual sensitivity, and scandal before evil probably follows different paths and is rendered in more models.

Trying to summarise the available theories, we propose a first model that connects, in a straightforward and simple way, religious beliefs, social feelings, and feelings of outrage before unjust suffering, at least within the main religious traditions arising after the Axial Age. In this case, we could expect that those scoring higher in religious or spiritual indicators will sense scandal arising from unjust suffering. The rationale is quite clear: Religion is related to theory of mind, or to the ability to grasp other people's mental states (Caldwell-Harris et al. 2011; Norenzayan et al. 2012), or even to prosocial coordination and enhancement (Bloom 2012); therefore, we could expect that religious people would be more sensitive towards others, and especially towards their sufferings or hardship. Since religion in its most evolved forms also integrates a moral concern, then religious people belonging to those traditions would react more explicitly against injustice, abuse, or inflicted pain of every kind (McCauley 2011, pp. 252–68; Norenzayan et al. 2016).

A different model can be conceived to represent the relationships between religion, social sense, and scandal before evil. This alternative model does not take for granted the connections we just hinted at and assumes a more disentangled or autonomous statute for each of these feelings and perceptions. To start with, many religious expressions assume a rather individualistic style, as in the case of pre-Axial religions, like those present in classical Greece and Rome (Bellah 2011). Still in very evolved religions, those that assume most mystical forms do usually not care for the well-being of others (Kolakowski 1982, pp. 98–117). Even today, a big fringe in the broad spectrum of what can be termed "spirituality" lacks prosocial concern and appears to be unrelated to other's suffering; it

is rather about cultivating self-uplifting experiences, and is closer to aesthetic enjoyment (Flanagan and Jupp 2016, pp. 1–22). Other problems arise from the traditional views of the deep ambiguity of perceived evil. Sensitivity towards evil could be more salient in those who hold a strong belief in divine providence and grace, but at the same time, evil often becomes a scandal, and even a reason to doubt and abandon a religious faith after witnessing great evil and suffering (Reilly 1991). In these cases, strong faith in a good and merciful God is at odds with the frequent experience of abuse, mistreatment, and hard suffering. Furthermore, a recent study did not show differences regarding moral judgment between religious and non-religious participants (Rabelo and Pilati 2019).

As a result, the relationship between religious/spiritual beliefs, compassion, and the scandal of evil is far from clear and unproblematic. This relationship is possibly much more complex, and it depends on more factors and variables. Amongst these factors, we can count the aspect of religious traditions and the ways to deal with the scandal of evil, the variables concerning the different ways to encourage concern for others, and the different ways of addressing the cognitive dissonance between having faith in a loving God and experiencing suffering or witnessing harsh and unbearable pain. That sensitivity is probably connected to cultural factors, and it depends less on innate cognitive mechanisms or spontaneous perceptions and reactions towards negativity. From that perspective, the issue appears to be less rooted in linear cognitive schemas and becomes more complex, requiring a deeper analysis and cognitive elaboration, or the elaboration of an explicative model, and so it is less linked to simple and direct cognitive schemas governing religious first-level biases.

For reasons of clarity, we use the term "religion" to designate institutional or organised expressions of transcendence and its communication, and we use the term "spirituality" to designate less formal and less tradition-dependent forms of self-transcendence. We also use the term "theodicy scandal" to refer to the negative reaction from the dissonance between a religious faith and the witness of great and unjust suffering. Of course, we are aware that these three terms—"religion", "spirituality", and "theodicy scandal"—enjoy many more definitions and distinctions in the field of the study of religion and spiritual experience (Hill et al. 2000).

The literature in this field does not help very much to find a clear orientation on this issue. A considerable number of studies has been devoted to the influence that religious beliefs and practices exert in moral behaviour; a recent systematic review listed 144 entries, and since then, many more should be added (Oviedo 2016). However, the relationship between religion/spirituality and the feelings of compassion and empathy does not necessarily entail a commitment to promoting prosocial behaviour. "Compassion", according to the Oxford Dictionary, is "a strong feeling of sympathy for people or animals who are suffering and a desire to help them." This emotion has received closer attention in some papers. For instance, Saslow et al. (2013) showed that compassion is related more to spirituality than religion, giving place to what can be termed a "compassion spirituality". A few years later, Krause and Hayward published an empirical study that showed how the religious commitment of those attending services enforces gratitude and the virtue of humility. This virtue nourishes a sense of compassion, which provides meaning in life and enhances the feeling of gratitude in a self-reinforcing chain (Krause and Hayward 2015). Newmeyer et al. (2016) studied to what extent religion and spirituality could mitigate "compassion fatigue" in trauma therapists, adding a new dimension to an already complex interaction.

We were unable to find empirical studies that took into account the scandal before unjust suffering, and how it could be related to compassion and spiritual insight. The theodicy problem has received a lot of attention in philosophy of religion, but little field or experimental research has been practised. There are some exceptions: A paper by Wilt et al. (2016) examined how different theodicies are related to mental health, and an article by Abbott (2019), based on field work after the earthquakes in Haiti in 2010, analysed how such tragic events were lived in the religious faith of the affected people.

Along the line of these results, it is necessary to proceed with closer examination and testing in order to better assess current theories in the study of religion; the implications of religion and spirituality in some other basic human features, such as compassion and moral development; and the specificity of religious experience and what needs to be disentangled or distinguished at other levels.

To better discern all this, an exploratory survey with an ad hoc questionnaire was designed to identify the three variables at stake (empathy/compassion, religious/spiritual identities, and scandal before unjust evil) and to see in what way they are related. The questionnaire was distributed to high school students in Spain and Italy (414), and the data were analysed by applying standard statistical analysis to discern the variations on that relatedness. As the analysis shows, the available data point to a greater complexity in the way religion, spirituality, empathy, and theodicy scandal interact or are perceived by those young cohorts, opening new questions and deeper research on such an intriguing interaction.

2. Our Study: Method and Data Collection

The first step in our research consisted of designing a questionnaire tailored for teenagers and their sensitivity that covered the three main variables under study. We built a brief questionnaire that collected data on three scales: one measuring compassion and empathy, a second focusing on scandal before unjust suffering, and a third scale about religious and spiritual perception and practice. Based on former experiences, we decided to reduce the survey to 60 items; all items offered answers on a Likert progression (from "totally agree" to "completely disagree"). The first scale was composed of 23 items, mostly inspired by available scales measuring compassion (four of them were considered). The second scale had 16 items, and since we were unable to find available scales that measure that sense of scandal, this became the most innovative part of the questionnaire; examples of items in that section are:

- There is too much unjust suffering in the world.
- The wickedness of some men and women has no limit.
- If God exists, He should not allow so much pain and injustice.
- God should immediately punish those who commit evil.
- God seems absent from the worst catastrophes that occur in the world.
- God acts in a mysterious way and we do not understand how He can correct evil.
- The evil in the world is too strong and there is no way to overcome it.

At the time this scale was built, we were not aware of the more elaborate "Views of Suffering Scale" (VOSS), which gathers 30 items and results in 7 factors (Hale-Smith et al. 2012), or the simpler "Theodicy Scale" with 9 items (Daugherty et al. 2009). We found several similarities and correspondences between our scale and the ones just mentioned.

The third scale comprised 17 items and tried to measure religious practice and spiritual perception; most items were taken as a short selection from former standardised questionnaires on those topics, which were already tested by our team. Some demographic items were added at the end of the instrument. Three ethical protocol questions introduced the entire set of items. In Appendix A we offer the entire questionnaire.

The questionnaire was built as a Google Page, and offered as an application for smartphones. It was distributed in the first round to a group of 20 students to test it and check language and understandability. After a few corrections, the instrument was ready and was offered to high school students between 14 and 20 years of age in Spain (270) and Italy (144). The usual ethical protocols were observed, and permissions were obtained in each case. This was clearly a convenience sample, based on personal contacts from the involved researchers. This sample of 414 cases allowed for a first exploratory test to assess the possible interactions between the selected variables.

3. Our Study: Data and Analysis

3.1. Descriptive

The average age in this sample was 16.43 years; females were 41.1% and males 53.6%, and 4.3% chose the option "I prefer not to declare". Some interesting data concerned religious identity. As Table 1 shows, at least three big religious clusters were well represented: Catholics (as could be expected from the two nations' cultural background), no religious affiliation, and Muslims:

Table 1. Religious affiliations.

Religion	*Average*
Christian Catholic	59.7%
Other Christians	0.2
Muslims	11.4
Other religions	2.2
No religion	16.9
No answer	8.7

Other important data concerned religious indicators. Concerning attendance of religious services, the average was M = 2.53 in a ranking from 1 ("I never attend religious services") to 5 ("I attend very often"). The item on prayer offered a similar means: M = 2.48. In any case, these data are in line with the usual—rather low—levels of religious practice among that cohort.

In the next step, a factor analysis was applied. Six relevant factors were extracted with high coefficients of reliability and the following means (see Table 2).

Table 2. Factor analysis, factors extracted with Varimax rotation and alpha over 0.600.

Factor	**Items**	**Variance**	**Alpha**	**Mean**	**St. Dev**
1. Empathy	16	21.59	0.927	4.14	0.72
2. Religiosity	6	8.10	0.838	2.91	0.99
3. Scandal	5	6.87	0.718	3.40	0.89
4.Spirituality	5	3.89	0.729	3.40	0.87
5. Insensitivity	4	3.13	0.660	2.13	0.78
6. Sense evil	3	2.86	0.660	3.82	0.85

The factor analysis offered remarkably interesting insights. The first one is that the main variables appeared to be unrelatedly distributed. The first factor was called "Empathy" since most of the clustered items reflect this sensitivity, and they were inscribed in the first scale. Only three items refer to the scandal scale: "We should do much more to change a world with so much pain"; "There is too much unjust suffering in the world"; "The wickedness of some men and women has no limit". In this sense, a relatedness was perceived between empathy and the perception of evil, but not so much with most of the items referring to God or to the scandal that witnessing evil could entail, and that could have a negative impact on religious beliefs.

The second factor gathered six items on the scale of religion and spirituality. It was interesting to notice that some of the items reflect what could be termed "fuzzy religion" or spirituality; at this level, it is hard to differentiate between both dimensions, if they could ever be disentangled. Second, only one item in this factor is related to empathy: "When I am depressed and things go wrong, I remember that there are many other people in the world who feel like me" (R = 0.400). This could hint at the common idea of a link between social connectedness and spiritual feelings, as shown in another related item in the spiritual scale: "Living beings are connected in a mysterious way" (R = 0.343). In any case, spiritual views offered insights that seem to be too fuzzy.

The third factor was labelled "Scandal" and it gathered six items from the scale on scandal before unjust suffering, e.g., some of the previously mentioned items or the items "God should have made us less selfish and better" and "God should not allow psychopaths and people who like to harm". The main issue is that all of these items point to a divine responsibility, look for a theological explanation, or complain about unsatisfying available answers. However, once more, the lack of relatedness to other items in the religious or spiritual scale is striking: Scandal appeared to be quite autonomous or unrelated to religious sensitivity.

The fourth factor was labelled "Spirituality" and gathered five items, like "There are other dimensions or unknown forces that also influence our reality"; "Maybe there are other worlds different from ours, where we can live better"; "There is something in us that is immortal"; "When I contemplate the universe, I understand that there is something beyond the physical world". This last item was shared with the second factor. It is again interesting how this factor appeared to be quite detached from others, but fairly related to the second one, but in any case, relatively unrelated to compassion or scandal.

The fifth factor was labelled "Insensitivity" and gathered four items on the scale on empathy that reveal lack of concern for others: "I feel disconnected from those who tell me their problems"; "I do not feel emotionally connected to people who suffer"; "When I see someone who feels bad, I feel that I cannot relate to that person". This was the only factor in which gender plays a clear role (R = 0.51), even if it was moderately present in the first one on empathy (R = −0.244). Girls appeared to be more sensitive than boys, as was found in former surveys. Once more, this negative state appeared to be unrelated to the indicators of religiosity and scandal.

The sixth factor was termed "Sense of Evil" and gathered three items mostly on the second scale: "I cannot stand the level of evil I know"; "The evil and suffering that I know makes me uneasy and makes me think"; "Given the calamities and suffering that humans cause, we should look for help beyond humanity and its resources". However, an item from the empathy scale came out: "My heart is with those who feel unhappy" (R = 0.364). This was an expected result in this set, i.e., the idea that compassion towards others entails some sense of uneasiness regarding evil and the suffering in the world; however, it seemingly affected the religious dimension little.

3.2. Comparing Means and Correlations

These results invite some reflections. It is useful to compare the means for the six extracted factors and the different religious ascriptions. The questionnaire distinguished between the following clusters: Christian Catholics, other Christians, Muslims, other religions, no religious affiliation, and no answer. Looking at Table 3, it is possible to appreciate differences and convergences between the means. Upon first look, Catholics and no believers ranked very close on empathy (4.18 vs. 3.96); the same happened for the factor on scandal (3.45 vs. 3.41). A significant difference was only found in the factor for sense of evil (3.55 vs. 3.22). Then, it is interesting to compare Muslims and Catholics: Concerning empathy level, Muslims showed greater compassion (4.40 vs. 4.18), but more interestingly, Muslims appeared to be less affected by the sense of scandal (2.80 vs. 3.45). Muslims also scored similarly to Catholics for the sense of evil (3.66 vs. 3.55), whereas those belonging to other religions (just 2% of the sample) had a greater sense of scandal (3.72).

Lastly, the last outcomes indicated quite clearly that the sense of compassion appeared to be unrelated to religious beliefs for those in the same cultural background, and increased only in Muslim youngsters; the sense of scandal was disconnected from religion for the Catholic majority and 17% of unbelievers, but made a difference among Muslim students, who appeared to be less scandalised in their religious beliefs by unjust suffering. This could be the consequence of broad cultural differences rather than a difference between religious and non-religious students within the same cultural setting.

Table 3. Comparing means among different religious affiliations and extracted factors.

Religious Affiliation	*Empathy*	*Religion*	*Scandal*	*Spiritual*	*Insensitive*	*Sense of Evil*
Catholic	4.1841	3.2201	3.4533	3.5298	2.0253	3.5559
Muslim	4.4083	3.7239	2.8068	3.5191	1.9087	3.6652
No answer	4.0165	2.8486	3.4095	3.3771	1.9419	3.5886
Other Christians	4.0000	3.1000	4.5000	3.2000	2.0000	3.8000
Other religion	3.9219	2.6375	3.7292	3.4500	1.9714	3.4250
Not religious	3.9683	2.0309	3.4141	2.9235	1.9304	3.2235

The correlation table offers several interesting connections between variables (see Table 4). For instance, empathy (F1) and religiosity (F2) were quite highly correlated (R = 0.274), and still more so with spirituality (R = 0.371). Furthermore, empathy correlated highly with perceived religious scandal towards evil (0.332), but it correlated negatively with lack of sensitivity, and very strongly with perceived sense of evil. Religiosity correlated strongly with spirituality, revealing once more the difficulty in disentangling both factors; religiosity also correlated strongly with sense of evil. Religious scandal (F3) was highly correlated with the perception of evil, as was expected, and with spirituality, but not with religiosity; possibly, a factor emerged here that discriminates between both subtle dimensions of religiosity and spirituality. Spirituality (F4) was, besides what has been indicated, strongly correlated with a sense of evil, and in this case the difference with religiosity factor is more significant.

Table 4. Pearson bivariate correlations; * sign $\leq$ 0.05; ** sign $\leq$ 0.0001.

	F1	**F2**	**F3**	**F4**	**F5**	**F6**	**Age**	**Sex**
F1	1	0.274 (**)	0.332 (**)	0.371 (**)	−0.258 (**)	0.561 (**)	−0.003	0.258 (**)
F2	0.274 (**)	1	0.050	0.483 (**)	0.060	0.355 (**)	−0.051	0.136 (**)
F3	0.332 (**)	0.050	1	0.250 (**)	0.136 (**)	0.308 (**)	−0.075	0.016
F4	0.371 (**)	0.483 (**)	0.250 (**)	1	0.011	0.428 (**)	−0.101 (*)	0.120 (*)
F5	−0.258 (**)	0.060	0.136 (**)	0.011	1	−0.117 (*)	−0.068	−0.275 (**)
F6	0.561 (**)	0.355 (**)	0.308 (**)	0.428 (**)	−0.117 (*)	1	0.030	0.182 (**)
Age	−0.003	−0.051	−0.075	−0.101 (*)	−0.068	0.030	1	0.096
Sex	0.258 (**)	0.136 (**)	0.016	0.120 (*)	−0.275 (**)	0.182 (**)	0.096	1

Beyond those points, it is remarkable that age did not play any role, and this is quite surprising if we consider that the sample gathered was of students between 14 and 20 years. This lack of significant correlation (except for a quite moderate negative correlation with spirituality) reveals that, at this age of adolescence, there is apparently little development regarding the analysed factors. Sex offers some other clues: As most surveys have shown, sex is correlated with empathy and perception of evil—girls are more empathic than boys—and less with religiosity and spirituality—girls are a little bit more religious. Other recent surveys were unable to distinguish between males and females for those factors.

4. Interpreting the Outcomes: What We Learned

This exploratory research offers a first test that allowed us to assess to what extent current theories and views on the topics under examination reflect actual feelings and beliefs. In the first place, following former surveys, the outcomes point to the autonomous character of compassion. Our sample registered a high score in this young cohort; however, it appeared to be a feeling or sentiment that belongs to one's own personality traits and is less related to other features, like religious beliefs, education, or religious practice, although some traditions could influence that specific feeling. This was the case for the Muslim group in our survey, who appeared to be more sensitive towards others. More generally, this is also an outcome that emerged after comparing means between religious and non-religious students. However, Table 3 reveals a moderate correlation between empathy and religiosity factors, which indicates that we cannot disconnect these dimensions from each other, and

that this characteristic is still more salient when spirituality is considered. This could mean that spirituality bridges or works as a mediating factor between religiosity and empathy. This connection can be read in the other direction, too: Empathy contributes to a more "spiritual" sense of religious practice.

As a second important issue, the outcomes show that to some extent, empathy/compassion is related to sensitivity towards evil and suffering, and both traits seemed to be quite related to religious scandal, or how much unjust suffering could entail doubts about divine presence, action, and goodness. However, they also appeared to be separated, which could mean that their connection depends on personal cases; we can hardly deduce a general rule from these data. Some religious people are not scandalised by unjust suffering, or vice versa—people who are not very religious could use that scandal as a reproach against religious faith. In this case, it is significant to notice that the Muslims felt less scandalised or the negative consequences of scandal. Perhaps empathy or compassion link religious faith to that scandal: In general, we can say that those who feel more empathy among the religious people are affected by scandal towards unjust suffering in greater measure.

The mental structures that could link compassion or empathy, religious or spiritual experience, and the negative feelings before evil and suffering probably follow diversified paths corresponding to distinct mental systems and strategies that are used to cope with pain and negativity. We are not keen on emphasising a universal pattern: A plurality of solutions and approaches appeared to be the norm in this rich and complex panorama. This result connects with former research on how religion might be related to theory of mind, and both to prosocial enhancement. Several studies point to a possible link between mentalising ability—which could be connected to empathy—and the religious mind (Bering 2003; Barrett 2004); however, so far, there is no evidence that supports that hypothesis in a convincing way (Reddish et al. 2016). When compared to this background, our present research suggests that empathy may play a role in religious cognition and experience, and that religion may nourish compassion as a place for expressing religious identity in a mature and self-aware way. Such a connection gives place to a religious expression among many others, one that gathers these different strands into an evolved form. In any case, that pattern would not be the only possible one. For instance, people on the autism spectrum disorder, who suffer from impairment in their empathetic capacity, are not less religious than neurotypical subjects: They just develop a different religious style or experience (Ekblad and Oviedo 2017).

As stated in our introductory notes, the collected data invite us to assume a more complex approach to religious cognition than what has been proposed when considering very elementary mental structures. Indeed, this chapter belongs rather to a more reflexive or second degree of religious cognition. This is a cognitive exercise that requires further analysis and goes deeper under the elementary cognitive structures that determine religious cognition at an initial level, e.g., when we identify supernatural agents or think about divine agency. When trying to adjust religious faith and perceived evil, injustice, and unbearable suffering, religious cognition seems to need cognitive mechanisms that are more complex than those proposed by the cognitivists of religion. When we have to cope with very negative experiences—our own or those of others—we need much better cognitive tools to make sense of such negative events. If religious faith survives despite the odds, after such cognitively discouraging perceptions take central stage, then this might be read as evidence that religious identity and beliefs have been built in a more elaborate way. Some voices have pointed out belief structures resistant to contrary evidence (Van Leeuwen 2014), and some studies have even revealed the cognitive advantages of such deceptive and impervious beliefs, which stand against the odds (Bortolotti 2020). However, once more, these studies point to a different horizon we need to explore further: how such religious beliefs are formed and how they persist despite what could be perceived as contrary evidence or major disappointments. Such an exercise belongs to a different research program, one that tries to better assess how general beliefs and religious beliefs help humans tackle and cope

with very negative perceptions and experiences without throwing us into a meaningless life (Oviedo 2019).

5. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The survey we presented in this article had a limited scope: The sample was not broad nor very representative, since it gathered about 400 cases from a convenience sample of high schools in Spain and Italy. However, the collected outcomes add a little piece to the huge mosaic we are trying to compose to better understand religious dynamics and their many levels and complex interactions with related factors, like empathy, prosocial attitudes, and the cognitive challenge of evil suffering for both religious and non-religious groups.

We are confident about the value of this research. It was conducted with rigour. The instrument and the scales applied showed great reliability in our tests. Furthermore, the sample size was wide enough to extract the conclusions we arrived at.

The present study is addressed mostly to those trying to better understand the inner dynamics of religious beliefs and attitudes in a multidisciplinary way (Gonzalez-Iglesias and De La Calle 2020). We expect this study to inform about current trends in a Catholic Southern European context. For this reason, it is important for this research to be replicated in other social, religious, and cultural settings, among others, to ascertain how much cultural variance influences the interplay between religion, spiritual feelings, compassion, and scandal before suffering. These variations could add new nuances to these complex experiences and cognitive elements, and could help educators and religion scholars alike to better discern how religious beliefs react before evil and negative events.

The tools we used for our instrument could turn out to be useful for further assessments and evaluations of the interaction between religion, spirituality, empathy, compassion, and sensitivity towards unjust evil in different populations and in different age groups. Our present study is an invitation to pursue analogous research to better assess common patterns and specific differences. In this way, we might gain more insight into these intriguing issues at the heart of religious experience. We wish to contribute with the present limited research to a richer and more complex view within a scientific study of religion and move beyond models that are too reductive and unable to account for the cognitive complexity of religious experience in the varieties of human and social dimensions.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire on Compassion, Spirituality, and Scandal before Evil

This questionnaire was part of the project "Compassion and spirituality". The objective was to study to what extent empathy and compassion are connected to spiritual and religious sensitivity, as well as to observe the incidence of other variables, such as scandal before unjust evil in the world.

Ethical Protocol

- I freely consent to participate in this survey.
- I have been informed about its objectives and usefulness.
- I agree to participate with the condition that the data will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the identity of the person who answers will never be known.

Scale about Empathy and Compassion

1. One of the things that makes the most sense in my life is helping other people.
2. I feel disconnected from those who tell me their problems.
3. If someone needs help, I do everything I can to help them.
4. I prefer to suffer before seeing another person suffer.
5. I feel very affected by family and friends who are in need.
6. I do not feel emotionally connected to people who suffer.
7. The world is a hostile environment that must be protected.
8. If I feel that someone is having a difficult time, I care for that person.
9. I like to be close to others in times of difficulty.
10. I realise when people are sad, even when they do not say anything.
11. When I see someone who feels bad, I feel that I can not relate to that person.
12. It makes me sad to see a person I do not know alone in a group.
13. Everyone feels bad sometimes, it is part of the human condition.
14. When a friend starts talking about their problems I try to change the topic of conversation.
15. I usually listen with patience when people tell me their problems.
16. I get very angry when I see someone who is being mistreated.
17. It is important to recognise that everyone has weaknesses and that no one is perfect.
18. Suffering is only a part of the common human experience.
19. My heart is with those who feel unhappy.
20. It makes me sad to see helpless elders.
21. Despite my differences to others, I know that sadness hits everyone equally.
22. Empathy with creation helps me feel sorry for all creatures.
23. When I am depressed and things go wrong I remember that there are many other people in the world who feel like me.

Scale on Perception of the Scandal of Evil

24. There is too much unjust suffering in the world.
25. The wickedness of some men and women has no limit.
26. If God exists, He should not allow so much pain and injustice.
27. God should immediately punish those who commit evil.
28. God seems absent from the worst catastrophes that occur in the world.
29. God acts in a mysterious way and we do not understand how He can correct evil.
30. The evil in the world is too strong and there is no way to overcome it.
31. The world is a place that is improving, people are becoming less bad.
32. God should have made us less selfish and better people.
33. I cannot stand the level of evil I witness.
34. God should not allow psychopaths and people who like to harm to exist.
35. The evil and suffering that I know of makes me uneasy and make me think.
36. We should do much more to change a world with so much pain.
37. I would be willing to sacrifice part of my freedom if it would help to decrease the injustice and pain in the world.
38. Given the calamities and sufferings that humans cause, we should look for help beyond humanity and its resources.
39. I am deeply saddened when I recognise my limitations and errors.

Scale on Religious and Spiritual Sensitivity

40. I consider myself a spiritual person, whether or not I attend religious events.
41. Sometimes I feel the presence of a mysterious force in me or in others.
42. When I contemplate the universe, I understand that there is something beyond the physical world.
43. Living beings are connected in a mysterious way.
44. I attend mass or other religious celebrations.
45. I am a person who prays or meditates.
46. I am a religious believer.
47. Sometimes I need a kind of help that cannot be provided by people or the media.
48. There are some values and ideals that I consider absolute.
49. Maybe there are other worlds different than ours, where you can live better than here.
50. There are other dimensions or unknown forces that also influence our reality.
51. The world is nothing more than what we see and know.
52. Without strong hope life would not make sense.
53. Our hope depends only on human achievements.
54. There is a mysterious force in the cosmos that guides us towards good.
55. There is something in us that is immortal.
56. In order to be happy it is important to cultivate a spiritual life.

Demographics

57. Sex
58. Age
59. Course
60. Religion
61. Public or private school

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Why Open Theism Is Natural and Classical Theism Is Not

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Abstract: The cognitive science of religion (CSR) indicates that belief in supernatural agents, or "gods", is underpinned by maturationally natural cognitive biases and systems (Natural Religion). It is unclear, however, whether theism is natural. Does the god concept that our cognitive biases and systems give rise to approximate theism? In other words, is Natural Religion "theism-tracking"? As Christian theologians have different views of what God is like, we argue that the answer depends partly on one's model of God. We discuss two models: classical theism and open theism. We argue that classical theism is far from being natural. The classical divine attributes are very hard to comprehend. Moreover, people naturally conceptualize God as a special sort of person, but the classical God strongly deviates from our cognitive expectations about persons. Open theism is much more natural. However, recent findings in CSR challenge the suggestion that Natural Religion tracks open theism. The possibility that we are "born idolaters" rather than "born believers" might undermine the Christian doctrine of general revelation and attempts to make CSR compatible with theology.

Keywords: cognitive science of religion; classical theism; open theism; Natural Religion; general revelation; natural knowledge of god; divine attributes

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1. Introduction

Many scholars working on the cognitive science of religion (CSR) have argued that religion is "natural" (e.g., Barrett 2012a; Bloom 2007; cf. Launonen 2018). In most eras and environments, human minds tend to give rise to roughly similar religious beliefs, for example, about supernatural agents or "gods".[1] Some treat this finding as evidence that belief in God, or gods, is irrational (see van Eyghen 2020). However, others argue that CSR might help clarify, and even support, traditional Christian claims about the natural knowledge of God (Green 2013), or what John Calvin called the *sensus divinitatis* (Clark and Barrett 2010). Clark and Barrett (2011) have suggested that God may have guided the evolutionary process in order to give rise to the cognitive biases and systems now unearthed by CSR. These suggestions point to an idea known as the doctrine of general revelation—the claim that God has made his existence and basic attributes apparent to all people (see Demarest 1982).

The problem with such theological interpretations of CSR is that, while belief in human-like finite supernatural agents is natural, it is far from clear whether theism (belief in the "God of the philosophers and theologians") is natural. However, if such a God exists, has created humans, and has fashioned the human mind so that it could become aware of his existence and attributes, we should expect the "arriving at the correct god" concept to be cognitively easy. Hence, attempts to make CSR compatible with theological claims about general revelation face the following question: Do the cognitive biases and systems point people to God—or do they only produce beliefs in finite supernatural agents, such as angels, demons, ancestor spirits, ghosts, and goblins? In other words, is natural cognition "theism-tracking"?

In this paper, we argue that one's answer depends partly on one's model of God. Christian theologians hold to very different views of God. There are several models on the theological market: classical theism, neoclassical or modified classical theism, open theism, panentheism, and process theism (Diller and Kasher 2013; Mullins 2016). Different models map differently onto our natural evolved intuitions about supernatural agency.

We begin by explaining what CSR scholars mean by what Barrett calls "Natural Religion". After this, we compare Natural Religion with classical theism and conclude that this model of God is far from being cognitively natural. The classical attributes of timelessness, immutability, impassibility, and simplicity make God maximally counterintuitive. Recent work in CSR suggests that people draw on their core knowledge of persons to conceive what divinity is like (Heiphetz et al. 2016). The classical God does not fit together with our cognitive expectations about persons. If classical theism is true, our cognitive tools are not theism-tracking. The God of open theism, however, resembles a human person in relevant respects. However, even if we take open theism to be true, it is not clear whether Natural Religion is theism-tracking. As classical theists, open theists also view God as omnipresent, omniscient, and incorporeal/disembodied, but these attributes may not be cognitively natural.

2. Natural Religion

According to Justin Barrett and Aku Visala, religion is cognitively natural in the following sense:

> [T]here is something about our minds that dispose it to catch religious ideas . . . [O]ur belief-forming mechanisms would be biased in such a way as to create a tendency or a disposition to acquire, think, and transmit religious ideas instead of some other kinds of ideas. (Barrett and Visala 2018, p. 69)

In his book, *Why Religion Is Natural but Science Is Not*, Robert McCauley (2011, p. 37) gives four marks for what he calls maturationally natural cognitive systems:

1. They "operate unconsciously, and their signals arrive to consciousness automatically and unreflectively";
2. Most (not all) natural systems begin functioning early in life;
3. They are designed for the "fundamental cognitive challenges" that humans historically have faced;
4. The operations of these systems "do not depend on anything that is culturally distinctive–not on instruction, or on structured preparations, or on artifacts".

According to McCauley, recurrent religious beliefs and behaviors are typically expressions of maturationally natural cognitive systems. The first criterion has to do with intuition. Cognitive science describes two basic types of cognitive operations: intuitive and analytic/reflective thinking (Evans 2003; Kahneman 2011). Intuitions, also known as implicit beliefs, are products of System 1. System 1 operates automatically, quickly, and typically outside of our awareness. Explicit beliefs, however, are products of System 2: the conscious, effortful, and reflective operations of our mind. The question "do you believe in God" is usually a question about someone's explicit beliefs, about what they consciously hold to be true.

A central idea in cognitive science is that explicit beliefs are informed and constrained by implicit beliefs (Barrett 2004; White 2021). While "intuitive" and "natural" are often used interchangeably in CSR (as well as in this paper to an extent), not all scholars do. Boyer (2001) has argued that recurrent religious ideas are typically minimally counterintuitive. This makes them interesting and catchy without ridding them of plausibility. However, highly counterintuitive ideas, while certainly not nonexistent in religions (Sterelny 2018), are never cognitively natural. Such ideas need so-called "cultural scaffolding" to survive. That is, unlike the products of maturationally natural systems, they depend on what is culturally and historically distinctive, for example, on instruction, on structured preparations, or on artifacts. Some theological ideas, such as the doctrine of

the Trinity, are highly counterintuitive. They depend upon the cultural scaffolding of the Christian tradition. Only by studying and utilizing System 2 can one begin to understand such ideas. As surveys on Christians' theological beliefs show, the everyday thinking of ordinary believers, pastors, and even professional theologians, often contradicts official theology. In CSR, this phenomenon is known as "theological incorrectness" (Barrett and Keil 1996; Slone 2004).

Justin Barrett (2012a, 2012b) coins the term "Natural Religion" to describe cognitively natural religious beliefs. The following excerpt brings together a number of CSR theories regarding our intuitions about supernatural agency:

> (A) Elements of the natural world, such as rocks, trees, mountains, and animals are purposefully and intentionally designed by someone(s) who must, therefore, have superhuman power;
>
> (B) These agents are not human or animal
>
> (D) Moral norms are unchangeable—even by gods;
>
> (E) Immoral behavior leads to misfortune; moral behavior to fortune;
>
> (H) Gods exist with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and the free will to act;
>
> (I) Gods may be invisible and immortal, but they are not outside of space and time;
>
> (J) Gods can and do interact with the natural world and people, perhaps especially those that are ancestors of the living and, hence, have an interest in the living. This interaction with the world accounts for perceived agency and purpose in the world that cannot be accounted for by human or animal activity;
>
> (K) Gods generally know things that humans do not (they can be superknowing or superperceiving, or both), perhaps particularly things that are important for human relations;
>
> (L) Gods, because of their access to relevant information and special powers, may be responsible for instances of fortune and misfortune; they can reward or punish human actions. (Barrett 2012b, p. 322)

Matthew Braddock summarizes the list into one sentence: "*humans are disposed to believe in non-human, invisible, disembodied, immortal, super-powerful, super-knowing, super-perceiving, infallible, morally interested, punishing/loving, causally active, and minded agents (with beliefs, desires, intentions, character, and free-will) who possess creator or designer status*" (Braddock 2018, p. 178; italics original).

What are the theological implications of Natural Religion? According to Barrett, "CSR provides evidence that humans do have natural propensities toward believing in some kind of god, and perhaps particularly a super powerful, immortal, creator" (Barrett 2012b, p. 324). He also suggests that CSR supports the Apostle Paul's ideas about the natural knowledge of God (Rom 1:18–20), and John Calvin's idea of the *sensus divinitatis* (the sense of deity) (cf. Clark and Barrett 2010). According to T. J. Mawson (2014, p. 164), "the findings of CSR . . . may be taken by theists as reason to suppose that they are right—God made us (or at least some of us) for himself, so our brains are restless until their find their rest in Him". Alvin Plantinga likewise writes:

> God has created us in such a way that we can know and be in fellowship with him. He could have done this in many ways; for example, he could have brought it about that our cognitive faculties evolve by natural selection, and evolve in such a way that it is natural for us to form beliefs about the supernatural in general and God himself in particular. (Plantinga 2011, p. 140)

These claims indicate that the doctrine of general revelation is a good fit with CSR. Barrett makes clear, however, that Natural Religion deviates from Christian theology in several respects. For instance, it may not be natural to believe in one god only. Moreover, cognitively natural gods are highly anthropomorphic beings. They are supernatural *persons*

(Boyer 2001). While most theologians also say God is a person, our core knowledge of human persons often interferes with our god concept in a way that is theologically problematic. This raises an interesting question for our purposes.

Despite theological incorrectness, are our natural cognitive biases and systems reliable *enough*? Do they generate belief in God in different eras and environments? Does CSR tend to support or undermine the doctrine of general revelation? On the one hand, while the history of religion is populated with finite supernatural agents, widespread belief in moralizing high gods (such as the Abrahamic Yahweh/Allah) seems like a recent phenomenon (Norenzayan et al. 2016). High gods are also lacking from the religions of many contemporary hunter-gatherer tribes (Peoples et al. 2016). Jason Marsh (2013) argues that prehistoric people lacked the concept of a high god altogether. He cites Barrett who writes that, "Arguably the oldest and most widespread form of god concepts is the ancestor spirit or ghost" (Barrett 2007, p. 775). Since ancestor spirits and ghosts are a far cry from theism, Marsh argues, it was impossible for the earliest humans to believe in God.[2] The theologically correct god concept was simply unavailable. Presumably, in his view, any people without the necessary cultural scaffolding just cannot know God. On the other hand, Braddock (Forthcoming) argues that Barrett's list shows Natural Religion to be "theistic-like". Our cognitive defaults fall near the mark. He also points out that we cannot conclude that prehistoric people did not believe in high gods just because ethnographic or archaeological evidence for them is missing. In this paper, we focus on the psychological evidence regarding natural intuitions. Our question is whether Natural Religion is theism-tracking:

> *Theism-tracking*: natural cognitive biases and systems are theism-tracking if the god concept they give rise to approximates the theologically correct model of God.

A few clarifications. First, a god concept is one's cognitively implicit blueprint of the basic attributes of a supernatural agent, be they ontological (e.g., incorporeality), mental (e.g., omniscience), or moral (e.g., benevolence) attributes. Second, models of God are theological theories of the divine attributes of what God is like. Such models are cognitively explicit. Since there are many versions of theism, we need to be clear which one we are talking about when considering whether Natural Religion is theism-tracking. Third, when does an implicit god concept "approximate" a theological model of God? Moreover, why do we employ such a criterion anyway? Would it not be simpler to just ask whether theism is natural? The reason is that the correct model of God does not need to have a perfect fit with Natural Religion for the doctrine of general revelation to be true. However, a model of God should not be too counterintuitive either. Some counterintuitiveness is allowed. After all, scholars, such as Boyer, argue that religious ideas are natural exactly because they are minimally counterintuitive.

Fourth, it is important to recognize that god concepts never come about in a cultural vacuum. Religion is never purely natural, and Natural Religion is not a real religion. Religion takes different forms in different cultures. CSR scholars often compare the naturalness of religion with the naturalness of learning a language. Learning a language always means learning some particular language, such as Finnish or Chinese. Likewise, religious beliefs and practices need human communities to develop. For this reason, it cannot be expected that human cognition gives rise to theistic-like beliefs without any cultural support. What is important is that theism does not require a particular cultural environment to develop.

Fifth, natural cognition can be theism-tracking, even if the belief in nontheistic gods, ghosts, and goblins is also natural. Christians have traditionally believed in the reality of angels, demons, and immaterial souls. From this viewpoint, natural cognition is not completely off-track in supporting belief in finite and creaturely supernatural agents, even if it gives rise to false god-beliefs as well. The question is whether theism is likewise natural, or close to natural.

Finally, as a reminder, what makes this question interesting is that the answer can either support or undermine the Christian claim about general revelation and, consequently, the attempts to make CSR compatible with theology. Having a relatively correct concept of

god has been traditionally viewed as a precondition for theistic belief, and the generation of theistic belief has been viewed as God's primary purpose for general revelation.[3] If theistic belief were counterintuitive, unnatural, and only showed up around twelve thousand years ago, it would speak against the claim that God has created all humans for a fellowship with him. Even the existence of God itself may be on the line. According to Marsh (2013), the naturalness of nonbelief serves as evidence against God. According to Braddock (2018), however, our "supernatural disposition" is more surprising given naturalism, but less surprising given theism. In our view, the question cannot be settled without comparing our implicit concept of god with particular theological models of God. In the next section, we consider whether Natural Religion is theism-tracking if classical theism is the correct model.

3. Classical Theism Is Not Natural

Classical theism is said to be the doctrine of God that one finds in historical Christian thinkers, such as Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas, and that is defended by the Catholic and Protestant scholastics. Classical theists (as well as theists of various other stripes) affirm that God is a necessary being who is omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, and perfectly free. They also affirm the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. By looking at Barrett's list, one can see that many of these attributes seem to fit well together with our natural intuitions about gods as superpowerful, superknowing, and so on. Yet those attributes are not unique to classical theism. What distinguishes classical theism from its rivals is its commitment to a God who is timeless, immutable, simple, and impassible (Mullins 2021a). These attributes turn out to be highly counterintuitive. We give a short overview of each before discussing their cognitive fit.

3.1. Four Classical Attributes

According to classical theism, God is timeless if, and only if, God necessarily exists without beginning, without end, without succession, and without temporal location. This means that God does not do one action and then another action. God does not experience one event and then experience another event. Instead, classical theists say that all of God's acts and experiences occur at a single timeless moment, or the eternal now. This timeless moment does not stand in any kind of temporal relation to the world. God is not temporally before or after any event in time. God is not simultaneous with any moment of time. God does not exist right now since the present is a temporal location. Timelessness is systematically connected to divine immutability. As immutable, God cannot undergo any kind of change, be it intrinsic or extrinsic. God cannot change in relationship to other things since that would involve God undergoing succession from one moment to another moment of time.

Divine impassibility makes three claims. First, it is impossible for God to suffer. Second, it is impossible for God to be caused, moved, or influenced by anything outside of himself. God cannot be influenced by anything external to think, feel, act, or be in any particular way. God is completely and utterly uninfluenceable. Third, God lacks so-called passions. This is a bit difficult to grasp because the English term *emotion* covers a wide range of affective states that include things that classical theists wish to affirm and deny of the impassible God. This is why contemporary work on impassibility has identified three inconsistency criteria used throughout the classical tradition for discerning which emotions the impassible God can have. The claim is that it is impossible for God to have any emotion that is inconsistent with God's perfect moral goodness, perfect rationality, and perfect happiness. An impassible God is in a state of pure undisturbed bliss or happiness that is grounded entirely in himself. Nothing can move or influence God to feel anything other than pure happiness. In fact, nothing can move or influence God to feel anything at all since it is impossible to influence the impassible God. Because God cannot be moved or influenced by anything external to himself, the impassible God does not have any empathy or compassion. (Davies 2006, p. 234; Mullins 2021b, pp. 19–22.)

Divine simplicity says that God is not made up of parts. This might seem like a trivial statement, but the classical theist is quite permissible in what counts as a part. The classical theist says that distinct attributes, actions, thoughts, feelings, and so on are all parts. Therefore, in reality, God does not have any distinct attributes, actions, thoughts, or feelings. Instead, all of God's actions are identical to each other such that there is only one act. This act is identical to God's existence. Furthermore, all of God's so-called attributes, thoughts, and feelings are identical to each other and identical to God's existence. God is just a simple indivisible substance, without any distinctions at all.

3.2. Natural Religion and Classical Theism

These attributes deviate from Natural Religion. As Jonathan Jong, Christopher Kavanagh, and Aku Visala have argued, this is why CSR says virtually nothing about belief in the classical God (Jong et al. 2015). Such a being is totally different from cognitively natural supernatural agents. For example, as Item (I) shows, cognitively natural gods "are not outside of space and time". Thus, they are not omnipresent or timeless.[4] Consider also items (B) and (L): "Things happen in the world that unseen agents cause" and gods "may be responsible for [some] instances of fortune and misfortunes". While the classical God is likewise causally active, he is also the prime cause of absolutely every event. This idea does not seem like it is cognitively natural:

> [T]here is a sense that the God of classical theism does everything, such that it is impossible to point at particular events that God causes as if to distinguish them from those that God does not cause. It is impossible to point at a particular bush that God rustles, a particular gust of wind in which God is present; God rustles all bushes and is present in all gusts of wind. Thus, insofar as the cognitive mechanisms described above—considered by some to be a "god faculty"—detect God in this bush but not that, this gust of wind but not that, then it is not a particularly good detector of God, who is everywhere always acting in all things, causing them to be. (Jong et al. 2015, p. 256)

Next, consider item (H): Gods exist with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and the free will to act. God's free actions become rather odd on classical theism. The classical theist, Kathrin Rogers, says that an action is something that a person does, not something that a person is. Yet, Rogers also says that a simple God is his act (Rogers 1996, pp. 172–73). As Rogers admits, that is counterintuitive. The idea of a *timeless* action is even more difficult to grasp. Typically, a free action is conceptualized as occurring over a series of moments of time. Consider a human person named Sally. At this present moment, Sally is sitting. It is too late for her to make a choice about sitting or not sitting. Any choice she makes will be about actions that she performs at subsequent moments of time. She has several options about what she will do at the next moment. She could sit up or remain seated. Whatever she decides to do at the next moment is up to her. However, this does not capture the actions of a timeless person. A timeless God can only do whatever he is timelessly doing. A timeless God cannot transition from not performing an action *to* performing an action. Nor can a timeless God transition from not making a choice to making a choice. This makes it very difficult to understand how God is freely doing anything. It seems like God is just acting, and never has the opportunity to make a choice about what that act is. Many religious people will speak of what God has done in the past and will say that God will do certain things in the future. Given classical theism, this is incorrect.

Item (H) also includes the notion that gods have wants. This seems to contradict divine impassibility. A being in a state of undisturbed bliss or happiness, uninfluenced by anything outside himself, does not have wants or desires (Mullins 2021b, pp. 44–45). Moreover, because God is impassible, he cannot really "interact with the natural world and people" (J) in any normal sense of the term "interact". The classical theist, James Dolezal (2017, p. 2), resists a popular view of God he calls "theistic mutualism", the idea that "God is involved in a genuine give-and-take relationship with his creatures". However, of course, this is exactly what normal believers take to be true. They believe that God can influence

them and that, through prayer, they can influence God. Impassibility might also make it difficult to hold on to the idea that God really rewards or punishes human actions (L), since we typically conceive of such actions as *reactions* to human behavior (Mullins 2021b, pp. 52–53).

3.3. God's Personhood

Such observations may cause one to question whether the classical God is actually a person. Some contemporary classical theists do say that God is not a person (e.g., Davies 2006, p. 61). However, this is contrary to what the actual classical Christian tradition says. Personhood is classically taken to be a perfection that one must predicate on God (Wiertz 2016, p. 45; Marschler 2016, p. 85). The classical understanding of a person is an individual substance of a rational nature. Sometimes, philosophers state that a person is a mental substance with the capacity for consciousness, feelings, and intentional actions (Swinburne 2016, p. 105). It is difficult to say that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and has free will without saying that God is conscious and performs intentional actions. Furthermore, the God of classical theism is in a state of pure happiness. Therefore, the God of classical theism clearly has the marks of personhood: consciousness, feelings, and intentional actions.

Nevertheless, the classical attributes run counter to our natural expectations about persons and minds. There is evidence that humans employ their core knowledge of human persons/minds to understand God's mind and personhood. For example, even though gods are generally viewed as having supernatural mental capacities, children start off by viewing divine minds as similarly limited, such as human minds (Heiphetz et al. 2016). Moreover, the theory of mind is a cognitive mechanism that is instrumental in our understanding of other people's mental states—and God's (Schjoedt et al. 2009; Bering 2002). Mentalizing, or "mindreading", is easy for humans because of this mechanism. Mentalizing skills also seem to foster belief in a personal God (Norenzayan et al. 2012). Therefore, the finding that "gods exist with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and free will to act" (H) implies that cognitively natural gods are essentially persons, not unlike human persons. However, the classical God is unlike a human person in many respects.

For example, we know intuitively that the mental states or acts of persons are not one and the same for all eternity. Rather, they are distinct, and one follows another. All the mental states or acts of persons are certainly not identical to one another, nor are they identical to the existence of persons themselves. Moreover, most persons we know have a wide range of emotions. They interact by responding and reacting positively, neutrally, or negatively to things and events around them. We never encounter a person who is in a state of pure undisturbed happiness. Something seems perverse about a person that is completely undisturbed by what happens in the world. Even the classical theist, Thomas Aquinas, argues that a virtuous person must be disturbed by witnessing a truly tragic event. If a person is not disturbed by witnessing a tragic event, Aquinas says that this person must lack moral knowledge or have a vicious moral character. Perhaps this person is undisturbed because she doesn't understand all the relevant moral facts of the situation. Or maybe she is just a terrible person and does not care about the tragic event (Aquinas, Summa Theologiae 2.Q39.a2). We find Aquinas's claims to be intuitive—a morally good person is upset by witnessing a tragic event. Yet, we find Aquinas's affirmation of impassibility counterintuitive. This is because it is impossible for an impassible God to be disturbed by anything outside of himself. It is impossible for an impassible God to experience anything other than pure happiness. This cannot mean that the classical God lacks moral knowledge or has a dubious moral character, for he is omniscient and perfectly good. So there seems to be a conflict between the notion of impassibility and what we normally take to be a good person (Wolterstorff 2010, pp. 223–38). At the very least, this shows that the classical God's personhood is very different from ours.

3.4. Implications for the Doctrine of General Revelation

If classical theism is true, and yet our cognitive biases lead us to conceptualize God as a person not unlike human persons, there is something to the suggestion that we are "born idolaters" rather than "born believers".[5] Our cognitive mechanisms are not theism-tracking. Most believers fashion God in the image of man, the Creator in the image of a creature. In fact, classical theists may agree. The classical tradition itself admits that the classical attributes are difficult to grasp. For instance, divine simplicity is often systematically connected to ineffability, or the unknowability of God (Hick 2000). Many defenses of divine simplicity often appeal to the ineffability of God because they see simplicity and ineffability as going hand-in-hand (Feser 2017, pp. 224–26; Dolezal 2011, pp. 206–12). Classical theologians likewise acknowledge that the Bible itself is permeated with anthropomorphisms. Some of them argue that God does not reveal himself as timeless or impassible in scripture because humans are not mature enough to understand these deep truths about God (Helm 2001, pp. 44–47; Dolezal 2019, p. 33). For example, it is too difficult for us to understand that God does not have any compassion, so God must reveal himself as having compassion in order to draw us closer to himself (Helm 1990, pp. 133–34).

This suggests that neither general revelation, nor special revelation (the Bible), adequately help humans understand God as he truly is. However, as Stephen T. Davis points out, Christianity is based on the assumption that God has revealed himself as who he really is (Davis 2017, p. 566). Here, we are concerned especially about the idea of general revelation, or the natural knowledge of God. According to this doctrine, "man at large knows both that there is a God and in broad outline what he is like" (Demarest 1982, p. 14). However, if classical theism is true, then true knowledge of God seems dependent on a particular cultural setting. Classical theologians, such as Augustine and Aquinas, took Greek philosophy to be a prime example of how God can be known without access to special revelation. As Adam Green (2013) notes, philosophy and theology are rare cultural achievements in human history. Their products, including classical theism, are not cognitively natural:

> Philosophy and theology as cultural phenomena are likely dependent on literacy and on sufficient prosperity to allow for the cultivation of expertise in the construction of abstract systems of ideas. The religious impulse of human beings is much more ancient and more widespread. Furthermore, from a CSR perspective, religion is thoroughly enmeshed with the social mind being engaged in a pragmatic mode. Though doctrines and practices can be built on the foundations of natural religion and this superstructure of orthodoxy can circumscribe or even contradict natural religion, doing so will require a great deal of cultural scaffolding. (Green 2013, p. 410)

If classical theism is the correct model of God, only a few theologians and philosophers have ever attained true knowledge of God. Now, the classical theist might respond by saying that the theologically incorrect intuitions are the result of the cognitive consequence of sin (see Peels et al. 2018). For example, because of the "noetic effects of sin", Calvin did not imagine *sensus divinitatis* to produce belief in the one true God, even if this was its original purpose (Helm 1998). He believed that the only path to knowing God in a post-lapsarian world is through the Bible. However, since reading the scriptures rarely makes people classical theists, this response will not help the classical theist much. Moreover, many Christians themselves display a theologically incorrect concept of God. Given the Christian doctrines on regeneration and sanctification, we would expect the Holy Spirit to be gradually healing the noetic effects of sin and, as a result, believers' understanding of God to be gradually becoming more and more correct (Launonen 2021).

4. Open Theism Is Cognitively Natural

Open theism is a model of God that has a better fit with Natural Religion than classical theism.[6] As noted above, most models of God affirm that God is a necessarily existent being, with attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and perfect freedom. Open theism is like classical theism in affirming these divine attributes. Yet, open theism presents God as a relational being, a person with a give-and-take relationship with humans. The open theist, Clark Pinnock, writes: "We are not dealing with an unapproachable deity but with *God who has a human face* and who is not indifferent to us but is deeply involved with us in our need" (Pinnock 1994, p. 102; italics ours). This model of God also rejects the four classical attributes. The open God is temporal, mutable, passible, and unified.[7] Hence, when the open theist says that God exists "with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and free will to act" (H), he uses these terms in a very normal sense.

4.1. Basic Characteristics of Open Theism

David Basinger (1994, p. 156) lists five basic characteristics of open theism:

1. God not only created this world ex nihilo, but can (and at times does) intervene unilaterally in earthly affairs;
2. God chose to create us with incompatibilistic (libertarian) freedom—freedom over which he cannot exercise total control;
3. God so values freedom—the moral integrity of free creatures and a world in which such integrity is possible—that he does not normally override such freedom, even if he sees that it is producing undesirable results;
4. God always desires our highest good, both individually and corporately, and, thus, is affected by what happens in our lives;
5. God does not possess exhaustive knowledge of exactly how we will utilize our freedom, although he may well, at times, be able to predict, with great accuracy, the choices we will freely make.

The first three claims address God's power. While both classical theists and open theists affirm divine omnipotence, in practice, open theists see God's power as more limited. They maintain that, in creating the world, God has voluntarily limited the use of his power in order to make room for human free will. Barrett's list indicates that people naturally think of gods as having "superhuman power", (A). Now, this could indicate that omnipotence is also cognitively natural. What theologians usually mean by omnipotence is that God can do anything that is logically possible. However, humans may not intuitively think of God as all-powerful in this sense. Perhaps the idea that God's power is limited is more natural. Moreover, according to open theism, God limits his power because of the "moral integrity of free creatures". This coheres with item (D): "Moral norms are unchangeable—even by gods".

As the fourth claim shows, the open God is not impassible, but has desires, (H), and can be affected by humans. Open theists also embrace the idea that prayer can influence God. According to Basinger (1994, p. 156), "[W]ithin most Christian traditions it is quite clearly held, to use the words of David Mason, that believers 'are to ask God for things' and that God 'hears, is affected by our importunities, and responds adequately to them'". This coheres with the cognitively natural idea that "Gods can and do interact with the natural world and people" and "have an interest in the living" (J). Moreover, the causal power of humans is more real on open theism than on classical theism. God is not the cause of every single event, but the created reality has a considerable amount of autonomy. From this perspective, it makes more sense to say that "things happen in the world that unseen agents cause" (B).

The fifth claim is what open theism is probably best-known for: God does not possess exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. Open theists agree with classical theists that God is omniscient. This means that God knows of the truth-values of all propositions, or God knows all of the facts of reality. Classical theists and open theists agree that, prior to creation, there are many possible future timelines, or ways, that history could evolve

(Rhoda 2011). What they disagree over is what is included in the total set of facts. The open theist says that if God creates a universe with free creatures, then history could evolve in several possible ways. God knows all of the possible ways that history could evolve, and God knows the objective probability of history evolving in any particular way. Yet, there is no specific timeline, no single way, that history will in fact unfold.

Do people naturally conceptualize God's knowledge like this? In our experience, ordinary believers typically think of God as having perfect knowledge of the future. What they do not often think about is that libertarian freedom (the cognitively natural concept of free will) may conflict with God's exhaustive foreknowledge of the future, as open theists claim. However, this aspect of open theism is clearly the conclusion of a philosophical argument (System 2). Thus, it does not seem to be cognitively natural (System 1). However, as we will see, perfect omniscience may not be natural either.

4.2. A Modified Account of Natural Religion

Is Natural Religion theism-tracking if open theism is true? So far, it may seem so. However, there is evidence that makes Barrett's description of Natural Religion somewhat outdated. Just like classical theists, open theists also believe that God is transcendent, omnipresent (not restricted by place), that God does not have any false beliefs, that God is incorporeal/disembodied, and that God is a moralizing deity who rewards the good and punishes the evil (e.g., Swinburne 2016). There are reasons to question whether these attributes are cognitively natural. As we will see, even professing Christians display theologically incorrect intuitions regarding them. According to the so-called coexistence model, acquired theological information about God does not replace the cognitive tendency to draw from our core knowledge of persons when thinking about God (White 2021, pp. 123–28, 134–37). Our implicit beliefs often conflict with our explicit beliefs—yet both manage to live together in our heads.

First, consider again Item (I) on Barrett's list: gods are not outside of space and time. In everyday life, Christians tend to think of God as limited by time and space to some extent. In a study, Barrett and Keil (1996) had participants—some of the Christians—read some version of a short story. In one version, a boy gets his foot caught between rocks while swimming. The boy prays to God and God saves the boy, despite answering another prayer on another side of the world at the same time. The participants were then presented with recall items about the story they had to recognize as either correct or incorrect. Some of the incorrect claims presented God as limited, even though the original story had not explicitly done so.

> [The] subjects seemed to characterize God as having to be near something to receive sensory information from it, not being able to attend differentially to competing sensory stimuli, performing tasks sequentially and not in parallel, having a single or limited focus of attention, moving from place to place, and sometimes standing or walking. (Barrett and Keil 1996, pp. 229–30)

Many incorrect recall items were recognized as correct if they depicted God as somehow human-like.[8] Importantly, these characterizations conflicted with the subjects' own explicit, culturally acquired, theologically correct description of God. In answering a survey about God's attributes, almost all agreed that God is everywhere, can perform multiple mental activities at once, is everywhere/nowhere/many places at once, and that God need not be near anything to see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it. Therefore, even if God is naturally conceptualized as superknowing and superperceiving (item K), this does not mean omni-perception/attention is intuitive. Barrett sees "no reason to believe that children or adults find the property of unlimited attention the least bit natural or intuitive" (Barrett 2012a, p. 143).

Is this a problem for the naturalness of open theism? Earlier, we noted that open theists affirm that God is temporal, and, therefore, not outside of time. In open theism, God exists in the present, just like creatures do. This fits nicely with Barrett's understanding of Natural Religion. When it comes to space, however, things appear to be different. The open

theist, William Hasker, maintains that "God must, somehow, transcend space" (Hasker 1989, p. 178). In standard definitions of omnipresence, God is said to be present to all spatial locations in virtue of the exercise of his power and knowledge. God is present everywhere because God is causally sustaining everything in existence, and God knows what is presently happening at every location. In his discussion of omnipresence, the open theist, Richard Swinburne, says the disembodied God is present to all spatial locations because God can cause effects at every place, and knows what is happening at every place. Furthermore, God's knowledge of what is happening at any given location is noninferential and does not rely on sensory input from some physical organism (Swinburne 2016, p. 113). This seems to conflict with the natural intuition that gods are *not* outside of space.

Second, consider the open theist claim that God is omniscient. Open theists are adamant that God infallibly knows all the facts of reality. Is this naturally intuitive? Experiments with children and adults suggest that people have intuitions about God having false beliefs. Michael Barlev et al. (2017) examined whether core intuitions about persons interfered with people's acquired theological beliefs. Christian adult participants were presented with four kinds of claims about God: two types of consistent claims (i.e., theologically and intuitively true (e.g., "God has beliefs that are true"), or theologically and intuitively false (e.g., "All beliefs God has are false")) and two kinds of inconsistent claims (i.e., true on intuition but false theologically (e.g., "God has beliefs that are false), or false on intuition but true theologically (e.g., "All beliefs God has are true")) claims. According to the authors, "Participants were less accurate and slower to respond to inconsistent versus consistent statements, suggesting that the core intuitions both coexisted alongside and interfered with the acquired beliefs (Experiments 1 and 2)" (Barlev et al. 2017, p. 425). In the third experiment, participants were made to respond under time pressure. In this case they were far more likely to make errors on inconsistent versus consistent statements. This suggests that System 1 intuitions about persons kick in while System 2 (with access to correct theological information) is still starting its engine. In other words, perfect omniscience, even about present facts, does not seem to be perfectly intuitive.

Third, virtually all theists claim that God is a disembodied spirit. By using a similar methodology, Barlev et al. (2019) have also found evidence that Christian adults naturally conceptualize God as embodied rather than disembodied. This contradicts the popular idea that people are, by nature, Cartesian dualists and view other persons essentially as minds rather than mind-body composites (Hodge 2008). On the one hand, the evidence is unsurprising given the depictions in the Hebrew Bible of God as walking in the Garden of Eden, sitting on his throne, and engaging in other physical activities. Countless numbers of artists have also represented God as embodied (it is difficult to paint a purely spiritual being, after all). On the other hand, it seems clear that people explicitly know such representations of God to be anthropomorphisms. Nevertheless, apparently Christians have to think through their answer a few seconds longer when they are presented with a question that is theologically incorrect, but in line with their core knowledge of persons (e.g., "God is at my church when he is not at other churches"). Just as in the case of God's fallible beliefs, intuitions about human persons coexist and interfere with theological conceptualizations of God.

Fourth, consider the open theist's claim that God is morally invested in the universe. It is not clear whether cognitively natural gods are morally interested (E). The so-called "big gods" account of the cultural evolution of religion suggests that moralizing deities only emerged around twelve thousand years ago (Norenzayan et al. 2016). When agriculture was invented and large groups of people began living and working together, free riding (reaping the benefits of cooperation but not paying any costs) also became a problem. A heavenly big brother was needed to weed out free riding. "The gods of small-scale societies", however, "are typically cognitively constrained and have limited or no concern with human affairs or moral transgressions" (Norenzayan et al. 2016, p. 7).

Braddock's summary of Barrett's account of Natural Religion may thus be revised accordingly: *humans are disposed to believe in nonhuman, disembodied or embodied, immortal,*

superpowerful, superperceiving, but not perfectly perceiving, superknowing, but sometimes erring, punishing/rewarding[9]*, or morally disinterested, causally active, and minded agents (with beliefs, desires, intentions, character, and free will) who possess creator or designer status and are restricted by space and time*. Natural Religion begins to seem less theistic-like, even on open theism. This modified account seems to support Marsh's claims that prehistoric humans did not have the concept of a high god. It also seems to undermine the doctrine of general revelation. Nevertheless, perhaps there is a way to salvage the theism-tracking thesis by making Natural Religion and open theism somewhat compatible.

4.3. Salvaging the Theism-Tracking Thesis

Consider the following responses to each of the four findings discussed above. First, we return to the issue of omnipresence and Item (I) on Barrett's list: natural gods are not outside of space. Contemporary philosophical discussion on the attribute of omnipresence is more complicated than it might at first appear. The current literature on omnipresence is divided on all manner of issues (cf. Arcadi 2017). There is even debate as to whether or not omnipresence actually entails God being spaceless or outside of space. Earlier, we noted that many theologians affirm that God is spaceless (e.g., Helm 2010, p. 41). The medieval scholar, Robert Pasnau, has called this into question. According to Pasnau,

> Although it is now commonly supposed that God exists outside of space, this was not the standard conception among earlier theologians. Medieval Christian authors, despite being generally misread on this point, are in complete agreement that God is literally present, spatially, throughout the universe. One simply does not find anyone wanting to remove God from space, all the way through to the end of the seventeenth century. (Pasnau 2011, p. 19)

If Pasnau is correct, this will provide some help in making omnipresence more intuitive. Yet, there is still the issue of God being "more" present in certain locations than others. Current discussion on omnipresence might help with this issue as well. "Omnipresence", writes the self-proclaimed modified classical theist John Peckham, "does not entail uniformity of presence (as sometimes assumed)."

> Consistently holding that God is omnipresent, but not uniformly present, merely requires that in addition to God's *general* omnipresence, God may be *specially* present to particular locations in some way(s) he is not present to other locations. This may be so whether the manner of divine omnipresence is understood as derivative or nonderivative. For example, God might be derivatively omnipresent while also specially present in specific locations in some derivative fashion. Perhaps God is omnipresent in that God's power extends everywhere, sustaining all things (Heb. 1:3), while instances of special divine presence are special manifestations of divine power in creation (i.e., instances of special divine action) that do not involve God being *spatially* present. In this way, general omnipresence and special divine presence *could* involve the same kinds of presence while being distinguished in terms of degree. (Peckham 2021, p. 88)

Our point is that theologians who are passionate about describing God correctly sometimes say that God is not present at all places at the same time in a similar fashion. This suggests that the participants in Barrett and Keil's (1996) study may not have been so theologically incorrect after all.

Second, Christian theology does not reject the claim of God as embodied. The doctrine of incarnation means that God (specifically, the second person of the Triune God) once assumed a human body—and remains embodied forever! Many theologians also believe God appeared to his people many times in a bodily form already before Christ. For instance, the patriarch Jacob is often believed to have wrestled with Yahweh himself (Gen 32:22–32) (e.g., Peckham 2021, p. 91). While most theologians would say God is essentially incorporeal, conceptualizing God as embodied may not be theologically incorrect. In fact, some even

say that standard definitions of God's omnipresence entail that God is embodied in the universe (Mawson 2006).

Third, as we saw, while open theists say God is omniscient, they don't believe God infallibly knows the future. While God knows the objective probability of history evolving in any particular way, God's expectations about the future can, nevertheless, turn out to be false since he cannot predict the future free acts of humans with perfect accuracy. Regarding divine guidance, Basinger (1994, p. 165) writes that, "It is always possible that even that which God in his unparalleled wisdom believes to be the best course of action at any given time may not produce the anticipated results in the long run". Even though, technically, this does not mean that God has false beliefs, open theism comes close to suggesting that God is susceptible to epistemic error. To be sure, the theologically incorrect intuitions people displayed in the study of Barlev et al. (2017) were not specifically about God's beliefs about the future. Nevertheless, the idea that God has false beliefs is not so far from the suggestion that what God "believes to be the best course of action" may not turn out to be the best after all.

Fourth, not all CSR scholars agree with Norenzayan et al. (2016) that moralizing big gods depend on cultural scaffolding, namely, on large-scale cooperation that creates the need for supernatural surveillance. Dominic Johnson (2016) argues that the fear of supernatural punishment is cognitively natural. Evolutionary, neuroscientific, and psychological evidence indicates that we are "wired for punishment" (Johnson 2016, p. 29). The concept of supernatural punishment is also prevalent among culturally isolated groups living in Hawaii, Micronesia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, for examples. Johnson also cites anthropologists, such as Harvey Whitehouse (2008), who list supernatural punishments and rewards among the "twelve characteristics that tend to be found among all religions, irrespective of period, continent, or culture" (Johnson 2016, p. 58).

One more general point. The path from intuitive/implicit beliefs to explicit beliefs is not straightforward (see Vainio 2016). On the one hand, many theological beliefs prevalent in the West depend on particular cultural scaffolding, on schools and churches, pastors and theologians, books and blogs. On the other hand, people have always engaged in analytic thinking. The countless number of counterintuitive ideas in indigenous religions indicate that Natural Religion does not exactly correspond to the explicit religious beliefs of any culture (cf. Sterelny 2018). Therefore, even if our natural intuitions do not perfectly correspond to any particular model of God, perhaps it takes only a bit of analytic thinking, or a minimal amount of cultural scaffolding, to arrive at a theistic-like concept of god. For example, even if people display intuitions about embodied gods when forced to respond quickly, is it not obvious that most people conceptualize supernatural agents as essentially spiritual beings. The open theist could, thus, argue that God has created people with sufficient theism-tracking cognitive systems, such that it only takes a minimal amount of reflection and general cultural scaffolding to arrive at a theistic-like god concept.

5. Concluding Remarks

We have argued that the answer to the question of whether Natural Religion tracks theism partly depends on one's model of God. Classical theism makes Natural Religion seem too far off the mark. While open theism is much more natural than classical theism, even here it is not clear whether Natural Religion is theism-tracking. More work is needed in order to properly answer this question. Archaeological, ethnographic, and other kinds of data must be taken into account. Moreover, the implications of our conclusions for the doctrine of general revelation need further scrutiny. One could argue that all the doctrine indicates is that people do not need any special revelation to know that there exists a powerful creator who rewards and punishes (a creator and a judge). These two ideas can be defended as cognitively natural.

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Notes

1 In all that follows, "God" with a capital G stands for the God of Christian theism while "god" stands for any supernatural agent.

2 According to Marsh, this fact bolsters the argument from divine hiddenness. This argument claims that God does not exist because "nonresistant nonbelief" does (Schellenberg 2015). Nonresistant nonbelief is lack of belief in God that is not due to the person resisting a relationship with God. According to the argument, any being worthy of the name God would be perfectly loving. A perfectly loving God would always be open for a relationship with creatures as long as they are also open.

3 Alternatively, one could view a correct concept of God as a precondition for a relationship with God. Some claim that one can be in a relationship with God without believing in God (see Schellenberg 2017).

4 It is worth noting that there is a debate over the exact nature of omnipresence. The classical theist Paul Helm says that the omnipresent God is spaceless (Helm 2010, p. 41). Yet the medieval scholar Robert Pasnau says that the classical Christian tradition did not affirm that God Is spaceless until the end of the 17th Century (Pasnau 2011, p. 19).

5 See the titles of Jong et al. (2015) and Barrett (2012a).

6 There may be also other models of God that seem similarly cognitively natural, such as some versions of neoclassical or "modified" classical theism (e.g., Peckham 2021). However, open theism is a clearly defined model of God and thus serves as an example.

7 God is unified in that all of God's essential attributes are co-extensive and compossible or coherent.

8 Regarding the methodology in Barrett and Keil's study, it has been pointed out that the stories themselves include anthropomorphic cues (Shtulman 2008). However, for the sake of argument, we will not appeal to this criticism here.

9 Barrett does not say cognitively natural gods are punishing/loving as Braddock does, but that they reward and punish.

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Article

(In)active God—Coping with Suffering and Pain from the Perspective of Christianity

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Abstract: Colloquially, suffering and pain are usually and exclusively concerned with the human body. Pain and suffering are clearly objective facts, as well as lasting and memorable experiences. Are suffering and pain purely biological phenomena and neurological states, or can they be interpreted by culture, religion, philosophy, sociology, Christianity, etc.? To what extent can it, therefore, be said that the body is sufficiently cognitively, motorically, and sensibly equipped to accept or reject unpleasant situations. Except biological, neurological, and medical, i.e., physical, views about suffering and pain, the Christian solution is one of the essential elements of human life which can serve as a bridge between adaptive and cognitive management and control of the body and mind and learned (parents, culture, society) patterns of dealing with pain and suffering. Our article aims to show how Christianity, in describing suffering and pain as the physiological fact and subjective experience, can be gathered up into a meaningful whole and a powerful sense of *(in)active* God.

Keywords: pain; suffering; body; evolution; God; narration; action; Christianity

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1. Introduction

Pain and suffering are complex and difficult questions, pondered by individuals and society at large. It does not concern only the past and present but the future as well. As these topics entail internal contemplation and theoretical exploration, they require a systematic examination. In the last few decades, there have been efforts in exploring and researching these topics from biological, evolutionary, cognitive, and medical perspectives. Yet, these individual efforts do not provide a holistic answer to such multiplex questions. While the contribution of these disciplines is necessary, of benefit would be to consider another point of view—a spiritual perspective. Therefore, this article will, in two parts, explore the scientific definitions of pain and suffering that do not instruct how one should deal with pain and suffering, therefore, distancing God from these experiences. Proponents of evolutionary theory, on the other hand, believe that suffering is simply a way "taken up into God's more comprehensive and gracious action in the created world" (Peters 2013, p. 115), while Deane-Drummond sees suffering as "the securing of some outweighing good" (Deane-Drummond 2008, p. 16). In any case, coping with suffering cannot be prescribed by biology or evolution, but will always require additional aids that are far beyond the conceptual framework of science.

The second part of the article will discuss pain and suffering through a human–divine (man–God) connection, and in this connection, there are easy, difficult, and formidable aspects. Pain and suffering belong to the difficult, if not impossible aspects. Suffering requires an internal effort, a transcending of oneself. A concrete answer to suffering cannot be given, as it is a part of life that does not have a roadmap. The difficulty lies in the fact that it is a personal state that everyone must endure individually, and therefore, the solution to suffering must be personal. There are no universal answers. One possible answer is in the Christian credo "memoria passionis, crucis, mortis et resurectionis Jesu Christi" (Metz 1978, p. 175). God's salvation does not suffer human limitations. Finally, the

bible tale of Job is based on historical experiences of faith, and it is a testimony of God's intervention in human history.

Therefore, this article will take a multidisciplinary approach to answer the conundrum of pain and suffering, from evolutionary, cognitive, psychological, and Christian points of view. More weight will be given to humanistic disciplines than to experimental approaches, as the former talks of pain that can be in touch with life. For suffering to be bearable, if not desirable, this formidable experience must be given a personal meaning. The following sections will look at how Christianity can provide an answer through meaning.

2. Pain and Suffering from the Perspective of Science

2.1. The Mystery of Pain and Suffering

The subject of pain has become an integral part of many sciences, primarily those sciences which were prefixed with "bio-". Thus, we have biology, biopolitics, bioethics, bioeconomics, biotechnology, biotheology, etc. Relying on the historical meaning of the concept of pain, it is observed that its understanding was burdened with shortcomings of definition and is subject to criticism and debate. The often cited and discussed definition of pain defines pain as "an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage" (IASP 2020). Therefore, pain is not so difficult to define since, according to most prevailing definitions, it is related to the body, although the opposite definitions increasingly displace pain from the physical, i.e., bodily. However, we will agree that suffering is still different from pain, and it is related to human experience, and experiences as such are very different and not subject to scientific verification. Since the spirit of postmodernism seeks the equalization of everything or the conciliatory equal value of almost everything, then it also seems that this disregard for the difference between pain and suffering has gone in exactly that direction: on biological and physiological legality.

On the other hand, the modern scientific study of suffering is mixed with ambivalent feelings, and there is a kind of apprehension regarding the man who suffers and his socio-cultural order. Different perceptions of the study of suffering and its social consequences often determine the relationship between the spiritual and natural sciences. It seems that suffering, along with pain, is still a bridge between the spiritual and natural sciences. Pain and suffering, as objective facts for a long time, especially large-scale suffering (natural disasters), have often been the subject of philosophical, theological, and psychological sciences. On the other hand, philosophers, and especially theologians, believe that the suffering of Auschwitz, Aleppo, Srebrenica, etc., cannot even be explained otherwise, or it could be said that it cannot be understood otherwise rather than within the spiritual sciences.

Pain and suffering with the development of experimental sciences and pharmacology have become the centre of our interest and a kind of hope and consolation in their endurance, ultimately, a solution. In any case, especially today when we see great advances in technological medicine, we would like to avoid the shameful and severe consequences of pain, suffering, aging, etc. It has already been mentioned that in the opinion of both the public and the specialized (scientific), the body is the one that produces pain and suffering. In this sense, the physical body was often simply neglected: "It is not, of course, that modernist philosophy has shown any great interest in the organic substantial body as such, but rather, in the human as the abstract universal marker of the site of foundational voice, vision and vitality" (Shildrick 2002, p. 48). In this context, many theorists and scientists expect paradigm shifts in the natural science methodology as well so that the phenomenon of the body can be scientifically processed.

In addition to the general, almost everyday understanding of suffering within modern philosophies of spirit, scientific psychology, and cognitive sciences, suffering is observed primarily phenomenologically and defined synonymously, and therefore, its meaning is of limited use. For this purpose, the deictic examples are used from the I-perspective to describe the physical experience of pain: I am broken, my being is empty, something deep inside me torments me, I feel uncomfortable, I am in agony, I am afraid, I am lamentable

and miserable, etc. Therefore, E. Cassel's definition of suffering is often cited in support of the above description of phenomenal suffering as "the state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person" (Cassel 2004, p. 32). An essential feature of suffering according to Cassel is reflected in subjectivity. The suffering of one person would be in a sense the private suffering of that person, that is, the person has a certain relationship to her suffering and her feeling of suffering that is fundamentally different from the relationship of another person to her suffering, i.e., the difference is manifested in *how to be* such a sufferer. Thus, the aforementioned subjective experience of suffering is often limited to sensory experience. Moreover, a whole spectrum from simple to complicated experiences of suffering emerges. According to Svenaeus, suffering is "the way the whole world appears to us, opening up the world to the person in a certain tone or colour" (Svenaeus 2014, p. 409). Drew Leder (1990), in his very influential book, *The Absent Body*, talks about the body and then pain from a third-person perspective, while most phenomenologists believe that suffering is related to a person, her experiences, and the experience of suffering. Suffering in the sense of meta-suffering signifies the ability to be able to think about one's own suffering states and is closely related to various theories of suffering, by the ability to think about one's own experience, happenings, and coping with suffering that one can not only apply to oneself but can also influence others. Human suffering is also marked by linguistic reflection and introspective communication (Wierzbicka 2014), and in this sense, philosophers and scientists speak of suffering as an ability possessed by a man in a special way. The suffering that concerns me or that threatens me is an ever-changing state of my consciousness, my being, and my experience. The notion of suffering, on the other hand, has a long tradition in Christianity, and it has always been subject to narration and the transcendence of oneself as a sufferer. In evolutionary research, pain and suffering are too often separated into two separate entities. In the constructivist sense, today, there is more and more talk about the unity of pain and suffering, about the annulment of the differences between these two entities (Duffee 2019).

After a sketchy theoretical presentation of the concept of pain and suffering in contemporary discussions, this paper does not intend to enter furthermore into their specialized meanings in certain sciences. However, it can be said that an important characteristic of the phenomenon of suffering is in its subjective quality (first-person perspective), whereas pain can be more or less described as an objective phenomenon (third-person perspective). Many humanities scientists have over-ontologized and stretched the notion of suffering too much, trying to encompass under this notion all human experiences that most *threaten the intactness of the person*. This subjective area of suffering experience is then often confronted with the objective area of physical pain. The question is how can there be a subjective experience in a biological universe since the *coexistence* of pain and suffering is literally mysterious? The concept of phenomenal suffering as an ontologizing area of subjective experience leads to one form of the modern variant of Cartesian dualism (Bueno-Gómez 2017). However, there is no denying the existence of suffering experiences, although these subjective experiences are described in everyday speech by psychological predicates (I am anxious, depressed, I cannot carry on, I feel miserable, etc.). What remains problematic is how suffering conditions can be defined objectively. Do other living beings suffer? What about insects? Does a fly suffer when children tear off its legs? And what about even more primitive creatures such as amoebae? Considering other beings and respecting their different intuitions, it seems at first glance that visible actions alone do not give any unambiguous conclusions about the suffering of other living beings. However, how do we know that man suffers and fish do not? Is it possible in principle to imagine a *humanoid robot* that perfectly mimics human actions without any sense of suffering? With the triumph of modern natural sciences and the associated empiricist-materialist-shaped worldview, these and similar issues become central.

2.2. Empirical Research on Pain and Suffering

Evolution suggests to us with its empirical research that all biological processes, including primary pain, and then suffering as its *intangible* consequence, can be explained by body functions and neural networks. For the biologist, the body is a biological, relative concept based on material chemical substances, its experiences, and the environment that offers stimulus. So Lynne U. Sneddon writes: "The definition of human pain suggests that there are two components: firstly, a stimulus that could or does cause damage is perceived (termed nociception) and secondly, this leads to a psychological state where an individual experiences suffering or discomfort (termed pain) [. . .] injured squid fled from predators at a greater distance than non-injured squid; thus, the response to tissue damage has evolved as a survival tactic." (Sneddon 2019, pp. 1, 4) What does empirical research tell us primarily about pain? If the brain of a rainbow trout that possess nociceptors, which are similar to those in mammals, is electrophysiologically stimulated, there are changes associated with pain in physiology and behavior and greater brain activity. For the body to respond properly to a harmful event, the sensory system helps to *detect* tissue damage. In this way, animals that respond to tissue damage are more likely to survive and reproduce than those that do not have the ability to detect damage. Aversion to something in animals can be recognized through elevated heart rate or elevated levels of stress hormones. From any change in behavior, it can be concluded that a particular organism experiences injury or pain. The electrophysiological properties of nociceptors in rainbow trout can be compared with those in mammals. Differences are evident in rainbow trout nociceptors that do not respond to temperatures below 4 °C due to evolutionary adaptation to lower temperatures (ibid., p. 3). Research clearly shows how A-delta fibers in rainbow trout act in the same way as C fibers in mammals (the African naked mole-rat), responding to various harmful stimuli. C fibers in terrestrial animals contribute to "longer-term pain" (ibid., p. 3), while A-delta fibers signal the first sensation of pain because they conduct stimuli to the central nervous system more quickly. Considering the overall behavior and physiological responses, despite the small number of C fibers, there is a wealth of evidence to confirm that fish feel pain, avoid potentially harmful events, and have the ability to remember.

According to many scientists (Broom 2001; Kavaliers 1998; Sneddon 2003), experiments have shown that fish have the ability to feel and perceive pain: "Thus, life history and ecology can shape the nociception and pain system" (Sneddon 2019, p. 3). Furthermore, a large number of animals learn to associate a painful stimulus with a specific situation and thus can avoid harmful events. Rainbow trout are thought to possess the same direction of transmission of nociceptive information as in mammals, from the peripheral to the central nervous system. Therefore, pain is a by-product of evolution, and all bodily life is moving towards becoming better and more perfect.

Evolutionary mechanisms explain the development of organisms and living beings purely mechanically and naturally, in which physical pain fits perfectly. The principle of natural selection provides a convincing explanation for species changes by adapting living things to certain evolutionary niches, which are continuously evolving over time. Accordingly, biological evolution offers a model for explaining the formation of different organisms over time, which change to adapt to appropriate environmental conditions. Evolutionarily observed pain simply shows how species that were stronger, more resourceful, and more adaptable to the biological environment simply replaced existing species with their persistence for survival and adaptability to the environment and new conditions, their resistance to new diseases, but also producing new diseases that harmed old species. The sedentary lifestyle contributed the most to this; for example, the farm one, which was immediately inhabited by various animals, such as mice and rats that transmitted diseases (Liebermann 2013, pp. 214–18).

What about suffering? Can it be said that suffering is synonymous with pain, that fish suffer as much as humans? "Humans are not merely evolutionary victims of their own genes, but remain responsible for what has gone wrong" (Conradie 2018, p. 8). To

what extent can it then be categorically stated that in this world there is no more room for lived suffering, responsibility for living things and nature, for oneself, since it is somehow imposed that we cannot in any way justify suffering given the existence of pain in the evolutionary body? Insisting on the natural and evolutionary development of pain, however, also implies a reform of our understanding of suffering. In all evolutionary research on pain, not only causal relevance but also the uniqueness of suffering is questioned. The consequence of such an evolutionary understanding of pain results in an introspective lack of effect on distinct human behavior (suffering, use of symbols, and communication), and the causes of such behavior are neither evolutionary nor common with other living beings (Deacon 1997): "However, the emergence of consciousness, self-consciousness, human consciousness and symbolic communication still requires much scholarly interest. There can be no doubt about human distinctiveness (all specimens of all species are indeed distinctive)" (Conradie 2018, p. 5). On the other hand, in our self-understanding and self-perception, suffering is central to our bodily structure. Suffering becomes a meeting place for the perception of everything real and an area of man's compassionate behavior. For "our response to the suffering of the other must be compassion, not an explanation" (Van Hooft 1998, p. 16).

Is then suffering also just a persistent evolutionary "egregious error" (Craig and MacKenzie 2021, p. 7) that is gradually being discovered by exploring pain and the body? The real question is what is meant by suffering? Is suffering interpreted as absolute independence from pain, i.e., the complete independence of our suffering states from the overall physical context? In this case, it is clear that there is no connection between our behavior toward pain and our future and thus our personal identity. Such suffering would be accidental, chaotic, and without identity. Of course, then there would be no connection between our suffering and the activity of the body. However, what if we acknowledge only the psychological conditioning of suffering, and by suffering, we understand only one independence of suffering from physical events and pain? In that case, the notion of suffering would presuppose a complete separation between the physical and mental realms of value. Such separation is contrary to our everyday experience because the existence of psychophysical connection has long been known to human thought. If I eat too much, I will feel nausea (suffering); if I regain lost love, I will be happy (I will stop suffering). Suffering is not just a physically conscious feeling or perception of one mental object of suffering that would be coincidentally related inertly to another separate physical object such as pain. In this way, we cannot derive the meaning of suffering at our own discretion. No criterion could objectively qualify one's suffering condition. Only a person or a living being can suffer. Entering into someone else's suffering probably implies insurmountable epistemological boundaries. As far as suffering is concerned, there are interspaces of interpretation that give preference to the interpretation of suffering as far as the art of living is concerned. Not everyone, but more than one interpretation is logically in-compatible with natural science knowledge. This is also true of the relationship of the natural and spiritual sciences in terms of the relationship between suffering and pain.

2.3. The Body Is a Unifying Force in Experiencing Pain and Suffering

There are countless sufferings and pains that we can experience. Suffering and pain are existential experiences that manifest physically (e.g., tissue damage), socially (poverty, violence), existentially (sadness, grief, stress), philosophically (seeking meaning), theologically (absence of God), culturally (racial and gender differences), etc. In this sense, one can speak of the unification of pain and suffering: the body. Pain and suffering, in any case, depending on the body, i.e., on the absence of internal and external reasons that hurt and torment a person. Along with the research of the body, which medicine has been dealing with for centuries, in recent decades, this problem has reached the media space, especially with the development of medical technology. James A. Marcum presents in his work *An introductory philosophy of medicine: humanizing modern medicine* the problem between logos and pathos as follows: "My proposal is that modern medicine must undergo

a revolution not in terms of its logos or ethos but in terms of its pathos. Specifically, pathos can transform the logos of technique and information into wisdom, a wisdom that can discern the best and appropriate way of being and acting for both the patient and the physician. Pathos can also transform the ethos of the biomedical physician's emotionally detached concern or the humane physician's empathic care into a compassionate love that is both tender and unrestricted" (Marcum 2008, p. 14). This quote very much affects the diagnosis of the modern sufferer because "wisdom comes alone through suffering" (Aeschylus 1953, pp. 39–40). Leaving aside, for now, this Marcum's visionary diagnosis of the present position of modern medicine within the social context, the question must be asked how much we still care about the body and what is meant by the body, that human body?

We have already said that a suffering identity is primarily determined by one's bodily life. In the active and passive exposure of one's body to illness and suffering, the physical, moral, social, philosophical, biological, and theological closeness/absence of other people is embodied. The fragile body of another person in illness and suffering requires not only compassionate understanding but also a qualitative response in terms of resolving illness and suffering. Phenomenologists say that it is precisely from the dimension of the body that one must proceed as that which is accessible to sensibility, which is available only as a phenomenon, which as such is presented and ultimately manifests itself as itself (Svenaeus 2014). Everyone has a body, and we all experience it in different ways. The gap between what we would want for our body and what our body is at the moment is shown in the cleavage and impossibility of unambiguous unity, the unity that must suffer the halving on the body and on what thinks that body, the fragmentation of pain and suffering. The body is the center of the human self, or at least what is left of it.

The past of the human body, both theoretical and practical, is very well known to us. The present of the body is biopolitical, bioethical, bio-scientific, biomedical . . . perhaps even biotheodical. The future of the body could be reduced to as little suffering and pain as possible. No matter how many different fragments of the body there were of our body, the body still remains a great unknown, a great mystery, (a sacred drama) practiced by many. A living body allows us everything. It hurts and is at the root of spiritual, social, communicative, and religious suffering. Suffering and pain, in this sense, inevitably refer to the dichotomy or unity of man and God, human and animal, mind and body, healthy and sick. However, the prospects for their solution increasingly rely on the already new and established dualism of a distant and (in)active God and a suffering and sick man.

Our critique of rationalism and ontology does not reject the existence of the living body, nor does it seek to reduce the living body solely to linguistically constructed pain and suffering. On the contrary, pain and suffering as the potential of bodily sensitivity generate an embodied relation, and in that sense, "the body could be said to be a thinking body and to have intentionality prior to the emergence of language and self-consciousness" (Burkitt 1999, p. 75). Western philosophy (and theology as well) was obsessed with an ontological understanding of being in which the subject is an epistemological subject who can understand the world and others rationally and conceptually. Such rationalizing knowledge often turned suffering and pain into manipulative objects. In that suffering and pain, there was too little, if we may say so, flesh. Therefore, we must primarily observe suffering phenomenologically and narratively because suffering and pain can only be retold, experienced, seen, promoted, prevented, etc. Western theology may have reduced pain and suffering too much given the almighty and often (in)active God, pointing out that is the problem of the existence of evil, and that of the moral kind, in general, laid down in man's free will. The physical potential of the body is neglected because the body and bodily feelings are considered inferior material considering that the final answer lies in eschatology: "If the only adequate answer to human suffering is God in the beatific vision, yet God remains incomprehensible and thus mystery in the vision of God, then human suffering is not a problem to be solved" (Miller 2009, p. 846). Our critique is precisely a phenomenological one, one in which the notion of God and understanding God serves as

the highest fundamental way that creates the immanent repression of physical and spiritual pain and suffering. The theological God, who theorizes man, uses concepts to displace pain and suffering too much from the realm of the body. Therefore, our critique holds that the fundamental mode of human existence is a sensory existence that is irreducible to a pure form of life. Man's sensory body, not the conscious mind, is the one that first comes into contact with the world: "In other words, bodily experience is a specific sociocultural event that cannot be extracted from the setting of the experience and ascribed to some universal body" (Rothfield 2005, p. 38). The pain and suffering that belong essentially to our sensibility are not fundamentally irrational, but through them, the conscious subject (man) feels his/her existence.

It has already been said that the Western rational tradition privileged intelligibility over sensibility, considering representation and intelligibility as the first way of perceiving the world. In particular, Husserl prefers the objectifying act over sensibility, the objectification that *turns* our senses into theoretical thought. For Husserl, although sensitivity can offer some sensory elements in the construction of theoretical content, such content does not have a self-sufficient character because sensitivity per se is not intelligible. According to Lévinas, sensory pleasure is a fundamental form of life that precedes reason, representation, and reflection. (Lévinas 2001).

To feel pain and suffering means to be within yourself, to feel your body. In pain and suffering, man separates himself from the other, withdraws into himself. The basic way of life for such a man is dissatisfaction with his sensory needs such as anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness, etc., which contribute to man's agony (Hovey et al. 2017). The misfortune of such a state is manifested in a dissatisfied soul. Pain and suffering are not just about materiality, although at their core is material: the body. The body primarily has a sensory dimension, and the sensory subject can feel the suffering of another person by empathizing with her situation. Suffering is not a reflexive object that can be easily named and understood only by language. It is above all a reasonable appeal and a call to respond qualitatively. Suffering offers itself to our compassion. Therefore, pain and suffering cannot be materialized and informative, but they are essentially existential, individual, communicative. The suffering of another tells the other simply something in common about their life. She is essentially narrative. It is in itself an existential need that requires not only compassion but the alleviation of the existing condition. We cannot treat the suffering of another as objects of knowledge because suffering is infinitely personal and cannot be understood only conceptually. Therefore, understanding and dialogic linguistic relation cannot exhaust the meaning of the relationship between pain and suffering.

3. Coping with Suffering and Pain from the Perspective of the Christianity

3.1. (Im)passible God

In addition to biological foundations, suffering also has metaphysical roots. Suffering is a very theological (theodicean) issue, perhaps even more so. Humans, as believing beings, cannot reject the challenging speech of God and His action since the sensual experience of God precedes the rational and conceptual understanding of God. Pain, and especially suffering, are manifested in the pre-original *accusation* of God, which not only requires God to engage in salvation but also to be sensitive to human trauma. In other words, it is the affective content, not the representational content, of a person's suffering that would allow God to respond to the person's needs. Theologians say that God's bodily life is already incarnated in human bodily life through his Son. Such incarnation connects the person with the *salvational* (perhaps rather with the eschatological?) action of God. A person's bodily sensibility is the primary relational mode with the world: "The body is neither an obstacle opposed to the soul nor a tomb that imprisons it, but that by which the self is susceptibility itself. Incarnation is an extreme passivity; to be exposed to sickness, suffering, death is to be exposed to compassion, and, as a self, to the gift that costs" (Lévinas 2002, p. 195). The incarnation is not simply an intimate abstract relationship between the person and God but must also refer to a compassionate intracorporeal relationship. A person,

as a passive and powerless being with regard to pain and suffering, is not a coward and indifferent to God's insensitivity, impassibility. Paradoxically, it is courage that makes the person a believer. Can God, therefore, feel a person's suffering?

An online study by Gray and Wegner shows that the more a person suffers, the more she believes. Where does this disproportion between one's own existential state and trust in God come from? According to the research above, "religiosity stems from the dyadic nature of both morality and mind perception" (Gray and Wegner 2010, p. 7). In the mentioned online study, it was shown that the respondents understand the mind mainly in terms of experience (the ability to feel and be conscious) and agency (the ability to do things). In their view, there is a dual type of entity: those who have experience but no action (e.g., babies, dogs, and children), and God, who has action but no experience. In addition, respondents answered that God has an "impoverished mental life" (ibid., p. 7). In moral typecasting theory, moral situations are divided into moral agents (heroes and villains) and moral patients (victims and beneficiaries). According to the dyadic structure of morality, we tend to look for the culprit for bad deeds and a hero whom we will praise and worship. In the absence of rebuke and praise, all the credit for moral acts is *taken* by God as the ultimate moral agent. What is interesting in this study is the fact that although God can do many things, He, unfortunately, remains "incapable of feeling pain, pleasure, or other inner experience" (ibid., p. 14). Human beings with their physical body and physical life seem to have an advantage over God because they have a sensory dimension and experience. Since God has no body and since He has no experience, i.e., *incapable of feeling pain*, He is then impassible and does not suffer (Mullins 2018).

Then why do people need God? According to *cognitivists*, we simply need God as the ultimate moral agent, especially in cases where we do not find a reasonable sequence of events from which suffering arises that cannot be understood and explained: "He [God] is a moral agent but not a moral patient, deserving of our curses and praises but not of our sympathies" (Gray and Wegner 2010, p. 9). Many other researchers such as Boyer feel that people simply unnecessarily attribute moral action to a being they have neither seen nor heard because it is simply a general tendency (Boyer 2001). The reason why people need an extraterrestrial moral agent lies, according to cognitive researchers, in their Hyperactive Agent Detection Device (Barrett 2000). Since humans could not find a responsible moral agent on earth, then all the obscure events were attributed to the supernatural one. Attributing events to an external agent has the benefits of physical and psychological effects because people have a *sense* of control over events. When people do not find a responsible moral agent for major events such as famine or earthquakes, they are simply looking for a far stronger moral agent—God. Especially when it comes to miraculous events, people transfer all the power of such an event to a supernatural being even more (Pargament and Hahn 1986).

What can we say about the above online study? We cannot omit the idea of God as a moral agent, which is one of God's major activities in the universe. This becomes especially clear in *The Transcendental Doctrine of Method*, at the end of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant writes: "the belief in a God and another world is so interwoven with my moral disposition" (Kant 1998, p. 689) that one cannot exist without the other. Furthermore, we are probably the only creatures who consciously question the necessity and justification of morality, God, and suffering. Research of this type, an online study, said nothing qualitatively new about God's co-suffering, other than showing a large percentage of public opinion about the impassible God. On the contrary, other opinions, albeit theoretical, can be cited, such as that of trinitarian Christian theology, according to which the Father suffered with his Son on the cross (Moltmann 1993): "If God has really participated in a representative sample of human suffering, then God Himself must somehow suffer under the shadow of divine silence"" (Bell 2019, p. 50). However, the suffering of a child lying in a hospital and the suffering of a father who is next to the bed of a sick child is not the same, the suffering of the Son of God and the Father *under the shadow of divine silence*, many will notice. The mentioned child both hurts and suffers; primarily physically. While, in the case

of the father, there is probably only suffering. His body is healthy unlike, for example, a sick child's body. As Lewis puts it, "Whatever fools may say, the body can suffer twenty times more than the mind. The mind has always some power of evasion. At worst, the unbearable thought only comes back and back, but the physical pain can be absolutely continuous" (Lewis 1961, pp. 40–41). Therefore, our notion of suffering necessarily implies a distance from the everyday notion of co-suffering. For the everyday notion of suffering arising from the will and one's own reasons, the co-suffering subject need not risk the body. Suffering with another is one that implies a co-sufferer's responsibility with a certain consciousness and intention and arises primarily from various calculations but not from bodily sacrifice for another. Therefore, the *original (bodily)* suffering is that which rests on bodily pain and not on rational reflection.

Although God cannot suffer in the way that human being suffers, the question remains why did this good and omnipotent God grant us suffering and pain? We could repeat the answer of J. B. Metz, who says that "this question now becomes a major theological question, an absolute eschatological question, a question that can neither be answered nor forgotten, a question for which we, from our side, have no answer; it is the question of 'too much'" (Metz 2006, p. 225). Does a good God then have any control over natural events and human lives? "Or if God has some purpose in mind that is being accomplished, whether directly or indirectly by the occurrence of such catastrophes, does this not prove such a God to be the cruel 'tyrant' that Nietzsche claimed God to be?" (Kropf 2006, p. 183). The question of evil and suffering is ultimately placed in the relationship between man and God, between the experiencer and the experienced, between the unjustifiable and the incoherent, between the salvational God and the *unredeemable* pain . . . Stump's claim that "the problem of suffering is, in a sense, a question about *interpersonal relations*, insofar as the problem has to do with possible morally sufficient reasons for God, an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good *person*, to allow human persons to suffer as they do" (Stump 2010, p. 61). The relational and narrative solution is *the most tempting* because only subjective experience of suffering can turn the discourse of pain to one's own physicality which is most concerned by the theodicy of suffering.

3.2. Practical Consolation in the Therapeutic Narrative

Narration is very important when contemplating suffering, as human nature is narrative. A man that does not know how to verbalize suffering stays unexpressed, incomplete, and this can result in psychological disease, as stories have therapeutic power. Through secondary experiences, a person can find meaning in suffering and models of solutions. Others, their story and experience, their life and work, give us a broader perspective, facing us toward our internal world and examining it from another point of view.

Suffering is not in vain and without hope. If we look at heroic stories and myths, we see that they share a narrative structure in which the main character voluntarily or forcibly leaves home, an area ruled by order, to step into an area of disorder. The hero's motivation is also important, which plays an important role in whether he will face the set task and whether he will bring something of exceptional value from that task. This rhythm is present in all great world narratives. Only when she escapes from the limitations of *a safe place* when she leaves the conformism of living and enters an unknown area can a person transcend herself and enrich her spirit. Therefore, this approach to literary texts, including the biblical text, can be considered a call to internalize the story and identify with the protagonist who makes Kierkegaard's leap of faith into the unknown. The person is called to move away from the existing in order to realize to some extent the meaning of what surrounds her and affects her as a whole. At this point, we come to *the paradox of Christianity*.

This is best seen in the example of Job who says, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19, pp. 25–26). From the initial shock and astonishment at the unjust suffering, Job changes perspective on his condition as he rises from his situation

the moment he faces it. The quoted passage highlights the formulation of the salvation and hope of the suffering person. In the preceding passages, God helps Job reconstruct the distorted state by suffering by examining his self-identity of egoistic righteousness. It was the presence of pain and suffering that was the intersection of his cry for the changeability of his future. Although Job longs for a bodily or intracorporeal relationship, such a relationship is absent. The hope for a change in the sufferer's physical condition was, only temporarily, postponed. Yet Job risked his bodily life by blaming God for his condition. In a figurative sense, Job risked his existence even when the truth he was talking about could be rejected by endangering his faith, his social position, his self: "Suffering recalls Job, as it recalls patients today, to three dimensions of human existence: to a sense of integrity and self; to a recreated relationship with God; and to renewed harmony with the human community" (Fleischer 1999, pp. 480–81). By such actions, Job's place in the aegis of faith is at stake. Job's question of suffering ends in silence, in torment, in hope. It is only on the border of God's suffering and man's cry that the mystical encounter and possible answer to the question of Job and our suffering occurs, to which everyone should answer from their own perspective. In all biblical narrations, as in the one about Job, it is always about searching for exit (exodus), freedom, of looking for a new life path and meaning. The tale of Job is about unbreakable hope that, despite all hardship, suffering will cease at the end and suffering will have a positive outcome. One more positive characteristic of this story is that it has the strength of identification as a healing, therapeutic character. The story of Job is simply a secondary experience that converts into an intimate experience. The listener/reader is identifying with Job, and through Job he finds representational expression of his own dealing with suffering. Through Job, expressing encouragement or conformation of his path highlighting the necessity of change.

Through narrative as a therapeutic (Griffioen 2018) memory of the sufferer and a return to dignity, the person is allowed to pause before the unexpected, unusual response of her God. In the structure of the suffering and tribulation of the innocent (Job), even in her non-existence as denial, there is a God who sees. It is not an effort to construct an indecisive identity of unbearable suffering from God's (in)audible speech, which even God does not pay attention to. We simply cannot respond to the suffering of the world and the community. The meaning of individual suffering is found in the experience and breaking of God's silence and one's own hope in listening to his response. We can poetically exclaim that lamentation is a trace of a *burning bush* that is only experienced up close and that remains inaccessible if one wants to preserve one's own life and not trivialize the mystery of suffering. Therefore, awe is the first attitude in interpersonal relationships, especially in the most sublime relationship, in the love of God where the measure is lost first and foremost and in which it is so easy to slip into selfish presumption and triviality.

3.3. God's (In)active Force in Relieving Pain and Suffering

Yet, in the end, the question of suffering concerns primarily meaning, what a person expects from life, and what she seeks at the end of her earthly existence which goes inevitably naturally towards its cessation, towards its extinction: "It is not suffering that destroys people, but suffering without meaning" (Gunderman 2002, p. 42). Therefore, the biblical meaning also indicates that, if a person believes, if she surrenders to that terrible abyss, life is just beginning, and the suffering—physical, moral, mental—stops. Still, the problem remains how to surmount the insurmountable? It also remains unclear how to overcome the infinite distance between almighty God and powerless and suffering man? How does such an endless relationship work and how does it shape the sufferer? How can dynamic intersubjective life function constructively within an infinite relationship?

Possible approaches and solutions are as follow:

(a) It is about a difficult question, how to save God's power, his all-knowingness, and goodness. The Christian answer is this: Christ's suffering and death on the cross marks a foundational historical event but always under God's unexpected merciful approach. Where there was defeat and nothingness, as in the example of Job, God is bringing new

life. Lastly, embodied God becomes a human intermediary to save humanity. In the same way that gods work, this heroic event is not happening outside of the concrete life of an individual in the same way the suffering cannot be abstract but always concrete and personal. Believing that the merciful God exists, with his continuous redemption, truly is immeasurable comfort. In this comfort is rooted the endurance of suffering. It is important to point out Christ's divine–human mediator role, not just his divine mediator but the redeemer-salvation character of his humanity. His humanity represents the character of God's salvation.

(b) Only a rational approach to suffering destroys suffering because of its divided understanding of suffering, and the experience of suffering. Rationalizing suffering is problematic, although necessary, because it views suffering as a static, statistical, documentary, etc., dataset. Experiential and lived suffering requires the transformation of not only the body but also the spirit as it seeks answers. Thus, the religious approach to suffering corresponds to the purification of personal life, implying the renunciation, conversion, modification, and transcendence of existence. The religious treatment of suffering is not intended for the acquisition of knowledge but a person's very existence. Therefore, we give preference to faith over experimental disciplines ones since believers talk about suffering that can very well be in touch with life. Of course, the insights of the experimental sciences are unavoidable when it comes to the pain that manifests in our body. Experimentally observed pain and suffering are devoid of context. They go simply to establish the facts. They worry too little about how to survive today, how to live tomorrow: "The problem of evil and suffering is not a puzzle to be solved but an experience to be lived with" (Dein et al. 2013, p. 200). Since suffering arises from compassion, that is, love for people and self, suffering is no more abstract, it is rather embodied, incarnated, intersubjective. In essence, such incarnated suffering is a well-known concept in Christian theology, which views life as the art of dealing with life's adversities. Suffering as subjective knowledge can serve a person as bliss to the extent that its religious content creates a specific style for the person by transforming her being. Suffering is the wisdom and virtue of life, realized by a certain transformation of the suffering person. Moreover, what is gained in transformation is practical knowledge of life: "In our response to the mystery of suffering, we define ourselves, find our integrity and ultimately shape our ethos" (Fleischer 1999, p. 485).

(c) Taking a human form, he becomes not just a symbol and a sign, but a real embodiment of the divine. In his appearance, it is present the invisible. From this it is then obvious that infinitely merciful God that suffers and dies can also co-suffer.

(d) Constitutively remembering of Christian faith from the beginning can be summarized in the words: "memoria passionis, crucis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi". Christian remembering of the cross and theology of Christ's death on the cross does not end in defeat but on the experience that good final prevails, that death and suffering are defeated by love. Therefore, Christian handling of suffering does not rest in the feeling of abandonment and weakness but witnesses God's salvation and new life. Initial disappointment transforms into gratitude. Christian remembering on the cross that is not only focused on the pain and suffering but true gratitude of personal salvation happily open to all people. Christ's cross is the synthesis of all suffering.

(e) Therefore, God's plan of salvation is not based on the limits of human possibility. God works, amid human possibility and final man's suffering, in the nothingness that is not removed from radical God's abandonment. Finally, God gives a purpose to every suffering to be allowed and surrendered to, which includes resistance and unrest with suffering for a greater purpose, includes the transformation due to love toward the man. The Christian understanding of pain and suffering does not have the purpose of succumbing to the cross but mainly giving purpose to scuffing through love the same way that Jesus did. The point of following his footsteps is not to be abandoned by God and people or suffer the same consequences; in contrast, as suffering is individual, it remains the challenge that needs to be given meaning.

4. Conclusions

It should be said that suffering, however, is not in itself a positive thing. Suffering is properly endured only in a broader sense. Suffering, in fact, is not the meaning of existence. As members of the narrative/story-telling community, sufferers are called upon to be the first to testify that suffering in itself does not have to make sense, but can even capture a person (Strawson 2004, p. 446). On the other hand, the utterance of suffering, its narration, and conversation create a community of people of the same destiny, and suffering is overcome. Pain and suffering are not explicitly categories of science. It concerns all people. Defining pain only through biological, cognitive, medical, and psychological spheres means nod touching the roots and dodging that what is important in Christianity. Pain and suffering cannot stay only on a horizontal plane, only on the level of different sciences. When trying to have an all-encompassing understanding of pain and suffering, there needs to be an inclusion of understanding the divine–human connection.

For this reason, pain must be unbearable in the context of the time (Job knows it; every sufferer knows it, too) because it is measured, temporally observed, it is unbearable, etc. However, if we observe pain and suffering, suffering in the first place, rather than pain, since pain is more related to this physical time, measurable time (hours, days, years, etc.), then it is a burden that should be released as soon as possible. From the perspective of eschatological *time*, what Christianity is talking about, this chronological time is radically changing, and it is easier to bear. That is why pain belongs more to the body and suffering to a person. In the context of our culture that rejects every form of suffering, suffering and pain must be narrated again. Pain and suffering in this context can very well narratively and hermeneutically fit into the category of change, into the category of human growth, and into the category of qualitative growth. That is why history and historical experience, that is, the experience that marked a person's walk with God, which she fondly remembers in moments of misfortune and which carries her, is important for suffering and pain. Although some research shows that a person invokes God more when it comes to bad life circumstances, these past events that person, as a conscious being, can remember, form an integral and central part of her life imbued with pain and suffering. Therefore, an existential experience that a person acquires during her life, and to which she can repeatedly refer, is an unavoidable part of overcoming suffering. In this context, God as the one who acts from the background becomes active through the anamnesis of past temptations. Thus, every pain and suffering is close to God.

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Article

What the Fall of Angels Tells Us about the Essence of Morality

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Abstract: The article describes two concepts of the sources of morality present in the evolutionist traditions (Evolution of Ethics and the Veneer Theory). Then, a modal argument against the evolutionist theory of morality is presented, based on the history of the fall of angels present in classical theism. This story is taken in the article as a possible example of the actions of individuals who operate outside of any evolutionary and social context, and of those whose ontic constitution excludes the possession of emotions. In this way, an attempt is made to present the essential features of anyone that is subject to moral evaluation, thus concluding that morality in its essence cannot be defined in biological and evolutionary terms.

Keywords: evolutionary ethics; fall of angels; modal argument; evil; morality

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1. Introduction

In contemporary debates on the origins of morality, evolutionists insist on the natural character of this phenomenon. According to them, the moral actions and the moral principles that emerged within human communities evolved from simple forms of altruism to cooperative actions because of the beneficial effect of avoiding inter-group conflict. Because of the higher value of cooperation over selfish behavior, morality allowed the group to avoid many problems and provided more resources to the community. In this paper, we attempt, inter alia, to show that, with this approach, morality is reduced to its social and biological functions, while the personal and first-person aspect essential for morality is omitted. It seems that, in the tradition of Christian theism, the concept of moral good and evil, and the idea of free will are important for the original and essential concept of morality. In order to illustrate the history of the notion of freedom that captures the essence of morality, in this paper we refer to the notion of the fall of angels, who, as free and rational beings, performed in their first act of will the act of turning away from God. This instance, present in classical Christian theism, reveals the essential features of morality by showing that morality can involve beings functioning outside of any evolutionary context. The essence of morality must therefore be defined in such a way that it can be realized by various possible beings capable of moral actions and subject to moral evaluation—both beings with and without a biological constitution. Thus, the study of the concept of morality, understood within the framework of "natural history", is unable to reveal the essence of morality, since "natural history" is not the same as "history of freedom and free will".

By the essence of morality, we understand the set of constitutive features of every moral act of any possible person (both biological and extra-biological). This assertion does not imply that detailed moral norms applicable to various types of individuals (biological and extra-biological) are identical. In terms of constitutive (essential) features, the concept of morality is unambiguous, that is, it applies in the same way to the activities of both human and non-human individuals. It seems intuitive that the concept of morality can be applied to the actions of non-human individuals, because we can think of them as beings acting in a way that is subject to moral evaluation. Since we are able to think of extra-biological individuals in terms of moral categories, we assume that our concepts

apply to them in the same sense as they do to us. If one wants to define the essence of morality in terms of biological adaptations, social conditions, or emotional reactions, one is excluding from the domain of morality possible entities (individuals) that are not biological (or even physical).

This article is structured as follows: in Section 2, we discuss the concept of the sources of morality based on evidence from evolutionary biology; in Section 3, we discuss the paradigmatic situation of a choice made by the will, which theism calls the "fall of angels"; and in Section 4, we discuss how to understand the nature of free will as the primary concept grounding morality, thus pointing out that the essential concept of morality applies to both biological and extra-biological beings.

2. Evolutionism and Sources of Morality

The theory of evolution concerning the origin of the world and life on Earth as well as the development of species also applies to the species that is the *Homo sapiens*. According to this theory, the capacities of this species are the result of changes occurring in the course of history aimed at its adaption to the environment and the possibility of successful reproduction. While this is not controversial with regard to capacities, such as upright posture or the opposable thumb, controversy arises when we ask whether the capacities traditionally called "spiritual", such as abstract thinking, self-reflection, and use of language or morality, are also evolutionary achievements.

Already Charles Darwin (2009, p. 72) wrote:

> The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable—namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed, as in man. For, firstly, the social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them.

Thus, he perceived morality as a phenomenon that arises as a result of the development of biological beings under two conditions: animals must have strong social instincts and, to some extent, develop intellectual abilities. According to him, such a development would lead to the emergence of moral sense or conscience. This does not mean, according to Darwin, that this moral sense would lead to the creation of the same moral rules as used by humans, but certainly animals of this type would have a sense of good and evil as well as a conscience (Darwin 2009, p. 73). Darwin included a description of different behaviors occurring among animals, which could be called social liking or attachment. The biological criteria for developing and strengthening such social attachments are the benefits of the pleasure that the animal experiences in the group and the greater ability of the group to defend itself from danger (Darwin 2009, p. 80). Darwin's faithful disciple and advocate of the theory of evolution, Thomas Henry Huxley, was not inclined to look for the sources of moral sentiments in the process of evolution, or at least he noticed that, in nature, there are sources of both moral and immoral behavior. In a famous quote (Huxley 2009, p. 31), Huxley explained:

> The propounders of what are called the "ethics of evolution", when the "evolution of ethics" would usually better express the object of their speculations, adduce a number of more or less interesting facts and more or less sound arguments, in favour of the origin of the moral sentiments, in the same way as other natural phenomena, by a process of evolution. I have little doubt, for my own part, that they are on the right track; but as the immoral sentiments have no less been evolved, there is, so far, as much natural sanction for the one as the other. The thief and the murderer follow nature just as much as the philanthropist. Cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and the evil tendencies of man may have

> come about; but, in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before.

Contemporary evolutionists fit within the framework of this opposition. For it is evident that in some species of animals there are behaviors that, because of some similarity, are described as morally good acts if they occur in the human world. This is not regarding evident behaviors, such as caring for their own offspring in many animal species, but about more sophisticated behaviors, such as what we call "cooperation" or "altruistic" behavior. The observation of such behavior in certain mammals led some researchers to conclude that what we judge as good in the human world, and therefore is subject to moral evaluation, is "rooted" in the biological world.

An advocate of this approach is de Waal et al. (2006), who criticizes Huxley's approach, calling it the Veneer Theory. According to de Waal, the Veneer Theory—at least as interpreted by de Waal—is false, because, as it is not grounded on any facts, it treats morality as a choice, not the result of evolution. De Waal supports his position (Evolution of Ethics) with the theory of kin selection and reciprocal altruism. This approach is clearly optimistic, as it assumes that both humans and other higher animals display many similar "morally good" behaviors: they are focused on cooperation or defend relatives and friends against aggression. Therefore, according to him, morality is "a direct outgrowth of the social instincts we share with other animals" (de Waal et al. 2006, p. 26).

Conversely, some biologists (Williams 1988) are inclined to follow a pessimistic vision that presents the natural world as a place filled with aggression, focused on the survival of the strongest, cruel, and heartless. Williams spares no examples of rape, incest, infanticide, and murder occurring in the animal world within the same species. When we apply our moral criteria to the cosmic evolutionary process, it is hard not to notice that it ought to be condemned (Williams 1988, p. 384). The evolutionary process is selfish and hardly strengthens our universal moral expectations, only the principles of tribalism. In order for a man to become a moral agent, he should rather learn about the biological mechanisms of his actions, which is helpful in overcoming them (Williams 1988, p. 401).

These two views on the nature of animals, and indirectly human nature, can be treated in a compatible and not disjunctive manner: in the animal world, there is potential for both cooperative actions and intraspecific aggression. If human actions are similar to the behavior of animals, or otherwise the mechanisms of our actions are genealogically present in the animal world, then conclusions about our biological nature should be neither optimistic nor pessimistic. We are capable of both cooperation and enormous aggression. Perhaps both positions presented above are too extreme and radical. Each of them, however, brings something very valuable to the understanding of man: on the one hand, it makes us aware of the relationship between man and nature (Waal), while on the other hand, the experience of good moral acts shows us that, in some sense, we are *not of this world*. Probably many contemporary followers of Huxley's views as naturalists would disagree with this conclusion as too "mystical". However, they describe a certain rift between the biological side of our nature and the gesture of the Good Samaritan. For this reason, they see morality as a phenomenon that is to some extent opposed to the biological world.

Both views on the genesis of morality have provoked a serious discussion. De Waal's theory promoting the relationship between emotion and morality finds the basis of morality in the phenomenon of empathy, among other things. For this reason, philosophers who are closer to Kantian ethics will accuse him of "[tending] to favor an emotion-based or sentimentalist theory of morality" (Korsgaard 2006, p. 100). If the perpetrator is to be a moral agent, he must have a certain type of awareness, but also a deeper level of intentionality. As noted by Korsgaard (2008, p. 111):

> An agent who is capable of this form of assessment is capable of rejecting an action along with its purpose, not because there is something else she wants (or fears) even more, but simply because she judges that doing that sort of act for that purpose is wrong.

The condition of having awareness, of being capable of cogitation or reflection, is necessary for us to be able to speak of a moral agent. Moral acts can only be the result of conscious, reflective actions. We may wonder to what extent one can be an autonomous agent when one makes decisions guided by certain evolutionary, emotion-based mechanisms. Such an action may have effects that can be judged as good or bad, but the perpetrator carries out the action, at least partially, in an automatic manner. Perhaps, therefore, not every human action is fully autonomous.

The expression of human personal action is the ability to transcend desires, emotions, goals, or affective states. Motives, including emotional ones, may or may not be accepted by us. They may or may not be the cause of our actions. One may feel angry with a fellow tribesman and yet refrain from harming him or even behave in a friendly manner. If biological feelings were the basis of automatic actions, the beings who follow them would not perform moral actions because they would be determined. It seems that, in the animal world, we are concerned with behavior that is not autonomous.

It is worth emphasizing that empathy or aggression in themselves are not morally good or bad. Our capacity for empathy and aggression can lead to both morally good and morally bad acts. We can easily imagine empathic actions that are morally wrong and good, and so it is with aggressive actions—they can lead to both moral good and moral evil. In moral acts, such feelings can play a motivating function, but, for the essence of morality, feelings are an accidental element.

De Waal is also accused of using a language that is too anthropomorphic in the description of animal behavior and of creating a very simplistic and dichotomous division into the Veneer Theory and naturalistic theories (Wright 2006, pp. 83, 93). We also do not know how to understand the causal terms used by de Waal, for example, when he claims that morality is a direct consequence ("direct outgrowth") of biological characteristics (Kitcher 2006, p. 124).

In our argument, we want to criticize the concept of the philosophizing evolutionist that accepts the Evolution of Ethics. He seems to adopt the following theses: (a) we have some potentialities for cooperative action, as some animals do; (b) these potentialities are innate, evolved, adaptive mechanisms; and (c) morality is completely *causally* dependent on these biological mechanisms, and it is an extension of these natural behaviors that transform into more sophisticated forms. Morality is something essentially biological; it is ultimately biological and arises out of necessity in an evolutionary way; it is created in social relations. We will argue against the last thesis (c), which we consider to be false. This argument also applies in part to the adherents of the Veneer Theory insofar as they define morality as something external to it, understood as a set of norms present in a given social group, but do not take into account the first-person foundation of morality. Even if they do not regard morality as a direct consequence of biological properties, they assume that it is ultimately the result of evolutionary development and concerns entities that are subject to the process of evolution.

3. The Fall of Angels

The theological doctrine of the fall of angels is found in one of the Christian creeds. For example, the catechism of the Catholic Church defines it as follows: this "'fall' consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and his reign" (CCC 392).

We refer to the story of the fall of angels, treating it as the basis for a modal argument that can reveal certain features of a moral being, and thus essential elements of morality. A theist treats this story as real. A non-theist can treat it as a kind of thought experiment, since even a non-theist can imagine the situation of the "fall of angels"—a special action of extra-biological entities that would be morally evaluated and would be labeled evil. The imaginability (comprehensibility) of the situation and the coherence of the story would form the basis for recognizing its possibility. We are aware that there is a discussion about the methodological correctness of arguments based on comprehensibility and imaginability

(van Inwagen 1998; Yablo 1993). Perhaps, as suggested by Inwagen, we should limit the scope of modal concepts to everyday situations that are weakly counterfactual, and adopt modal skepticism on metaphysical issues. Moreover, the *onus probandi* of proving that the situation of the "fall of angels" is impossible lies on the part of its critic. Thus, we deem legitimate the use of this example as an argument against the concept of morality that is used by the philosophizing evolutionist. It seems that we should be able to apply the category of morality to beings that are better developed than humans, or even exist in a more perfect way, as is the case with hypothetical pure spirits.

The problem of the sin of angels, purely spiritual beings, is philosophically interesting for many reasons. It touches upon the problem of the cause of evil and the first evil that appears in the created world. Furthermore, it touches upon the issue of the motives that could have guided the perpetrator of the first morally evil act—a perpetrator who had high cognitive skills, was created good, and did not experience any carnal passions that could disturb cognitive and, consequently, volitional processes.

In Christian theism, there are various ways of representing and analyzing the fall of angels. From a theological point of view, the theodicy problem is significant: if God made the fallen angel perfectly good, then the angel had no motivation to do evil. However, since he did it, perhaps God did not create it fully good. If he made him perfectly happy, then the angel had no reason to change this state, and, if not, then God would be at least partially responsible for his wrong choice. For this reason, considerations regarding the cause of the wrong choice and its actual subject-matter have become a significant part of theological considerations that make use of important elements of the philosophical concept of will and the theory of action.

We will focus primarily on presenting the concept of St Anselm of Canterbury, St Thomas Aquinas, and Blessed John Duns Scotus. We will treat them as hypothetical descriptions of the actions of extra-biological entities that choose moral evil. If their choice belongs to the category of moral actions, it must realize the necessary features of morality; therefore, the analysis of this choice should reveal these essential features.

Anselm (1998a, chp./sct. 3.11), in his considerations on the nature of the will (*voluntas*), distinguishes: (1) the will as the power of the soul; (2) the will as its dispositions or inclinations—*affectio commodi* and *affectio iustitiae*; and (3) the will as its act, that is, used as a tool and manifested in a particular willing. Anselm (1998a, chp./sct. 3.11) explains how he understands the inclinations of the will as follows:

> [S]o the tool for willing has two abilities which I term affectivities: one is for willing what is advantageous, the second for willing what is right. To be sure, the will's tool wills only what is either advantageous or right. For whatever else it wills, it does so in view of its usefulness or rightness, and even if it is mistaken, it deems itself to be willing what one does in relation to these two aims. Indeed when disposed to will their own advantage, people always will their gratification and a state of happiness. Whereas when disposed to will uprightness, they will their uprightness and a state of uprightness or justness. And in fact they will something on the grounds of its advantage, as when they will to plough or toil to insure the means to preserve their livelihood or health, which they regard as advantages. But they are disposed to will on the grounds of uprightness, for instance, when they will to learn by hard work to know rightly, that is, to live justly.

Anselm draws attention to the relationship between justice and righteousness—what is right and proper is just—and the benefits of happiness. *Affectiones* are interpreted as inclinations towards various subjects or types of motivation (King 2010, pp. 360–64) or—as Katherin Rogers (2001, p. 66) writes using Harry Frankfurt's terminology—respectively, as first and second order desires. According to Rogers, the desire is always aimed at benefit or happiness, albeit either rightly or wrongly, and wanting justice is wanting benefits rightly. Rogers therefore regards the desire for happiness as universal, contained both in *affectio commodi* and, consequently, in *affectio iustitiae*. Such an interpretation, not devoid of textual

foundations, does not radically oppose the inclination of the will, which allows us to avoid some of the difficulties that arise from it. However, it should be emphasized that according to Anselm, *affectio iustitiae*, being a desire to be righteous for its own sake, has the value of selflessness. As Anselm (1998b, chp. 12) writes:

> When the just man wills what he ought, he preserves rectitude of will for no other reason than to preserve it.

Thus, every rational being strives for happiness, but this happiness may have a different axiological values. Even if happiness is associated with the desire for justice as the ultimate goal, it is not a motive for just action. He also emphasizes that the propensity of the will to justice is characterized by a certain self-reference—it inclines to righteousness and, at the same time, it itself is moral righteousness.

Anselm describes the fall of angels using categories present in his concept of will. According to him, the angel fell because he followed *affectio commodi* and abandoned *affectio iustitiae*. Anselm (1998c, chp. 4) states that "the devil certainly could not have sinned by willing justice".

Following the will to desire justice or righteousness guarantees right and proper action, and the only cause of moral evil can be the will to gain happiness and advantage. Thus, an action worthy of praise flows from *affectio iustitiae*, while an action that deserves reproach is the consequence of succumbing to *affectio commodi*, when *affectio iustitiae* suggests a different action. Anselm, therefore, permits a conflict of both inclinations of the will when the desire for benefits is disordered, that is, it is opposed to what is right and righteous.

The fallen angel, choosing happiness in a disorderly manner, committed a moral evil, and therefore did not persist in justice and, as a consequence, lost his inclination towards it. The fallen angels' apostasy is final, and their inclination towards righteousness is not restored (Anselm 1998c, chp. 27).

In Anselm, we find the view of a libertarian will that looks for the causes of evil in the will itself. When Anselm ponders the ultimate reason for the angels' apostasy, he replies that it is their own will:

> Why does he will what he ought not?—[the student asks his master]. No cause precedes this will except that he can will (*non nisi quia voluit*). (Anselm 1998c, chp. 27)

Anselm emphasizes that it was the will that was the efficient cause of its act, an act that the subject should not have. The will, then, is capable of self-determination and, because of this capacity, can do moral evil. Anselm's doctrine is not only a psychological description of the action of the will, which is internally conflicting—it primarily draws attention to the conditions that must be met for the perpetrator to be subject to moral evaluation. As aptly noted by Tobias Hoffmann (2020, p. 15), "Anselm shows that Lucifer meets all the requirements for being a moral agent, and in doing so he clarifies the necessary conditions for moral responsibility in general". First of all, he shows how two subjects that have identical cognitive conditions can make completely different moral choices.

Medieval thinkers wondered what the evil angel wanted in his fall. Anselm's answer was complex. The devil wanted to be like God, but in a disorderly manner. However, according to the Anselmian concept of being able to think about God, one cannot think, of God, that something resembles Him (*nihil illi simile cogitari possit*). A cognitive subject, such as the devil, must have known that it is impossible not only to become like God, but even to think about it. Anselm (1998c, chp. 4) responds to this argument by explaining the nature of this similarity:

> Even if he did not will to be wholly equal to God, but something less than God against the will of God, by that very fact he inordinately willed to be like God, because he willed something by his own will, as subject to no one. It is for God alone thus to will something by his own will such that he follows no higher will.

Therefore, putting one's will above God's will can be interpreted as an attempt to become God and therefore to become like Him, albeit wrongly. For, according to Anselm, God establishes the right order (*rectus ordo*), so any willing that is inconsistent with the goal intended by God is wrong.

Analyzing the subject of the devil's desire, Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* (Aquinas 1962, I, q. 63, a. 1, resp.) admits that an angel may desire equality with God, yet not through equality as such, but through likeness, and specifically understood. For likeness can be of two kinds—according or not to what something is naturally disposed to. According to Aquinas, in the case of the fallen angel, the desire to become like God consisted in that, as the final goal, he desired either the happiness that he could attain by his own nature, diverting his desire from supernatural happiness, which is obtained by God's grace, or the happiness which flows from grace, but achieved by the strength of one's own nature, and not given by God's order. In both cases, the angel wanted to achieve ultimate happiness through his own efforts, which is possible only for God, so in this sense he wanted to be like God. The consequence of this desire was the desire for power over others, which is also a sign of being like God. Thomas distinguishes between two meanings of the expression "to be equal to God"—being identical and being similar. The identity of God and of any creature is contradictory, so the desire can only be for a specifically understood likeness.

Furthermore, John Duns Scotus, when asking if an angel could have desired equality with God, uses, in addition to the notions of the Anselmian tradition (*affectio commodi*, *affectio iusitiae*), two other concepts: desire and love of friendship. According to him, the will has two acts—the act of loving something with a friendly love and the act of desiring something loved—and the object of each of them can be the whole being, because, just as every being can be loved with the love of friendship, so can every being be desired for an object that is loved. From this, Scotus (2001, *Ordinatio* II, d. 6, q. 1, n. 10) draws the conclusion that an angel can love himself with the love of friendship and can covet all desirable good for himself, and, since being equal to God is a certain good desirable in itself, the angel may covet it for himself. Scotus assumes here that being equal to God is not something self-contradictory, because then it would not be possible for it to become an object of the will. Let us note that he does not analyze the problem of the non-contradiction of the angelic state of being, which is equal to being God, but the expression "being equal to God". It is non-contradictory in itself and can therefore be the object of a lustful love. Scotus, however, does not limit himself to saying that, if equality with God was possible for an angel, he could desire it for himself—according to him, impossible things may also become the object of the will (2001, *Ordinatio* II, d. 6, q. 1, n. 11).

The desire of a depraved (sinful) will can, therefore, according to Scotus, refer to the impossible. Duns strengthens his position by analyzing the concept of hate. As he writes, those damned by their will hate God forever. What, then, is hate? According to Aristotle (2007, vol. 1382a, 15, p. 128), hatred is the desire for the hated object not to exist. Therefore, the damned want God not to exist. According to Scotus (2001, *Ordinatio* II, d. 6, q. 1, n. 12–13), this is impossible and inconsistent in itself (because God is a necessary being); the impossibility of such an object of desire does not therefore preclude the sinful will from desiring it. Since the sinful will may wish God not to exist, it may also wish that such perfection as appertains to God be in some other being—be it the angel or something else. Thus, a fallen angel may want for himself perfection equal to that of God.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analyses. It seems that the key element of morally good behavior in Scotus's ethics is the principle of order, expressed, among other things, in the inclination of the will to justice. When the will is guided by this inclination, the action of the moral subject is right, because justice related to what is right and righteous is preserved. Scotus follows Augustine's definition of perversion as a kind of reversal of order: the perverse will loves the means that should lead to God as ends, i.e., as goods in themselves, and treats God as a means leading to another end. The devil's will would be the expression of a final reversal and disorder in which the perverse desire of the

will is expressed not only in the inversion of means and ends, but also in going beyond the limits of what is possible through the desire for the impossible.

Such perversion is absolute, for the impossibility of God's non-existence is an absolute impossibility—while other beings may be impossible only due to specific circumstances, non-existence is absolutely contrary to God's nature. In a sense, the absolutely perverse will, by crossing the boundaries of what is possible, reverses the order of being and good. Although it seems that the desire for God's non-existence is simply impossible, in the case of a sinful, bad will, it becomes possible. The devilish will, through an act of perverse willing, carries out, on a volitional (not metaphysical, when it is not possible) level, a reversal of the ontic order, desiring the non-existence of Being that is Being in the strongest sense. It also reverses the order in the will, abandoning the act of love, which it ought to have for the highest being, for the act of hatred.

Ultimately, Scotus interprets the fall of angels as a series of acts of will, the first of which was their immoderate love for themselves, and the last and greatest sin the hatred of God—for as long as God existed, the evil angel could not have what he wanted. As he says, it can be assumed that the evil angel wanted a certain good for himself, namely superiority to others. Either he had a disordered nilling (*nolle*)—he did not want happiness for himself to a lesser degree than it exists in God himself—or he did not want to wait for happiness any longer, or he did not want to achieve it by merit, but by himself. As a consequence, he had a nilling of being subordinate to God, and finally a nilling of the existence of God (Scotus 2001, *Ordinatio* II, d. 6, q. 1, n. 63).

4. Primary Concept of Morality

The following conclusions from the above descriptions of the activities of extra-biological persons are of interest to our considerations. Creatures that are not subject to biological conditions and biological evolution can be moral agents, and their actions are subject to moral evaluation in terms of good and evil. The necessary conditions for being a moral being are intellectual cognition and free will.

Free will is a power capable of self-determination and the production of various types of volitional acts, e.g., willing, nilling, love, and hate, both of the first and second order. These acts are understood as acts of an autonomous subject. It is the perpetrator who is their author in a significant sense, that is, who generates them independently of any causes other than himself. The will by which he can implement them is indeterministic, because the quality of the perpetrator's volitional acts is determined neither by external causes nor by his cognitive resources. Therefore, two spiritual entities (the fallen angel and the good angel) are able to issue opposite acts having the same knowledge. The choice made by the fallen angel is an internal action; therefore, the choice itself originally, not external actions, is subject to moral evaluation.

Perhaps, as Anselm or John Duns Scotus wanted, two inclinations must belong to free will: inclination to happiness and inclination to justice. It is worth emphasizing that this intuition is, philosophically, extremely valuable: freedom of the will cannot be realized in a valuable way, only at the level of a natural drive that leads to happiness, but only at the level of just will that controls this drive. Free will is capable of acting justly, but it does not necessarily have to do so.

With regard to research on morality carried out from an evolutionary perspective, it should be emphasized that the situation of the fall of angels represents a moral evil whose accomplishment is in no way related to the possession of emotions; it takes place outside the context of such concepts, as aggression or empathy. Moreover, in their case, moral evil takes place outside any social context. The volitional acts of the fallen angel are directed towards God, but it is difficult to talk about a social group in this context, because they are individuals from different ontic levels. The angel's choice does not cause any effect that would affect God—the angel's decision realizes an intrinsic value in the person who made the decision. Thus, the essence of morality is realized in the relation between the very act of will and what this act should rightly carry out. The act of will is moral as long

as, irrespective of anything else (affects, external motives, and biological mechanisms), it chooses or rejects that which is right.

Apart from the fact that the angel is in a certain relationship with God through his volitional acts, the decision faced by the angel does not in any sense aim at the good or the bad of the group as such. The decision also does not fulfill any biological goals—the concepts of adaptation or survival do not constitute criteria for assessing the moral value of this decision. Morality, then, cannot be reduced to such phenomena as survival, evolution, and development of the group as such.

Since we assume that the fundamental meaning of morality must be the same with respect to human and angelic individuals (or any created non-human individual), the conditions for being a moral subject should be the same for every being subject to moral evaluation. The analysis of the paradigmatic choice, which was the fall of the angel, shows the necessary conditions for being a moral subject, and consequently allows the specification of the original concept of morality. The essential concept of morality must apply to both biological and non-biological beings, and is therefore a transbiological concept.

5. Conclusions

The modal argument, based on the possibility of the existence of such entities as angels, was intended to show that morality cannot, perforce, be defined in evolutionary terms, since it can also apply to the being and activities of extra-biological individuals. In order for such individuals to be subject to moral evaluation, the definition of morality cannot include biological and evolutionary concepts. Otherwise, (hypothetical) spirit beings would not be able to identify themselves as moral beings, think of themselves in moral terms, or act morally.

In human moral action, it is possible to pursue biological and evolutionary goals; however, it does not follow that the essence of morality can be reduced to the mechanisms of realizing these goals. The philosophical concept of morality cannot exclude the possibility of a moral evaluation of any possible entities capable of moral actions. Morality must be something that can be realized by every moral creature, both biological and non-biological; the essence of morality is therefore the conformity of the act of the will itself with what is morally right or wrong.

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Will Cyborgs Ever Be Humans in the Image and Likeness of God?

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Abstract: Advances in technology and genetic engineering have rekindled the hopes of some communities for human immortality on earth. Projects aimed at copying the human brain for the purpose of enabling humans to achieve "cybernetic eternity" are emerging. From the perspective of Christian anthropology, it is advisable to ask the following question: is a cyborg a human being in the image of God? It boils down to the criteria for being in the image of God. The first of these is creativity, understood as the actualized relationship of the human with their Creator. For the human is not a product of even the most brilliant minds and technologies, but a creature for whom a personal relationship with the Persons of the Holy Trinity is constitutive in nature.

Keywords: Creator; creation; image of God; body; soul; eternal life; personal relationship; cyborg

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1. Introduction

Future technological development will allow human beings to gain immortality on earth, according to futurologist Dr. Ian Pearson. This will be achieved by copying the human mind and moving it into a cloud storage (Osiński 2018, 2021). Thus, such a copied mind will live eternally in digital form, able to inhabit the body of any cyborg. Dr. Pearson presumes that the result will not just be software, but a living, although digital, person. In contrast, Yuval Noah Harari, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, claims that with the latest technologies and genetic engineering, humans will undergo evolution. Hence, they will become more powerful, live much longer, and even be immortal (Harari 2017). In the next 200 years the rich will become cyborgs because of the gradual integration of natural and artificial components. It may sound like a science fiction movie script, but Professor Harari seems to be serious in his statements. In his opinion, humanity will develop to such an extent that it will eventually overcome death with its own powers.

For quite some time, there has been ongoing work in the field of technology ensuring longevity and aiming toward the implantation of human consciousness into a machine. Thus, the Russian billionaire, Dmitry Itskov, is trying to achieve immortality by becoming an android and wants to accomplish this by 2045. The famous scientist Stephen Hawking (d. 2018) believed that the project is perfectly feasible. Ben Goertzel, a Doctor of Mathematics who is one of the leading architects in the field of artificial intelligence, also dreams of human-made immortality. In cooperation with David Hanson of Hong Kong, he has constructed the social humanoid robot "Sophia"—a fembot, that is, a female-like robot that was granted citizenship in Saudi Arabia in late 2018. Goertzel is currently working on the software for a humanoid robot that is intended to register the memories, opinions, and beliefs of Bina Rothblatt. The aim is to "capture" the human spirit and perpetuate it so that it can function after the death of its "prototype" (Wirtwein and Przegalińska 2019).

According to Professor Harari, "we no longer need God, but technology." For him, from a religious point of view, Silicon Valley is the most interesting place on earth, for scientists are there developing a "techno-religion." In his opinion, new technologies will turn humans into cyborgs and equip them with immortality (García-Barranquero 2021, p. 179).

Is that really the case? Is a cyborg that is in line with the understanding of Christian anthropology—according to the encyclopedic definition derived from literature and science fiction movies: a human being or an animal whose particular organs have been replaced by technical devices, or a robot that looks like a human or a living organism enhanced by mechanical devices—indeed a human being?

This article endeavors to look at these futuristic predictions from the standpoint of Christian anthropology. Looking to the future, will it be possible for a cyborg to actually become a human being made in the image of God? Does artificial intelligence—and not Jesus Christ—have the ability to provide humans with immortality?

2. From Homo Sapiens to Homo Cyborg?

The case of Peter Scott-Morgan testifies to the incredible possibilities opened up to humans by the development of the latest technologies. This British scientist was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. In spite of that, he is not about to give up.

This is where he resembles Stephen Hawking—a brilliant astrophysicist who was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis at the age of 21. Doctors gave him a maximum of 2–3 years to live. Owing to the application of modern scientific discoveries, Hawking lived over 50 years. The same applies to Scott-Morgan, who uses state-of-the-art technology to sustain life and treats his body as a testing ground (Kowalski 2020). After the disease was discovered in 2017, doctors predicted he would live only a few months. The year is now 2021 and he is still alive. In 2020, he was featured in the Channel 4 documentary *Peter: The Human Cyborg*. He met Hawking only once, but that was enough for him to seize the genius' rule: "always think about what you can do, not what you cannot do." He wants to become part machine and part wetware. This term is used to describe those elements of computer hardware and software that can be linked to biological life forms, such as humans. In collaboration with the world of science, Scott-Morgan is working on the improvement of his senses. In the future, his entire exterior is to be electronic and regularly upgraded. Scott-Morgan has become an advocate of the idea that it is a fundamental human right to live in the form in which one wishes to exist—whoever they are, regardless of their origin, circumstances, or ambitions (Zagórna 2020).

Scott-Morgan wants—with the help of scientists and the latest technologies—to transform himself into Peter 2.0—a cyborg. By cyborg, he means the most advanced human cybernetic organism that has ever been created in the 13.8 billion years of human existence. Almost everything in it will be irreversibly changed—body and brain. The physical interaction with the world will become robotic. The five senses will be enhanced. Part of the brain and external personality will become electronic, which will be partly hardware and partly software (Sikorski 2019). As he stresses, the motto guiding him in this is: "I am not dying, I am transforming." Because of technology, he is able—in overcoming pathological changes—to speak and express his emotions. The number of modifications he has already made is impressive. A specific exoskeleton allows him to stand on his feet, and in the future, it is even expected to enable movement. His brain is directly connected to the computer. His paralyzed face is to be replaced by a hyper-realistic avatar that will not only "speak" but also express emotions in parallel. Lama Nachman, director of Anticipatory Computing at Intel Labs, is working on solving the problem of interpersonal communication.

In May 2019, Peter Scott-Morgan said, "I will continue to evolve, dying as a human, living as a cyborg" (Zagórna 2020). He is Peter 2.0, an entity that exists physically—and *online*. It is a living organism permanently fused with a machine and artificial intelligence—not to acquire superhuman abilities, but to overcome the limitations caused by disease. Some people say that, if Scott-Morgan succeeds, modern technologies will be able to help the sick and paralyzed, and this gives enormous hope to people from all over the world (Kowalski 2020).

At the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) 2020, the Samsung-related company STAR Labs unveiled a prototype of an artificial human identified as NEON. Perfection is still a long way off, but the idea is under constant refinement. The intention of Pranav Mistry,

head of STAR Labs, is for NEON to become "an independent yet virtual being, that can show emotions and learn from experiences." NEON is meant to be a virtual companion with whom a human can build shared experiences and memories (Florencka 2020).

3. Is a Cyborg a Person?

As for the main topic, it appears necessary to answer the question of the personal status of the creation that has become the work of the latest technologies (Szopa 2021, pp. 198–202). Raymond Kurzweil tries to explain the viewed developments. In his opinion, the process of evolution has gradually accelerated. According to the scientist, this has resulted in an increasingly sophisticated way of recording and handling information, which in turn leads to the fact that innovations created by evolution are stimulating and enable even faster progress (Kurzweil 2013, p. 53; Hołub 2015, pp. 83–94). Kurzweil is not alone in this, for a similar belief that humans will become cyborgs at some stage of their development is proclaimed by Hans Moravec (Moravec 1999) and Kevin Warwick (Warwick 2004). According to Julian Savulescu of Oxford University, transferring the contents of human minds to systems characterized by artificial intelligence represents one of the most advanced capabilities of human development (Savulescu 2009). Kurzweil believes that

> "every form of human knowledge and artistic expression—scientific and engineering ideas and designs, literature, music, photographs, movies—can be expressed through digital information. . . . Human brains work digitally as well, by a discrete stimulation of neurons. The networks of our interneuron connections can be described digitally, and the structure of our brains is determined by a surprisingly short digital genetic code" (Kurzweil 2013, p. 86).

He sees the possibility of scanning the human brain and copying it. This process—in line with his thought—could capture a person's entire personality, memory, skills, and history. To try "uploading" human patterns into a suitable non-biological substrate could be one way of gaining control of human intelligence (Kurzweil 2013, p. 370). What Kurzweil has in mind here is the posthuman existence, some form of natural existence. The vision of overcoming biology and replacing it with artificial products of technology places the human being in a one-dimensional reality of the physical and the biological (over time—postbiological).

The solutions proposed are internally contradictory, according to Brent Waters. In order to accomplish the potentiality of the human, it is suggested to destroy the body, which, after all, makes a human being human. Thereby, despite all the rhetoric on improving bodily functions, the project is driven by an attitude of resentment toward human corporeality (Waters 2010).

Hence arises the question: does the information obtained from scanning neurons contain data on the psychological and personality properties of a person? In line with Grzegorz Hołub, the emergent self is more than just the sum of the properties of the structures that created it. Moreover, "scanning the very structures of the brain and nervous system, understood as microstructures, does not lead to the knowledge about certain properties which constitute it at macro level" (Hołub 2015, p. 89). In this regard, Bruce Tonn inquired about psychological motivations and the collective unconscious (Tonn 2011, pp. 25–34).

Who is a human as a person in light of the proposed solutions? Grzegorz Hołub defines this concept a "bundle" (Hołub 2015, p. 90; Hołub 2010, pp. 207–10). The person appears as a bundle of information, a bundle of higher mental properties. This understanding often emerges in bioethical debates and is referred to as the naturalistic concept of the person (Walters 1997). Personism is another name for it, under which killing a human being may be permissible, but killing a person understood as an existence with moral status is unacceptable. This, however, is determined by the possession of personal properties characteristic of a maturely developed personality (awareness, self-awareness, ability to

enter into relationships). Peter Singer and Michael Tooley are equated with these views on personalism (Hołub 2005, p. 189).

Ray Kurzweil raises a question as well, with regard to the identity of the posthuman person—Will Dmitry Itskow be the same person after having his brain scanned? The problem is addressed, among others, by Derek Parfit in his book *Reasons and Persons* (Parfit 1984, 2021). According to Kurzweil, the copy of a given person, although it may look and function like the original, no longer meets the criterion of personal identity. "Thus, the scanning and transmission of a person is not a form of radical life extension," Hołub concludes (Hołub 2015, p. 91). Kurzweil states that copying the brain and destroying the original indicates the end of the person. Despite the fact that a copy holds the capability of convincingly embodying the original, it does not constitute a continuation of its existence (Kurzweil 2013, p. 371).

This standpoint is inconvenient for a movement whose main goal is to transcend the barriers of biology, that is, to enable the human's gradual independence from natural limitations. At best, one can speak of prolonging the existence of the bundle of information reflecting a given personality. Still—as Hołub points out—the bundle itself is not a person. As a result, "the idea of person uploading means at most the multiplication (proliferation) of some set of information" (Hołub 2015, p. 91). Kurzweil considers that scanning does not allow for the transfer of a person's subjective awareness. He perceives the problem in relation to the consciousness associated with abstract thinking, which, for example, functions in the creation of mathematics or philosophy, but he fails to identify the place of this important type of awareness in the project of posthuman existence that he is developing. However, according to Hołub, this clearly weakens his reflection and the strength of justification for the propositions put forward (Hołub 2015, p. 93).

4. Elements That Constitute the Human Being

From the context above, it seems appropriate to ask the question—with reference to theological anthropology, where the "object," meaning the human, is read in the light of the Divine Revelation—about human essence, that is, what actually makes a human being a human? (Napiórkowski 2002, p. 79). Benedict XVI emphasizes that it is necessary to "start again from God" in order to restore to the human "all his dimensions and full dignity". In the constitution *Gaudium et spes*, the Second Vatican Council pointed to the fundamental principle of Christian anthropology: "The Bible teaches that man was created 'in the image of God'" (Gaudium et Spes, n. 12; Scanziani 2007, pp. 633–52). This truth is stressed by Cardinal Chistoph Schönborn when he claims that "in the concept of God's image, the Council found the 'leitmotif' of the Church's teaching about man" (Schönborn 2008, p. 49; Delhaye 1967, pp. 159–60). John Paul II pointed to the importance of the theology of *imago Dei*: "Man is in the heart of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit from the very beginning. Was he not created in the image and likeness of God? Apart from God man does not 'make any sense'. Man 'makes sense' in the world only as an image and likeness of God. Otherwise one would have to say, as indeed some have done, that man is 'a useless passion'" (Paul 1998, p. 702). The human being—as we read in the Book of Genesis—was created "in the image of God" (*imago Dei*) (cf. Gen. 1:26–27; 5:1). God is reflected in the whole human person. The Polish dogmatist Czesław Bartnik stresses, that "being 'God's Icon' is the most perfect, supernatural genealogy of man and establishes a personal connection with his 'source'" (Bartnik 2000, p. 307). Therefore, as "the image of God," he or she can be God's "associate," engage in dialogue with God, and enter into communion with Him" (Bartnik 2000, p. 307; Pontificia Commissione Biblica 2019, no. 45–68).

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, raised the human being as the image of God to the level of salvation. The redemption accomplished by Him is the renewal of the image of God in the human. In Jesus Christ as the "radiance of the Father's glory" (Heb. 1:3) and "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15; cf. John 12:45; 14:9), mankind has received the fullness of God's image—which in the human is not a static reality, but a dynamic one, open to complementation. Human persons are called and enabled by the grace of

God to conform themselves ever more through holiness, love, and personal communion to the divine image of Jesus Christ, and on the path of Christian life the process of this divinization takes place. The dynamic of God's iconicity is completed when humans perfect themselves, sanctify, acquire values, fight sin, and deepen their communion with the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity (Bartnik 2000, p. 310).

> "The truth is that—as Vaticanum Secundum teaches—only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. ... Christ fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. ... For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin" (Pastoral 1965, n. 22; Agresti 1979, p. 13; Schindler 1996, pp. 156–84; Kasper 1996, pp. 129–41; Rowland 2010, p. 65; Delhaye 1967, p. 163).

The Catechism accentuates that "the human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual ... Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God ... The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the 'form' of the body. That is, because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature" (Catechism 1993, nn. 362–65).

With regard to the aforementioned substantial aspects of being *imago Dei*, it is worth confronting the position of Christian anthropology with the features of a being produced by modern technology. Does a cyborg comply with the aforesaid features of *imago Dei*?

(a) Creativity—the Relationship between the Human and God the Creator

Gerhard Müller points out in *Katholische Dogmatik*—after Genesis 1:27; 2:7—that the human being is a creation of God. Creativity means that in the whole reality of humans, their existence, and the realization of their spiritual-bodily being, the transcendental relation to God the Creator as the beginning and end is exclusively and fully constituted. It is not about the cosmological beginning of the world, the material conditions of the evolutionary and genetic origin of humans as a species and individuals, nor their transience and insignificance or the experience of human fragility and helplessness in the face of the laws of nature and impermanence (Müller 2014, p. 111; 2015, p. 143).

Creativity defines everything that humans experience—thanks to the will of God—as being existentially different from God but allowing them to realize themselves in relation to the Creator (Roszak 2018). It is understood not only as the first cause, but also as the principle (*arch*e) of the human being. This constitutive reference allows human persons to read themselves as relational beings. Because of relational identity, humans understand themselves as persons, that is, beings unconditionally endowed with autonomy, subsistence. By owning themselves, humans are able to freely dispose of themselves, enter into personal (free and conscious) relationships with others, and identify themselves with them in love (relationality, transcendence of self). Vaticanum Secundum teaches, that "by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential" (Pastoral 1965, n. 12). Humans can then actualize their transcendental relationship with the Creator in the history of salvation. Furthermore, they may also adopt an attitude of adoration, obedience, thanksgiving, and love toward God, not as humiliating dependence and immaturity (as atheism alleges), but as harmonizing with God's personal love for the human in holiness, justice, grace, justification, and forgiveness of sins. A relationship thus understood makes a partnership built on dialogue and personal communication between the created human being and their Creator possible. Second Vatican Council stated that through the gift of the Holy Spirit "man is called to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by Gods love and constantly preserved by it; and he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love

and devotes himself to His Creator" (Pastoral 1965, n. 19). "The constitution of man as a creature endowed with spirit and freedom reveals him as a living being who, by its very principle and always, can be either a 'hearer of the word' or the recipient of God's useful free action in history" (Müller 2014, p. 112; 2015, p. 143).

The image of God (*imago Dei*) is in humans, by its very nature, directed toward completion. This urges the human to become an even greater, aware, and active image of God. To this end, it is necessary for the human to constantly learn, ponder, and contemplate the mystery of the personal life of the Persons in the Holy Trinity. Cardinal Angelo Scola links the truth about the iconicity of the human with the sonship of God. Integrating anthropology with Christology allows us to grasp the fullness of what is human in the humanity of the Son of God (Balthasar 2004, pp. 23–42; Bettega 2007, pp. 19–21; Colzani 2003, p. 496; Bordoni 1982, p. 213). "What the Old Testament reveals as a special nature, which the human being created by God receives by virtue of its unique reference to God, is fully realized as a sonship in the event of Jesus Christ. Man is a creation intended to live as a son of God—in accordance with the form of the Only Begotten Son, who is Jesus Christ" (Scola 2005, pp. 156–57).

(b) Corpore et anima unus—"One Body and Soul"

The biblical account of the calling of humans into existence indicates that, as beings created by God, they are both corporeal and spiritual beings. The material element is referred to by the Hebrew *baśar* or the Greek *sarx*, *soma*. The noun *baśar* is derived from the verb create (*bara*) and signifies, in the biblical sense, the whole person—for the Bible takes a holistic view of the human person. When Christians speaks of the human, they cannot fail to include the "soul" or "spirit" (Sacred 1979). The Bible and Christian tradition mainly employ two terms: soul—*nephesh*, *psyche*, *anima*, and spirit—*ruah*, *pneuma, spirytus*. The soul is a "living being" (*nephesh hajjah*), "breath of life" (*nishmā hajjim*), "mental life," and a sensual soul (cf. Gen. 1:30; 2:7). While "Spirit," on the other hand, has "wind," "breath" and "breath of the inner life" at its core. In the biblical context it most often reflects cognition, intellect, understanding, judgment, and dynamism of the will and emotions. At present, the term "person" (*faneh, panim, prosopon, hipostasis, persona*) enters the picture. It signifies, first of all, the whole human, but seems to be used to render the spiritual world of the human being, that is, as a synonym for "soul" (Bartnik 2000, pp. 380–89). The Catechism of the Catholic Church concludes, that "the term soul often means human life in Scripture (Matt. 16:25–26; John 15:13) or the whole human person (Acts 2:41). It also signifies everything that is innermost (Matt. 26:38; John 12:27) and most valuable in a human (Matt. 10:28; 2 Macc. 6:30); that which makes the human in a special way the image of God: 'soul' signifies the spiritual principle in man" (Catechism 1993, n. 363; Berry 2017, pp. 96–103).

From the perspective of Christian anthropology, the human being is both "body and soul." Neither the body itself nor the soul itself is a human. This standpoint—as Saša Horvat notes—is referred to as the Aristotelian–Thomistic hylomorphism (Horvat 2017, p. 141). The soul is the only substantial form of the body. Christian anthropology considers the beginning of human existence to be the moment of union of the immortal soul, given by God, with the body transferred in the act of coexistence of the spouses. The joining of the immortal soul and the mortal body has a substantial nature, and therefore constitutes the human.

What is the significance of this in relation to the constitution of a human–cyborg? Is it possible for the human soul to be reduced to the level of a bundle of information that can be scanned into a computer to ensure human immortality? From a Thomistic viewpoint—according to the philosopher Jörgen Vijgen—cognitive attempts to reduce the soul to a materialistically understood brain are not justified. The soul and the brain are not and cannot be an alternative to the concept of St. Thomas Aquinas. The soul, body, and brain are not autonomous elements constituting a human being. They are metaphysical components of a complete being—the human being. In the light of Thomistic hylomorphism, the actuality of the body (matter) is derived from the soul (form), which

is the principle of life activity and substantial unity. In the Thomistic way of looking at it, the soul is not a neuroscientific concept, but a metaphysical and anthropological reality that cannot be reduced to a naturalistically understood bundle of scannable information (Vijgen 2017, p. 77).

In search of an answer to the question: what is a human?—the aforementioned Croatian philosopher Saša Horvat attempts an interdisciplinary collaboration of neural sciences with Christian philosophy and theology, which gives rise to the following questions: are we witnessing the possibility of overcoming the concept of the soul through neurological brain research? Do the fascinating neural structures reveal the whole truth about the human? Firstly, he notes that neural sciences do not recognize the concept of the human being as a unity of soul and body. He concludes that the contemporary paradigm of human studies is based on physicalism, while theologians turn to non-reductive physicalism (Horvat 2017, p. 128; Kim 1995; Horvat and Roszak 2020). According to Aquinas, because of the soul, which is the "substantial form of the body," human beings are distinguished from other created beings by their ability to establish personal relationships and become familiar with everything that surrounds them. In Joseph Ratzinger's account of the dialogicality of the human being, some see an opportunity for a dialogue between Christian anthropology and contemporary neuroscience. "The concept of dialogical soul can become a very fruitful platform for discussion between representatives of different sciences. The analogies with the achievements of modern neuroscience are quite strong and a universal language of dialogue needs to be elaborated to find common points and lead to the identification of issues and common content" (Szetela and Osiński 2017).

Joseph Ratzinger highlights in *anima*—understood as the substantial form of the body—that the human, on one hand, belongs entirely to the material world, while on the other, transcends this world. "The material world comes to itself precisely because *anima* in the human reaches out to God" (Ratzinger 2014, p. 154). Humans are constituted in a relationship that conditions their immortality. They are creatures whose "essence includes the ability to see God (i.e., the capacity to know the truth in a broad sense) and thus the possibility of participating in life" (Ratzinger 2014, p. 155). The soul, enabling the openness of human existence on God "is not merely some addition to his as if independently existing being, but constitutes the greatest depth of the human being" (Ratzinger 2014, p. 155).

(c) Eternal Life as a Consequence of the Relationship between the Human Being and the Risen Christ

Joseph Ratzinger links the immortality of the whole human being with the openness toward the relationship with the Divine Persons (Gallardo Gonzalez and Elena 2020). It is inherent in the human but is ultimately the consequence of creation by God the Creator. This endowment—Joseph Pieper states—constitutes the creature such that what has been given to it truly becomes its share (Pieper 1968, p. 96). However, a serious difficulty arises here. The criteria of purely human knowledge, as Ratzinger notes, proves to be inadequate. From their perspective, one can only intuitively extrapolate that a future life does exist (Ratzinger 2014, p. 160). But is "cybernetic immortality," by transferring a scanned human mind to a super-intelligent computer, eternal life in the sense of Christian anthropology?—wonders Emilio Justo (Justo 2019, p. 235). In his view, this implies a neurological reduction of the human being. Humans are identified with what their brains do (Justo 2019, p. 236). The questions arise: what about the personal identity of a human being since transhumanists themselves admit that a scanned brain is a copy? "The bundle itself is not a person" (Hołub 2015, pp. 91–92; Hołub 2020, p. 211; Kurzweil 2013, p. 376). Is a cyborg able to build interpersonal relations?

According to the optics of Christian anthropology, eternal life signifies a complete participation in the life of the risen Jesus Christ. It is an involvement in the relationships of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, an experience of giving and receiving (Ladaria 2009, pp. 438–44; Ladaria 2011, pp. 155–56). It begins with the reception of the sacrament of baptism (cf. Rom. 6:4–11) and will reach its fullness in the eschatological era. It is the full transformation of the human into the image of the risen Christ and, as a gift of the grace of

God, a partaking in His life. It is not narrowed down to a selection of few but applies to every person in all aspects of being. Human immortality is therefore not possible without participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ or without the Holy Spirit that the risen Jesus communicates to people (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44–49). There is no eternal life without being conformed to Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ratzinger emphasizes: "although the human body is constantly 'subject to destruction', man remains one whole person moving toward eternity, maturing in bodily life to see God face to face" (Ratzinger 2014, p. 158). The resurrection of the body presupposes the full identity of the human and the possibility of unrestricted communication with the Divine Persons and other people (Tryścień 2017, pp. 121–25). It is in the resurrection and through the work of the Holy Spirit that the human's personal being reaches the summit of its possibilities. Theology defines it the state of *visio beatifica*—seeing God face to face (Roszak and Huzarek 2019). Aquinas speaks of a perfect union and vision that is equally a happy community (*communio*) of all the saved, an experience of complete love and joy, and attendance in the life of the Trinity that embraces the whole person (Ladaria 2011, pp. 151–55). Initiated at baptism, the whole-person relationship of the human with the Divine Persons in the Church leads them out of isolation toward true unity with the Holy Trinity, other saved persons, and all creation (Ratzinger 2014, p. 159).

5. Conclusions

Humans are beings who experience the truth that "God created man incorruptible, and to the image of his own likeness he made him" (Wis. 2:23). They carry a longing for permanence and immortality, and they make many efforts to prolong their existence. Therefore, it is not surprising if one becomes excited about the latest developments in technology that seem to offer such opportunities. This is quite typical of naturalistically reduced anthropology. The triumph of information technology ignites the imagination and raises expectations that the most pertinent anthropological questions will be resolved with the help of information and technological advances. Essentially, the "bundle concept of the person" does not make it possible to grasp the specificity that is determined by the inner life of the human person and their relationship to the Persons of the Holy Trinity. We are thus dealing with some type of quasi-personal existence, being a function of natural processes and phenomena, in which the ontic content of a person is not perceived: independence, reason, the ability to self-determination and the constitution of the individual nature (Szulakiewicz 2006, pp. 229–30).

Human beings—according to theological anthropology—are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). As such, they exist in a unique and personal relationship with the Divine Persons. *Imago Dei* in the human is inherently directed toward the completion of knowing, exploring, and penetrating the mystery of the personal life of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Human persons find the fullness of what is human in the humanity of Jesus Christ. They are intended to live like the incarnate Son of God. There is no way a human being can be reduced to a laboratory-constructed cyborg controlled by a supercomputer (Kull 2016).

The biblical account of the calling of human beings into existence presents them as a unity of soul and body. Modern anthropologists like to refer to them as persons (Colen and Vecchio 2021). From the perspective of Christian anthropology, the human is "body and soul" (Oleksowicz 2018). Neither the body itself nor the soul itself is a human. The soul is the substantial form of the body. Furthermore, the body–soul relationship is not accidental, but substantial. The soul cannot be reduced to a bundle of information that can be scanned or copied. As the transhumanists acknowledge, there can be no personal identity between the copy and the original. Moreover, the soul, body, and brain are not autonomous elements constituting a human being but are metaphysical components of a complete being—a human being. The soul enables the human's openness to God and represents the greatest depth of the human being.

The immortality of the whole human being is determined by the constitution of humans in their openness to God and others. From the standpoint of specific sciences,

without recourse to the Revelation of God it can only be assumed that a future life exists. In the sense of Christian anthropology, "cybernetic immortality" is not equivalent to eternal life. True immortality of the human is only possible through the *Passover* with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a full participation in the life of the risen Jesus Christ. This life is initiated in the human by sacramental baptism, it grows through a vital relationship with the Divine Persons to reach its fullness in the eschatological times. The resurrection of the body presupposes the full identity of the human and the possibility of unrestricted communication with the Divine Persons and other people. The whole-person relationship with the Holy Trinity in the Church brings humans into the deepest communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity, other saved persons, and all creation. It is therefore a completely different reality from the technological extension of human existence in the temporal dimension.

The aspects indicated are shared by the human being created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). It is difficult to look for these realities in a laboratory creation such as a cyborg or humanoid android. Technological progress makes it possible to support human life in many dimensions or to make up for the human body's deficiencies resulting from illness. It is a great accomplishment of human genius and the power of science. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of theological anthropology, a cyborg cannot be identified with a human being created in the image of God.

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Contingency, Free Will, and Particular Providence

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Abstract: The results from contemporary science, especially the theory of evolution and quantum physics, seem to favor process theology. Moreover, the evil committed by free will leads some theologians to reduce divine action in order to prevent God from being responsible for evil. Thus, among those who defend a particular providence, Molinism finds many followers. This article first argues that contemporary science does not constrain us to deny particular providence. Second, it criticizes the implicitly deterministic character of Molinism. Thirdly, a Thomistic solution is proposed as an alternative which, by means of a different metaphysical approach to cosmic contingency and freedom of will, defends particular providence without reducing divine activity except in personal sins.

Keywords: determinism; Molinism; Aquinas; Francisco Suárez

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1. Introduction

On a touching dialogue in *Crime and Punishment* by F. Dostoevsky, a disbelieving Raskolnikov proves the faith of Sonya, a humble young woman who has been forced to prostitute herself to support her miserable family, with these piercing questions:

> "'So you pray a great deal to God, Sonya?' he asked her.
>
> Sonya said nothing. He stood and waited for her answer.
>
> 'What should I do without God?' she said in a rapid, forceful whisper, glancing at him for a moment out of suddenly flashing eyes, and pressing his hand with hers.
>
> 'Well, there is it!' he thought.
>
> 'And what does God do for you in return?' he asked, probing deeper.
>
> Sonya was silent for a long time, as though unable to answer. Her flat little chest heaved with agitation.
>
> 'Be quiet! Do not ask! You are not worthy!' she exclaimed suddenly, looking at him severely and indignantly.
>
> 'That's it, that's it!' he repeated to himself, insistently.
>
> 'He does everything', she said in a rapid whisper, her eyes again downcast".
>
> Dostoevsky (1998, p. 311)

Sonya could very well be counted among the people "abandoned by God". Motherless, with a drunken father, turned into brothel fodder to support her siblings . . . Yet she puts herself in God's hands and abandons herself to His providence. Dostoevsky presents her to us as an icon of traditional faith who, despite her tremendous weakness, through her love defeats the pretended *Übermensch* represented by Raskolnikov, the man who relies only on his own energy.

My purpose in these pages is to take into consideration the thesis of particular providence defended by classical theism here personified by Sonia: "God does everything". All events in human life, whether originated by unconscious nature or produced by free persons, can be referred back to God in one way or another.

To do this, I will start first with the view of divine providence put forward by process theology, an approach that seems to have the results of contemporary science in its favor. Secondly, I will look at Molinism, which, despite presenting itself as a form of classical theism safeguarding free will in the best possible way, actually contains certain deterministic factors fatal for it. Thirdly, I will present a Thomistic alternative to this system. My point is that the Thomistic theology, while attributing to God omniscience and an infallible will, safeguards freedom and contingency better than Molinism.

2. Indeterminism and God's Impotence

The idea of a particular providence could contrast with the scientific worldview of contemporary man, who could look with disdain on the simple confession of faith that Dostoevsky puts on Sonya's lips. Of course, events being traceable back to natural causes, conscious or not, has never been a problem for the notion of providence sustained by classical theism. However, the various advances in the sciences motivate the revision of traditional approaches to the subordination of causes to God. For example, some understand that quantum mechanics would mean a contribution to the debate between determinism and indeterminism. However, although at first glance quantum mechanics would seem to favor an indeterministic position, further reflection indicates that it can be integrated into both a deterministic and an indeterministic framework:

> "It is a matter for metaphysical decision which of these alternatives is to be chosen, a point made clearly enough by the existence of both an indeterministic interpretation (Niels Bohr) and a deterministic interpretation (David Bohm) of quantum theory, each having the same empirical adequacy in relation to experimental results, so that physics by itself cannot settle the issue between them".
>
> Polkinghorne (2005, p. xi)

As Polkinghorne attests, the debate is not on the playing field of physics, but is still situated in the realm of metaphysics. Among the ontological reasons to prefer indeterminism, free will stands out. Indeterminism is presented as enjoying the advantage of "making room" for freedom. Only in a world susceptible of different future states of affairs, it would be possible for a free agent to bring about varied results for his actions. In an indeterministic cosmos, however, providence should necessarily be weaker. Thus, Whitehead's process philosophy, partly inspired by quantum mechanics (Epperson 2004), leans toward a certain indeterminism. Accordingly, his disciple Hartshorne (1958) argues that free will requires causal indeterminism, and Whitehead himself understands divine action as

> "to move, from within, the concrescient opening of beings towards the achievement of their formal and ontological growth: it is an action that is persuasive, loving and gentle because it does not interfere with or put conditions on the freedom of movement of nature and only comes from itself, although under the impulse of a divine force that is persuasive and not coercive which tries to bring the world to better itself".
>
> Montserrat (2008, p. 838)

This divine action at the same time frees God from the burden of the evils of the world. Moreover, He is not only innocent, but also becomes a sufferer in solidarity with human beings who suffer:

> "God, in some sense, suffers evil in the same way that actual entities do, by seeing the impulse towards good blocked. God, immersed in process (by way of its primordial, superjective and consequent nature) is not responsible for Evil but rather the fellow sufferer that understands, the faithful friend that suffers as we do, who accompanies us and who understands us".
>
> Montserrat (2008, p. 839)

This model of understanding providence has the advantage of making God innocent of evil in the world but, since it sees Him as powerless to remedy it, He becomes much less meaningful for the religious man, who cannot count on God's action in the world (Böttigheimer 2013, pp. 26–28; Böttigheimer 2016, p. 3). Perhaps Sonya could be comforted by thinking of God's compassion for her, a weak God who suffers the same sorrows as she does by virtue of His divine solidarity. This could perhaps provide her with some moral support, but He would not be the God "without whom she couldn't do anything". The divine providence of classical theism offers the advantage of providing the believer with confidence in a God who is truly able to embrace everything under His plan, even evils, although the role of most of those evils cannot be understood for the moment for us.

One can apply some words addressed by Rousseau to Voltaire to process theology's providence. In a letter sent to him on 18 August, 1756, the French philosopher expressed that questioning divine providence before the so-called "horrendous evils", instead of providing relief to man's sufferings, rather aggravates them:

> "You charge on Pope and Leibniz with insulting our evils by maintaining that all is well [*or*: good], and you so greatly magnify the picture of our miseries that you heighten our sense of them; instead of the solace I had hoped for, you only distress me. It is as if you feared that I might not see clearly enough how unhappy I am; and believed that you would greatly calm me by proving that all is bad. | Make no mistake about it, Sir; the effect is the very opposite of what you intend. This optimism which you find so cruel yet consoles me amid the very pains which you depict as unbearable".
>
> Rousseau (1997, pp. 232–33)

A philosophy that dispossesses God of one of His main characteristics for classical theism, omniscience, and almighty power, risks rendering theism insignificant for human life: a God powerless against evil is not able to raise hope; we may mourn with the All-solidary, but we cannot ask Him to "deliver us from evil". For this, we need the Almighty, someone capable of sustaining our hope "against all hope" (Rom 4:18).

3. Molinism as a Determinism

A logic similar to the one that permeates process theology had already influenced classical theism. Even if God is omniscient and almighty, He should have to reduce His action in free human acts in order to "make room" for free will: such is the Molinist view. In a way, this system participates in the thesis according to which free will cannot exist if God determines the results of processes, actions, and changes, hence the need to "make room" for freedom. Despite this, I will try to suggest that the conception of causality held by Molinism is not only a theological determinism, but also includes a natural determinism.

A number of scholars hold Molinism today. I take here Craig's (2000) exposition of divine knowledge, according to the Molinist position. De Molina (1588) speaks of three kinds of divine knowledge. The first is the "natural knowledge" by which God knows Himself insofar He penetrates comprehensively into His divine essence. In knowing Himself He would also know all the possible creatures that He could create as likenesses of His essence. By this knowledge, "He knows all the possible individuals he could create, all the possible circumstances he could place them in, all their possible actions and reactions, and all the possible worlds or orders which he could create" (Craig 2000, p. 129). In addition to this natural knowledge, there would be a "free knowledge" that is properly the foreknowledge of everything that is going to happen. This knowledge is logically founded on the divine decision to create this precise world with these concrete persons placed in such and such circumstances. Thirdly, in the middle of both modes of knowledge, Molinism situates a "middle knowledge", which is the one by which:

> "God knows what every possible creature *would* do (not just *could* do) in any possible set of circumstances. For example, he knows whether Peter, if he were placed in certain circumstances, would deny Christ three times. By his natural

> knowledge God knew in the first moment all the possible things that Peter *could* do if placed in such circumstances. But now in this second moment he knows what Peter would in fact freely choose to do under such circumstances. This is not because Peter would be causally determined by the circumstances to act in this way. No, Peter is entirely free, and under the same circumstances he could choose to act in another way. But God knows which way Peter *would* freely choose. God's knowledge of Peter in this respect is not simple foreknowledge. For maybe God will decide not to place Peter under such circumstances or even not to create him at all".
>
> Craig (2000, p. 130)

As we see, this "middle knowledge" is intended to explain that a person's free decisions are not predetermined by God, but are the product of human free will. God merely establishes the conditions under which free will is to unfold. The outcome depends only on the created free will. In order to make true the divine knowledge of this outcome, God must comprehensively understand the nature of each free will, as the same author explains:

> "God by his infinite understanding knows each creature so completely that he discerns even the creature's free decisions under any conceivable circumstance. Since the moment of middle knowledge is logically prior to God's creation, no actual creatures exist at that moment, but God comprehends them as they exist in his mind as possible creatures. He knows them so well that he knows what they would freely do in any situation".
>
> Craig (2000, pp. 133–34)

The result is a complete foreknowledge of all the contingent events of reality, the fruit of the combination of a comprehensive penetration into the essence of each free will and of all the circumstances involved in its action: "Only an infinite Mind could calculate the unimaginably complex and numerous factors that would need to be combined in order to bring about through the free decisions of creatures a single human event" (Craig 2000, p. 135).

A celebrated defender of Molinism such as Plantinga has stated: "I don't believe there *are* any good arguments against counterfactuals of freedom, or middle knowledge, or the claim that some of God's actions are to be explained in terms of middle knowledge" (Tomberlin and Van Inwagen 1985, pp. 378–79). However, I believe that the chief criticism that can be made of Molinism lies in its conception of causality, which, at the end of the day, destroys what it was intended to save: free will. This is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. That Molinism is a theological determinism was already claimed for instance by Langston (1990, p. 71), but let us read here how Leftow draws the same conclusion in a recent publication:

> "God can control my actions using Molinist tools. Since if I were in a situation S, I would do A, God can take advantage of this to make me do A, because he can put me in S. Moreover, a Molinist God *cannot stop* controlling my actions. If he creates me, he must put me in one particular situation or another. He controls the situation in which he puts me in. Therefore, he has control over what I do. [. . .] Therefore, in Molinism, God is compelled to predetermine my choices. Furthermore, even though God does not cause me to do what I do, but only puts me in a situation in which I choose to do this without being caused to do this choice, it is He, not I, who sets my action in motion. [. . .] Molinism is a form of theological determinism. Again, for the world to be deterministic at a time t it is enough that, given its history from t, it has only one possible future. [. . .] The counterfactuals of free will and divine decisions *imply* all future history. Therefore, if God's decisions are exhaustive, as the Molinists believe, a Molinist world is deterministic".
>
> Leftow (2021, pp. 90–91)

Indeed, if God knows exhaustively every created free will and He decides to place it in certain circumstances, the result of the divine decision to create that particular person with his personal idiosyncrasy and place him in those certain circumstances is only one concrete and *determined* choice. That is precisely why divine middle knowledge is accurate according to the Molinist account. Nevertheless, if this is so, then the result is always deterministic, in the sense that, once God chooses the existence of this personal free will and these circumstances, the result produced in the world can only correspond to a precise (supposedly) free decision.

Interestingly, the greatest opponent of Molinism, the Dominican Domingo Báñez, also a Spanish scholar, already noticed this deterministic nature of Molinism at the time when this doctrine was born. Before we read his words, let us keep in mind that, in the Catholic context where these theologians debated, it was crucial to include among the concurrent factors in a given situation the degree of divine motion, that is, the help or push coming from God to the human will. According to the Molinists, this motion was not fatal to freedom of will, because the person was free to use or not to use this impulse to do a good deed. Moreover, it is a famous and controversial affirmation of De Molina (1588, p. 53) that, given two men, one could receive a stronger divine impulse than the other and nevertheless not take advantage of it to do a good action and commit a sin, while the other, with equal or even less divine help, could perform a virtuous act. Divine foreknowledge, since it comprehends all the circumstances, including the degree of divine motion that God freely wants to give, plus the nature of the free will of each person, knows exactly how each person is going to behave. Let us now read how Báñez proves the deterministic character of Molinism:

> "[. . .] I argue in your own way against you. Free will is that which, given all the requisites to act, can both do one thing and do the opposite (see De Molina 1588, p. 12). Now, given all your requisites for consent, it is impossible for the will not to consent. Therefore, it does not consent freely. I prove the minor premise: only three things are necessary for the complete efficacy of the help of prevenient grace, namely, 1st the entity of the divine help with its force and motion by which the mind of a human being is stimulated, 2nd the congruence and accommodation with the free will according to the opportune moment, 3rd the infallible foreknowledge of God. These three things fulfill divine efficacy. However, if these three elements are verified, it is impossible for the will not to consent. Therefore, it does not consent freely. This is confirmed by noticing that the following consequence is necessary: if these three things are verified, then the will consents. The 'antecedent' [affirmation] is the cause of the 'consequence' and is not in the power of the creature; therefore, neither the 'consequent' is in his power. You will not deny the minor premise [. . .]. Therefore the 'consequent' is true".
>
> Báñez (2021, p. 308)

The sum of the circumstances plus the divine help and nature of each individual's free will produce only one effect, a *determined* choice. In this sense, according to the premises accepted by Molinism, only one result is possible. The system fails to save what it claims to defend, namely, free will. This conclusion does not depend on foreign definitions of the concepts used by Molinists, but it relies on their own conception of free will and divine motion.

4. A Structural Problem of Molinism: Causal Determinism

There is one central element of Molinism, which indicates an obvious structural limitation: its notion of freedom. No one can argue that people are to some extent predictable and that the more rational a person is, and the better formed his character is, the more predictable he is. However, the Molinist idea, according to which God could know the behavior of a person placed in certain circumstances due to an exhaustive knowledge of free will, indicates a rather deterministic notion of the very nature of free will. The debate

about the relationship between divine omnipotence and freedom usually takes place on a Molinist playing field, for it focusses the notion of freedom on independence from all external coercion. However, this approach loses sight of the core of free will as explained by Aquinas. Notice that for Molina himself the opinion of Aquinas was authoritative and indeed his famous book (the *Concordia*) was presented as a commentary on some questions of St. Thomas' *Summa theologiae*.

Aquinas' notion of free will is the capacity for self-determination. Human beings do not necessarily follow sensory inclinations, but this independence from them is not the ultimate root of free will (Pilsner 2006, pp. 59–66). This freedom is sustained by the intellectual potency that grasps the finite nature of the goodness of any election (see for instance *De malo*, q. 6). Only an infinite good is wanted in a necessary way. Consequently, the finitude of the goodness involved in any election makes every election not necessary even if such election is, so to say, predictable. Let us take the example of a human person whose inclinations are well integrated thanks to virtue and is even confirmed in grace, Jesus Christ. If the devil tempts Jesus to blaspheme, He will surely refuse to do it, but He will act knowing that His election is a finite good that does not constrain the capacity of the will. The capacity for self-determination depends on an intellectual apprehension and exists even in such a case like Jesus' free will. The concrete election cannot come from the will in a necessary way. Even in the case of Jesus, He can avoid sin in many ways and none of these is necessary for any will. They are different finite goods that do not compel the will. Of course, some possibilities are preferable for a given person in a given set of circumstances, but the will is not constricted to choose them, because the intellect recognizes that no alternative is necessary. Therefore, another finite good can always be sought. In that sense, there is nothing in the so-called "singular nature" of a personal free will that can make it possible to foresee with certainty (not only with a height probability) how a person will act. It would seem Aquinas means, not even God could foresee it.

To continue this discussion, I want to refer now to Francisco Suárez, who is an important defender of Molinism, although he disagrees with Molina on some points. He also affirms that "God understands the capacity and inclination of the human will and all the ways and means by which it can be inclined to give its consent or to reject it" (Suárez 1599, p. 190). This seems like an idea of divine supercomprehension of free will similar to Molina's: choices ultimately spring from a kind of "singular nature" of each free will, as if this nature would necessitate the precise choice that *has to* be elected by such person in such circumstances. According to Echavarría (2017, p. 59), Suárez considered divine supercomprehension insufficient as the root of the certainty of middle science. However, it must be recognized that the Jesuit theologian does not offer many more precisions in this regard either.

On another occasion I have dealt with Suárez's understanding of freedom, centered on the impulse of the will, as opposed to the Thomistic idea of freedom as defended by Báñez (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2021). In this opportunity, I would like to go deeper into the metaphysical problem embedded in a Molinist way of conceiving reality. To introduce this kind of exploration, let us read some lines written by the aforementioned Dominican theologian as a response to Suárez: "[. . .] it is astonishing that those assertors understand how the infallibility of divine providence does not remove the contingency of many natural effects, and do not understand how divine providence itself determines the acts of free will without destroying human freedom" (Báñez 2021, p. 142). I believe that Báñez would not be so surprised had he availed himself of the time to read Suárez more carefully (Báñez 2021, p. 152). In that case, Báñez would have noticed the new metaphysics taking shape in his mind. Reading the works by this Jesuit, we could find that, when all is said and done, contingent things are not really contingent for him, but are in fact endowed with necessity:

> "If one considers the power and mode of action of the proximate cause of such an effect [sc. the effect of the lower natural causes, insofar as it happens without the intervention of some free cause] there is no contingency in such an effect, because its cause does not possess an intrinsic power of its own to avoid its production

> but works by an intrinsic necessity, given all the requisites. Since this cause is imperfect and can be impeded in its action by the interference of another, such an effect can be contingent. Now, such contingent things are called contingent in a qualified sense (*contingentia secundum quid*) because they are so only with respect to a cause that can be impeded by another, but not with respect to the whole of all the concurrent causes".
>
> Suárez (1599, p. 289)

This declaration of Suárez's idea of necessity and contingency is very illuminating because it puts his metaphysics of causation at antipodes of Aquinas' one. To explain the Thomistic account on this topic, I will use a very instructive article by Stephen Brock, where he compares St. Thomas' conception to the contemporary idea of "determinism". Today we tend to consider deterministic

> "the thesis that given the things that there are, with the tendencies or laws of their natures plus the conditions in which they are found at a given moment, all subsequent events are inevitable. Thomas is only arguing against doctrines that hold that the sheer laws of the natures of things, *by themselves*, make everything happen necessarily. For his purpose, it suffices to show that the natures of the things do not themselves completely determine the original conditions, i.e., that some of the conditions are merely accidental to the things".
>
> Brock (2002, p. 229)

Aquinas does not admit the first species of determinism because a precise result cannot necessarily follow from the set of states of affairs that affect the material nature. He is especially interested in the second type of determinism: an effect cannot necessarily follow from a contingent cause, that is, by virtue of its intrinsic nature. It is true that he agrees with Suárez in admitting that, "given a cause, then its effect necessarily follows, unless there is an impediment" (*In Metaph.*, VI, lect. 3; Thomas Aquinatis 1964, §1193; Brock 2002, p. 222). However, what kind of necessity is that? Is Suárez right when he says that events produced by unfree causes and able to be impeded are only contingent in a qualified sense (*secundum quid*), but not absolutely contingent (*simpliciter contingentes*)? Aquinas thinks exactly the opposite: such a kind of events would be *absolutely contingent* and would *only* be necessary in a qualified sense (*necessaria secundum quid*). On the contrary, absolutely necessary events (*necessaria simpliciter*) would be those that were intrinsically inevitable, i.e., brought about by a cause that could not be prevented in any way (Brock 2002, p. 231). An example of a necessary event within the paradigms of physics that he handles is the motion of the planets.

Suárez understands that an event produced by a cause able to be impeded is "contingent" only because of an extrinsic factor that does not affect the event itself but its cause. He would probably call this predication of the word "contingent" a *denominatio extrinseca*, an external qualification. Quite the reverse, for Aquinas, the very nature of the cause qualifies the nature of the causation. A cause that acts in a way which is susceptible of been impeded is a non-necessary one and so are its effects. That is not something alien to the cause: the possibility of being impeded belongs to its own nature. The nature of causation is linked to the nature of the cause and the effect is contingent or not because of the causation itself. Even if, in the case that anything impedes the causation, the effect follows from a contingent cause, that cannot be considered a necessary effect but in a qualified sense. Let us read Aquinas himself (*Expositio Peryermeneias*, I, lect. 15; Thomas Aquinatis 1989, vol. 1.1, p. 81, 36–42; Torrijos-Castrillejo 2020a, p. 170):

> "One cannot simply and absolutely say that everything that is necessarily is and everything that is not necessarily is not, because it does not mean the same thing that 'every being, when it is, is by necessity' and that 'every being absolutely (*ens simpliciter*) is by necessity', since the first means hypothetical necessity (*necessitate ex suppositione*), while the second means absolute necessity (*necessitatem absolutam*)".

Contingent events are, in an unqualified sense, contingent. If a certain necessity is attributed to them, it is merely conditional: supposing that under such precise conditions, they are actually verified, and then it is "necessary" that they happen. However, this necessity is conditional or hypothetical and, therefore, must be considered only a necessity in a qualified sense (*secundum quid*). As we see, Suárez departs completely from Aquinas' view in this point and inaugurates a much more "deterministic" conception of nature. For this reason, in the same article mentioned above, Brock (2002, p. 231) confronts the conception of causality held by St. Thomas with that of Suárez by quoting a passage from the *Disputationes metaphysicae* (19, 10, 5–6), published in 1597, which is very similar to the one we have copied above:

> "A contingent effect in respect to its proximate cause which works naturally, if compared with the whole order and series of causes in the universe (when any free cause intervenes either by applying other causes or by removing eventual impediments), possesses no contingency but necessity [. . .]. Thus, it is true, absolutely and without doubt, with respect to the whole order or arrangement of agent causes, that there cannot be any contingency in the effects, unless in that arrangement some free cause intervenes".
>
> Suárez (1861, vol. 25, p. 736)

It is easy to recognize here a metaphysics very similar to the Stoic one, a position expressly criticized by Aquinas. He understands that these philosophers identified fate with "a certain series of causes" affirming "there is nothing that has no cause and, given a cause, it is necessary to put the effect. If this or that effect happens, it has had a cause and this cause another cause and so on: as if one is killed at night because he left home, and he left home because he was thirsty, and he was thirsty because he took something salty; consequently, since he ate something salty, he died in a necessary way" (*Quodlibet*, XII, q. 4, co.). This kind of approach is explained by the fact that the Stoics distinguished necessity from contingency according to the "external elements that impede events: indeed, they said that something is necessary if anything can't prevent it from becoming true; something is impossible if its truth is always impeded; something is possible if its truth can be impeded or not impeded" (*Expositio Peryermeneias*, I, lect. 14; Thomas Aquinatis 1989, vol. 1.1, p. 73, 168–72). Nevertheless, their distinction is invalid because "it is founded on something external and accidental (*per accidens*), for something is not necessary because it does not possess an impediment but, being necessary, then it cannot be impeded" (ibid., 178–81). Similarly, elsewhere he calls the Stoic view "irrational", since "we call necessary something that by its very nature cannot not be, while we call contingent something that happens frequently and may not be. It is proper to the contingent to have impediment or not to have impediment, for nature does not prepare an impediment to something that cannot not be, because to do in this way would be superfluous" (*In Phys*., II, lect. 8; Thomas Aquinatis 1965, §210). As we are seeing, Aquinas has a very good taste to identify a *denominatio extrinseca*, but here he thinks that the fact that something can be impeded or not does not belong to the relationship of this cause with others, but to a proper characteristic of this cause and its fallible power: if it would be a true necessary cause, no impediment could prevent its causality.

Nevertheless, as we have seen above, Suárez establishes necessity by connecting the causes among them so that he raises all of them to the same level of necessity. There are no longer the two levels of necessity, and the intrinsic or absolute contingency (*simpliciter contingentia*) coined by Aquinas disappeared. In this way, we have a much less rich picture of physical nature. A type of metaphysics like that of Suárez will fit very well with Newton's classical mechanics, as the philosophy of Descartes does. However, it probably is less able to adapt to the kind of natural reality that contemporary science is discovering.

5. A Thomistic Alternative

These difficulties observed in Molinist metaphysics make it hard to agree with Leftow (2021, p. 102) when he claims "Molinism is the best version of theological determinism".

I would rather suggest that Thomism reveals itself as a more solvent alternative for addressing the problems involved in the relationship between divine activity and creaturely contingency. In a certain sense, one might call it a "theological determinism" insofar as Aquinas admits that divine will is always fulfilled and divine knowledge embraces every past, present or future event. However, he believes that the infallibility of divine intelligence and will does not eliminate the contingency of things. It neither represents a threat to freedom, nor does it mitigate the contingent nature of much natural causes. Thomas's world is not deterministic in the sense that the sum of physical and free causes does not necessarily produce the future states of affairs.

For Aquinas, the mere divine foreknowledge of contingent events does not necessitate them. Because of knowledge's very mode of being, to know an event in no way affects its contingency or its necessity. Taking up an idea from Boethius, Aquinas explains that my knowledge of "Socrates sitting" does not necessarily cause Socrates to be sitting (*S.Th.*, I, q. 14, a. 13, co.). By the very nature of his agency, Socrates is free to be sitting or standing. Similarly, I can certainly know that "it is raining now", but raining is, by its very nature, a contingent event. My certain knowledge of what is happening does not nullify its contingency.

While Socrates is sitting, it is necessary to affirm that Socrates is sitting and, while it is raining, it is necessary to affirm that it is raining. The same is true for past events: it is necessary to affirm that Socrates remained seated in prison on his death day, although he was free to get up and leave, it is necessary to affirm that, on the eve of Waterloo, it rained, although it might not have rained. This is the merely "hypothetical" or "conditional" necessity to which Aristotle had already referred: "What is, insofar as it is, it is necessary that it be" (*De interpretatione*, 19a23–4). Now, this type of necessity resides in the proposition, not in the thing; the thing is, by its very nature, contingent, necessary, or free, according to the intrinsic ontological elements that constitute it. The observer's knowledge cannot alter this.

In the case of divine foreknowledge of contingent futures, St. Thomas also makes use of a metaphor partly inspired in Boethius (*S.Th.*, I, q. 14, a. 13, ad 3): God would be like an observer surveying a road from a mountain; while the people on the side of the road only notice who passes by them, the elevated observer can also see the walkers who have not yet arrived at a certain point and those who have already crossed it. Likewise, God, from the watchtower of His eternity, could contemplate past, present, and future, for He possesses a kind of specific perspective, since He does not live temporal events as successive but in their respective actuality.

The divine eternal knowledge of temporal things cannot be understood as if, thanks to eternity, things somewhat "inform" God about them and thus He learns the events. Rather, Aquinas believes that the divine understanding knows the truths concerning temporal things not as our intelligence, which should adapt to those things, but rather temporal things should adapt to divine intellect (*De veritate*, q. 1, a. 2, co.). For this reason, divine knowledge with respect to created things cannot dispense with the divine will to create this world with these precise characteristics (*S.Th.*, I, q. 14, a. 8). After all, every contingent thing depends on divine will and this will "is always fulfilled" (*S.Th.*, I, q. 19, a. 6). This does not prevent Aquinas from affirming that the divine will is neither a direct nor an indirect cause of sin, because God does not will sin in any way, although He "permits" that some persons will to commit sin (*S.Th.*, I, q. 19, a. 9; I-II, q. 79, a. 1).

Now, divine intervention on contingent things neither dissolves their contingency, nor cancels freedom even if it moves created free will to do a good deed. Furthermore, infallible divine will ensures the contingent nature of contingent things (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2019, pp. 445–46). Things do not become contingent insofar as God "steps back" and "makes room" for contingency, but it is precisely the efficacy of divine will that safeguards that contingent events are such (*S.Th.*, I, q. 19, a. 8).

Perhaps this can be well understood with the help of an example given by Oderberg (2016, pp. 214–15) in an article on this subject. He tells us how he was teaching his son to write:

> "[. . .] I sometimes hold his hand [sc. my son's hand] while it grips the pencil, guiding his formation of the letters. Sometimes I force his hand to move in a certain direction, to be sure, but most of the time I do not. So let us focus on the times I do not force his hand. My son has free will: he has the power within himself not to comply with my physical guidance. Sometimes he does not, and his hand moves willfully off in the wrong direction. I am not responsible for that transgression: if he wants to depart from my guidance he can, since I am not compelling him. But consider the cases where he does freely comply. Here, he willingly submits to my physical guidance (not to mention my moral exhortation) and moves his hand in accordance with the motion of my own guiding hand. Although my son has the power to do otherwise, he does not exercise it".

I think this example is interesting because our experience reveals this type of relationship with causes subordinate to us. When a principal free agent intends to achieve an effect by means of a subordinate free cause, there are only two possibilities: either the influence on the subordinated cause is so soft as it can be refused, or the self-determination of the subordinate cause is suppressed by coercing its body. In that sense, a created principal free agent must "leave space" to the subordinate free agent if he wants the latter to continue to act freely, but in such a case he cannot determine the outcome of his action. However, when Aquinas says that God works upon free agents by concretely ordering the outcome of each deliberate action (e.g., *S.c.G.*, III, 91–2), He does so in such a way that His concurrence does not abridge their freedom in any way, but it is not limited to a mere soft influence. It could not just be a "moral motion", as Molinism thinks, which would make God both the conservator of the created power to act and a cooperative cause of the new act produced by the creature, so that God would not be responsible for the actual causation itself (De Molina 1588, pp. 169–70). Within Aquinas's metaphysics, God does not only cause the things but also their capacity to cause and even the actual use of this capacity. God's constant conservation is necessary for creatures to continue to exist and, in a similar way, His continuous intervention in their capacity to produce the being of another thing each time it is originated is required (*S.Th.*, I, q. 105, a. 5; Silva 2014, p. 281). For this reason, He cannot only intervene in the power and in the new act produced by it, but also in the causation itself.

Ultimately, the view that leads to "making space" for freedom and contingency insofar as God should "step back" from creation tends to see divine causality as if it were a created one. However, Aquinas insists on the transcendent nature of divine causality. God is not a cause comparable to created causes that enter into categorical orders of causation: either they are necessary or they are contingent. God, on the contrary, stands outside both orders; He transcends them (*In Metaph.*, VI, lect. 3; Thomas Aquinatis 1964, §1222; Roszak 2017, pp. 6–9; Torrijos-Castrillejo 2020a, pp. 166–71). God is outside any finite order. Let us recall that an event is *intrinsically* contingent if its cause is contingent (i.e., if it is such a cause that can be impeded) and necessary if its cause is necessary (i.e., if it cannot be impeded in any natural way). If God is outside both orders of causality, even if His action is infallible and no event escapes from His providence's order, the events do not receive their own qualification by divine action, but by their proximate causes. That means that an event could be infallible for divine action while absolutely contingent provided its proximate cause is a contingent one. Necessity and contingency represent characteristics of created ways of causation. Divine infallibility is beyond contingency as well as necessity.

The idea of the transcendence of divine action should not lead us to a certain deism by virtue of which we would reduce divine intervention to a generic influence that is only determined via created causes. Divine transcendence does not mean that God only acts with a general providence and merely causes "the being" or "the conservation" of things in a broad way. Rather, all novelty in the world, with all its minutiae and all the

richness it contains, is due to an active and detailed exercise of providence (Bonino 2020, 231–32). Nevertheless, this transcendent and therefore incomprehensible nature of the divine way of acting in all things implies that, although divine providence foresees sins as something hateful and not willed by it but only tolerated, God is in no way the cause of them (*S.Th.*, I-II, q. 79, a. 2). It is difficult for us to understand how God can have foreseen and tolerated all the elements of which an evil action consists without Himself being the cause of it, but the disorder of sin as such is not willed by providence either as a means or as an end. Above all, it is necessary to recognize that the type of causal influence by which God moves and guides creatures, created and preserved by Him, surpasses our intelligence and probably constitutes an idea more difficult to understand than *creatio ex nihilo* itself (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2020b, p. 454).

6. Conclusions

In contrast to classical mechanics, quantum mechanics, and other new areas of contemporary science, such as the theory of evolution, seem to require an ontology able to explain a flexible nature capable of acting on its own. Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics and traditional theism do not constitute an obstacle as such for the explanation of the new kind of facts discovered. Indeed, as recently expressed by Feser (2019, p. 310), "quantum mechanics, is as neutral between Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian interpretations as [. . .] relativity theory is when rightly understood. But an even stronger claim can be made, because there is a sense in which quantum mechanics actually points toward Aristotelianism[.]" As we have suggested, the Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of causality may be even more apt to explain contemporary physics than various philosophies elaborated in modernity. Process theology is thus not the only alternative for elaborating a system of thought consistent with the new discoveries regarding physical nature. Unlike it, classical theism allows us to safeguard a conception of God that makes Him more relevant for the religious man: an omniscient and almighty God who can hear our prayers and elaborate plans to seek the concrete good for each believer.

Particular providence could be justified with a Molinist approach, but this theological system shares with process theology the idea that God must "step back" from His creature to some extent, in order to "make room" for contingency and freedom. However, Molinism in fact conceives of nature and free will in an intrinsically deterministic way. In contrast, Thomism understands that God, the cause of contingency and freedom, can move creatures in a concrete and infallible way without harm to created action. Although the combination of divine action plus created action brings about determinate results, created things are, in each case, intrinsically and absolutely (*simpliciter*) contingent or free. Only in an accessory or improper sense (*secundum quid*) could it be said that events are necessary because they are under the control of the infallible divine will, which acts in a way that is incomprehensive for us and does not interfere with the nature of every event.

This sort of philosophy of providence does not need to safeguard contingency by reducing the efficacy of the divine motion, but rather, above all, it bears on divine transcendence. On the opposite side of process theology in this regard, a Thomistic God is not part of the world. The world may well remain contingent even if God has a determinate knowledge of all things and acts effectively in the course of events. His incomprehensible transcendence places divine activity on a transcendent level that allows Him to act without altering the intimate nature of things.

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Persona in spe. Anthropological and Theodical Aspects of Hope

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Abstract: I intend to reflect on three phenomena that are revealed in the personal experience of hope: (1) hope distinguishes a person from the natural context, but it does so through nature, i.e., based on desires rooted in human nature; (2) hope is not only inscribed in the existential situation of human being, but also expresses the very meaning of human transcendence: the person transcends themself, because they live the hope of fulfillment in the transcendent reality; hope is a foretaste of a higher, more perfect life; (3) hope is a person's deeply experienced expectation of love, that is, of someone who loves. The above phenomena require a justification, which is the answer to the question "what is the reason for experiencing hope?". Carrying out analyses on the basis of the modernized metaphysics of the person, I refer primarily to the concept of personal acts, to the concept of religiosity as an essential property of the person and to elements of the concept of love. The conclusions of these analyses indicate the necessity of accepting the real existence of the object of human hope, since personal life essentially goes beyond contingency, towards wholeness in the form of union with Someone who loves.

Keywords: hope; person; human experience; classical conception of the person; personal transcendence; religiosity; love; nature; fulfilment; natural theology

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> *One could say that man is alive as long as he waits, as long as hope is alive in his heart. And from his expectations man recognizes himself: our moral and spiritual "stature" can be measured by what we wait for, by what we hope for* (Benedict XVI 2010)

1. Introduction

The sign of our times seems to be uncertainty, which humankind experiences on a global scale and which has been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic (Seryczyńska et al. 2021). Seemingly durable footholds, which have given people a sense of security, have collapsed. Questions about hope and meaning seem to echo ever more frequently and more clearly: Where are we heading, what is the meaning of our existence? Where can we find answers to the questions lingering in the depths of our existence? Where can we find hope, indispensable for living? In this somewhat dramatic situation that we find ourselves in, we also experience a crisis of authority. Science, to which humankind has largely entrusted its fate, has proved insufficiently effective and not reliable enough during this last ordeal. Therefore, perhaps the time has come to examine our personal experience with greater attention, which, as it seems, we can trust the most.

The subject of this paper is the phenomenon of hope, captured against the background of the entire elementary human experience. The main problem that has provoked this reflection is based on perceiving a clear structure of expectation in this experience: the state of being directed towards something. We live as though we were waiting for something and expecting something. Of course, we follow various specific goals that we set for ourselves or plan to achieve. However, looking a bit deeper, one can see some primary, basal expectation which always predates these goals, which, although undefined, is still present and accompanies us in the depths of our world experience, as well as in some acts of self-awareness. We discuss hope in its existential dimension, in which it presents itself as something highly unique and mysterious. Attention has been drawn thereto recently by

philosophers like G. Marcel, E. Bloch, P. Ricoeur, and J. Pieper (Bloch 1986; Marcel 2010; Ricoeur 1970; Pieper 1986). Given the importance we place on the hope experienced in such a manner, we would probably place it among the deepest aspects of humanity, for it accompanies human beings throughout their lives, especially in extremely difficult or particularly significant times.

At this point, it will be necessary to adopt a few preliminary determinations of terminological and methodological nature. First, the anthropological character of this approach denotes examination of the original human experience, not an analysis of the concept of hope (on the method, see below). The principal interpretations placed on individual issues result from this kind of reflection. First, by placing personal experience at the centre of research, the basic plane of capturing the phenomenon of hope shifts from the sphere of the future, probably predominant in the conceptual discourse, to the sphere of the present, of current experience. In this way, through hope, we also become acquainted with its subject, the human being.

When talking about hope, I take into account the following aspects or elements: (1) expectation; (2) desire (strongly present: it is directed towards something, it "pushes" towards something); (3) longing (perceiving that something is desired, but unknown); (4) openness to (any) possibility of fulfilment; (5) readiness to endure hardships. Expectation seems to express the nature of hope the most, but this concept includes anxiety (in the face of the unknown), and hope—in a narrower sense, more in line with everyday experience—involves comfort and peace, a kind of certainty (with simultaneous lack of total certainty). Hope, which is very important, describes the existential state of human beings on their journeys, as if they were heading somewhere. In addition, it expresses a certain kind of acceptance and readiness for the hardships that this endeavour requires. This theme draws on classical philosophy, according to which the object of hope is the good which is difficult to obtain (Latin: *bonum arduum*) (ST I–II, q.40, a.1c). The very goal or object of endeavour, significant in theodical discourse, does not seem to be a direct element of hope, because, as I have mentioned, it is undefined with relation to content in the existential dimension. It is nonetheless an important assumption which will be extracted and analysed through reflection.

In the analyses conducted, three basic contexts of hope coexist: (1) the context of the elementary, everyday experience of hope (the aforementioned aspects perceived in human experience, regardless as to whether subjects experiencing it identify them with hope); (2) philosophical reading of the phenomenon of hope in human nature and personal experience; and (3) a theoretically constructed concept of hope, on the basis of a philosophically justified analogy: natural hope, present in all nature (I base this argument on the philosophical theory of analogy developed by M. A. Krąpiec: Krąpiec 1993b). These three contexts are closely interrelated: everyday experience reveals the foundations of hope in human nature, and human hope, in turn, is a special case of an inclination present in all nature. In addition to the above contexts, the theological context of hope ought to be mentioned, being often undertaken by thinkers, which in the present reflection—on account of its fundamentally philosophical nature—will not be taken into consideration by me (Lamb 2016).

My reflection will follow two paths, both of which intersect in various ways: (1) the experience of a person subjected to phenomenological analysis, and (2) elements of experience interpreted metaphysically, using arguments from classical philosophy, including the area of modernized metaphysics of the person. Here, I resort to the anthropological achievements of the Lublin Philosophical School, where studies were conducted on the harmonisation of classical approaches towards realistic metaphysics (Thomistic) with the phenomenological type of describing the person's original anthropological experience. The biggest steps in this regard were taken by K. Wojtyła, while M. A. Krąpiec made the most significant contribution to the modernisation of classical metaphysics (Gudaniec 2020). I still consider this task as open and incredibly creative, and its greatest difficulty stems from the language, because the phenomenological description, focused on subjective experience,

uses terminology different from the classical object-oriented language of metaphysics, applied to indicate the ontic reasons for phenomena given in experience. Achieving a sufficient level of harmonisation still seems to be an ideal difficult to attain. Moreover, it should be mentioned that one of the assumptions in this reflection is the thesis that such a philosophical analysis of personal experience is a source of rational knowledge (with an appropriate concept of rationality),[1] just like empirical or scientific cognition. Only with such an assumption does a dialogue between science and philosophy become possible.

Reflection about a person and personal life plays a significant role in this text. The term "person" is understood here in line with the tradition of classical philosophy, where personhood is attributed to the human being by virtue of being a man or woman. Moreover, a person is the subject of a specific experience which does not allow that person to be reduced to a specimen of a species, described according to a purely natural model. On the other hand, the realism assumed at the starting point seems to be an adequate plane for discourse with naturalism.

The content presented below is integrated into a three-level basal structure: I. "nature" as a place where hope is born (points 2–3); II. "transcendence" as an experienced openness to a higher dimension of being (points 4–7); III. "love", which is a certain reading of the relation to this dimension (points 8–9). The last theme leads to the formulation of a particular hypothesis, based on a specific type of relationship between hope and love.

2. Hope on the Foundation of Nature

Nature seems to have been well studied by us, which is often the starting point for debates about the human being or a person. The concept of nature is certainly a subject for scientific discussions, but I do not intend to elaborate on this here; therefore, I shall limit myself to a simplified philosophical concept recognising nature as the source of determined action (PH 192b–193b).[2] For the purposes of the following discourse, I interpret the operation of natural processes philosophically as the path from desire to fulfilment, with appropriate understanding of both terms. The concept of fulfilment requires a broader comment. It has its own objective and subjective dimension, the latter usually equated with happiness (which, among other things, clearly poses a cognitive problem: What is happiness?). In the objective aspect, considered here to be the primary one, it is a correlate of desire and is defined by it (in the context of nature). It is also important to distinguish between fulfilment which relates to a particular function or desire from one which relates to being as such. However, these two contexts are fundamentally related to each other: a being seeks to fulfil itself through the fulfilment (fullness, perfection) of its specific functions and actions. The fulfilment of a being presupposes its incompleteness, including some concept of contingency and potentiality: a being striving for fulfilment is not ready, but becomes so: i.e., it strives for its fullness. In anthropological discourse, the moral aspect of fulfilment seems to be quite significant: a person is fulfilled as either good or evil. This aspect would require a significant expansion of the research field, which is why in this reflection I shall essentially concentrate on the natural dimension of fulfilment reducing its role to the realisation of the desire present in nature.

What is embedded the deepest and, at the same time, present and marked in every truly human experience is desire, *desiderium*, which in turn underpins every endeavour. The dynamic side of human existence is most clearly visible in constantly experienced choices and dilemmas, linking our actions with appropriate objects and goals. This aspect is well reflected in the Latin word *inclinatio*—inclination towards something, being directed towards something. *Inclinatio* is a picture of the action of all nature, of every being: necessary, structural desires, inclinations, and then aspirations, transformations, actions aimed at achieving fulfilment, which is the purpose and sense of nature's existence, are commonly encountered in nature. It is a picture of the empirically available reality with which our human existence is intertwined.

It is essential for these considerations to draw attention to a certain elementary level of hope, which we can talk about at the level of nature. Every particle of nature derives

the meaning of its existence from the "hope" that the natural inclination inherent in it will be fulfilled. For example, the function which a given element of nature must fulfil in the entirety of its existence (e.g., water, forests, air, rocks, etc.) may be considered to be such an inclination of nature. Here, hope is the expectation of fulfilment (of this function), connected with the force driving towards endeavour, the aim of which is to remedy some deficiency. This expectation is not only active, seeking fulfilment, demanding it,[3] but it is also filled with a kind of certainty about fulfilment—since the strivings of nature are reliable.

Therefore, I use the term "hope" to describe natural phenomena which proceed in a determined manner. These phenomena are common and, moreover, show a significant similarity to the facts known from human experience; thus, hope can be assigned a certain universal meaning which allows it to be determined in various contexts by analogy. It is also important to remember the difference between hope, which denotes striving despite difficulties, and love or desire which strive to achieve a goal directly, without any consideration of the existence of obstacles. This difference derives from the classical tradition, which defined the object of hope as *bonum arduum*, a difficult good.

Natural desires are the driving force of life at every level. They set the directions and fields of action, aspirations, and development processes. By reflecting the cause of natural desires, we seek metaphysical explanations, which lead above all to the recognition of the existence of a privation, which is the principle explaining these phenomena. Without such a privation, there would be no endeavour to change, to attain a better state—as Aristotle used to say. The rational analysis of natural desire reveals its logical correlate, i.e., fulfilment. If in nature there exists a desire, being an expression of deficiency, its meaning is based on the real existence of the complement (filling, fulfilment). In other words: the logic of nature's functionality demonstrates that there would be no point in having any desire if it was not supposed to be finally satisfied. Such a desire would simply not be allowed to arise, as it would have to be contrary to a fundamental principle of nature. Natural desires are therefore an announcement of something new, which is to fill the privation present in the current state of nature.

At the level of nature, hope is most noticeable where life presents itself (Grassi 2020). A special hope related to the duration and fulfilment of life functions, despite all the hardships that nature poses in abundance, is embedded in a significant way in the very phenomenon of life itself. Hence, in the behaviour of animals and in the development processes of plants, numerous symptoms of expectation can be observed, conditioned by the need to develop and protect life, such as the hope of finding food, water, shelter, the possibility of escaping danger, etc. According to the scholastic tradition, hope (*spes*) is the first act of sensual irascible faculty (*vis irascibilis*), which is directed towards the difficult good. In the next stage of the activity of this faculty, another very important act thereof appears, namely courage. This plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of obtaining the good. Courage comes with struggle and sacrifice (ST I–II, q. 45, a. 1–3). Nature's path leading to the desired good, which is moreover difficult to obtain, is therefore not a passive expectation, but also includes struggle as a price worth paying to achieve fulfilment.

3. Human Hope

There is hope embedded in all nature that fulfilment will come despite the obstacles. It is an image of the positivity of life that can be read from the way nature works. The human being also has this natural positivity in themselves, as a syndrome of hope rooted in their nature—it spontaneously tends to seek fulfilment. The problem with hope begins on the cognitive side, in the face of arduous cognitive work and uncertainty, as well as in the face of freedom, which can either accept or reject this natural orientation (e.g., in the name of some idea of reason). However, hope itself as a natural force that leads to fulfilment, is indelible and manifests itself in various ways in human experience.

Human hope takes on a character different to a purely natural hope. This, of course, is related to the essentially different type of existence that human beings reveal in relation to

other natural beings. They are, above all, aware of the actions of nature and can comprehend its essential aspects. Moreover, they determine their own actions by themselves, setting their own direction. In this way, all people form themselves through their conscious and free actions. Nevertheless, they have no knowledge of what fulfils them, having unsuccessfully sought their happiness in many objects and activities for centuries (Krąpiec 1983, pp. 119–218, 351–59). Being by nature a recipient of cognitive curiosity to explore the essence of the world and its existence, they do not go beyond an endless set of unanswered questions, and almost every solution found raises further questions.

This is a certain paradox, perhaps most clearly noticeable nowadays: having achieved such a great deal of knowledge about the whole of nature and almost every part of it, humanity is still unable to fathom the mystery of its own existence, nor to explain the meaning of the existence of the world. Freedom of action, regarded as an essential property of the human species, does not reach perfection either, although we have been endowed with this quality by nature. Our numerous decisions are imperfect, revocable, constantly corrected, and made under the influence of various factors which determine them, preventing us from experiencing full freedom. In a similar respect, human love remains unsatisfied, seeking for complete happiness and unable to find rest for itself. This extraordinary power of bonding with anything that can fulfil us in some respects has also been received by us from nature.

Each of the listed activities, essential aspects of personal life, is an element of human nature, and therefore seeks fulfilment out of necessity. Through its own actions, by the power of natural desires and inclinations, every being strives to achieve a goal which is appropriate for it, by virtue of the irrefutable logic of the act of nature. Although the described personal actions are acts of nature, drawing their power from natural desires, they do not find fulfilment in nature. As in any other case, actions rooted in nature contain a guarantee of their fulfilment, the achievement of the purpose inscribed in the structure of a given action. We have called this guarantee and certainty "hope" in its elementary meaning. We can, therefore, formulate a thesis whereby hope, born in the realm of nature, does not lead to the fulfilment of actions essential for human beings, a fulfilment that would be available in nature. The path of hope in the human being does not reach its immanent end.

Consequently, we arrive at a fundamental observation: nature appears to be self-sufficient in all beings below the human level. The human manner of existence reveals its insufficiency: nature is unable to fulfil the desires that constitute the essence of human life. Being the birthplace of these desires, it cannot ensure their fulfilment—even though it assures such fulfilment to all other creatures of the natural world. Human beings do not find fulfilment in themselves, in their natural endowment, nor in their experiential interior, where their desires dwell. That is why they are a searching, unfulfilled, and even mysterious being, because compared to the whole "system" of nature's actions, the way in which they are to achieve fulfilment remains hidden and inaccessible.

4. Hope Reveals the Person

Nature establishes the necessary structures, and therefore human experience reveals something that cannot be removed, something irreducible that resists any attempt to deny, suppress or marginalize. The human being cannot resist searching for meaning, awaits answers, opens up to "something more", to something they do not know but desire. In the pursuit of fulfilment, they ultimately settle for nothing and feel that their desire cannot be satisfied. Therefore, there exists a certain primal structure in the human being, manifesting itself in the form of undying desire, which clearly grows stronger in the face of the threat of losing the meaning of life. This primal structure is expressed in the feeling of an urgent need for meaning, in the impossibility of living without a sense of meaning, or in a feeling of anxiety.

Is it not true that phenomena of this type—similar to the emotions and passions greatly valued and sometimes experienced by us, such as the admiration for all kinds of

beauty—become more understandable when at their source we discern hope, revealing their orientation towards something that is unknown but desired? That is exactly what the content of these unique human experiences seems to be like: longing, nostalgia for something that attracts us so much, a foretaste of some more perfect, desired beauty. If this is the case, then we can conclude that hope lies at the root of the most sublime and intense human acts.

Continuing this thought, I shall use the following expression: in the realm of nature, the hope that comes to the human species, "reveals the person", i.e., a being that cannot attain fulfilment in nature. This is what we call *transcendence* or going beyond the level of nature. Hope, born of the desires of human nature, rises above nature and reveals a new perfection: the person. A person seeks fullness in their actions such as cognition, freedom, or love (Krąpiec 1983, pp. 326–30). They seek perfect fulfilment in them, i.e., being oneself to the full. If these acts describe a person's transcendence in relation to nature the most accurately, it is precisely hope that seems to constitute the very heart of transcendence, as it best expresses its meaning. A person transcends their nature because, living in the hope of fulfilment, they turn towards something more. Hope therefore offers a foretaste of a better (more perfect) life, experienced in the most exalted personal acts and intense desires rooted in human nature. In hope understood in this way, one should therefore seek the foundations of the phenomenon of openness to the transcendent dimension, which is characteristic of human transcendence.

Revealing the person (through nature) manifests itself, first, in the fact of interiorisation of hope, i.e., making it internal, because hope—while simply indicating a reliable path to the fulfilment of desires in nature—is experienced in the human being, it constitutes an aspect of the experience of "I". Such an interiorized phenomenon of hope takes the form of a more or less conscious expectation of fulfilment: a person lives in hope, experiences hope, that is, they relate to their desire and "strive" towards something more that could fulfil that desire. What a human being asks about, that is, the transcendent meaning of their life and existence, exceeds their abilities, and yet they carry these questions within themselves, thus discovering that they are a person. This is what proves that there is hope in this search, as otherwise such questions would not arise.

Second, revealing the person denotes the emergence of a new level, the level of the person, where nature finds no fulfilment in itself. Being a human being, as a specimen of a natural species, turns into being a person who, in the empirical explanation at our disposal in relation to nature, must ultimately remain a mystery. Based on natural desires, hope leads to an awareness of the meaning of life, or at least accompanies such awareness. It reveals the person, their dignity, and their uniqueness. The level of the person reveals a specific self-awareness and a free subject, shaping themselves from within, expressing themselves through their own autonomous acts.

However, "the person, then, not only is a consciousness, but has a nature," (Spaemann 2006, p. 103), i.e., they experience themselves simultaneously as a being belonging to the world of nature. Such nature–person opposition was investigated in the field of classical philosophy, with the adoption of a realistic concept of person and nature appropriate for this philosophy. The person is a being that transcends nature and adapts the natural aspects of their being to rational action, specific to a person. Persons exist in a unique way that allows them to respond to their nature.[4] Hence the source of their action is something deeper than nature itself: "Because they are thinking beings, they cannot be categorized exhaustively as members of their species, only as individuals, who 'exist in their nature'" (Spaemann 2006, p. 33).

The specific actions of a person reveal something that has been called spirituality. The term is not necessarily considered here in reference to the resolutions of metaphysical nature, because certain aspects of this phenomenon are also, for example, the subject of phenomenological description. According to Wojtyła, thanks to the experience we obtain a positive sense of spirituality, not only its concept created through negating materiality (Wojtyła 1979a, pp. 47–48, 180). A person goes beyond their natural environment and

reveals a mode of action that focuses on the reality as a whole, and not only on objects that satisfy the natural biological or psychological needs of the human being (Krąpiec 1993a, pp. 602–7). The spiritual side of personal activities manifesting itself in this way is a clear indication of the transcendence of the person over nature. The priority of nature, despite its applicability to the entire cosmos, does not concern human activity because a human being is not a particularised nature in relation to the general idea of a species, but is a self-aware personal subject who "implements" humanity in themselves as their individual nature (Krąpiec 1993a, p. 611). In the Middle Ages, during discussions concerning the Boethian definition of a person, it was emphasized that a person signifies a property that belongs to only one subject, an individual, and that the term itself is not a concept which denotes the general essence of a thing, but it is rather a generalized proper name (DT IV, c. 6; ST I, q. 30, a. 4c; Spaemann 2006, pp. 29–33). Hence a person is "somebody", rather than "something", which is only a concretization of a general essence. It stems from the fact that the person is not completely defined by their nature or "enclosed" within it. It should rather be concluded that the person possesses (although not fully) or implements their nature, and it is the core of their specific manner of existence (Spaemann 2006, p. 31; Wojtyła 1979a, pp. 83–85).

5. The Promise of Fulfilment

The topic of fulfilment, which stems from the idea of natural desire, at the level of human experience of hope, introduces a theme which can be described as *the seed of fulfilment*, or, if it is a part of a personal experience of desire, as *the promise of fulfilment*. In a sense, it represents the true heart of hope or the core of experiencing hope (living in hope). The structure in question is not a single unique moment in a person's experience, but rather it constitutes, as previously noted, its common and inerasable element, which is an ever-present background in personal experience. For in every truly personal act, in which a person expresses themselves in the fullest form, the seed of fulfilment is present, imparting meaning to these personal acts, including intellectual cognition, freedom, love, or creativity. In these actions a person searches for their own completeness, meaning and perfection of what they are. Therefore, it can be stated that the actual presence of such acts constitutes a certain guarantee of fulfilment, and the existence of hope has its foundation in strongly and clearly experienced natural desires.

Just as the whole of nature finds fulfilment, since a guarantee of satisfaction is contained in natural desire, the hope for the fulfilment of whatever nature reveals as the seed or promise is also a natural state for a person. From the perspective of personal experience, it can be stated, that nature, along with desire, gives a foretaste of completeness, and in this foretaste a person discovers the promise of fulfilment, and they seek to fully obtain what has been revealed as a foretaste, promise, or an announcement. All of these aspects are contained within hope, which is based on an unassailable principle, according to which nature must realize its striving, i.e., it must bring desire to fulfilment. The desires present in human nature must therefore reach fulfilment, i.e., personal acts in which human beings express themselves to the full must reach the state of fullness, "saturation", satiety. Otherwise, human beings would have to be considered absurd entities.

As noted by a Polish philosopher, who represented the Lublin School of Philosophy, M. A. Krąpiec: over the course of a human life, the person "entangled" in the natural and material contexts of their own being does not encounter the full conditions needed to fulfil their most essential actions, which as actions that follow from human nature should be fulfilled:

> Without the perspective of the fulfilment of personal-human acts (cognition, the desire of love), i.e., without the real as well as concrete possibility for every human being of the eternal endurance of that which already now has appeared in biological forms of duration as transcending matter, the very acts of cognition and love, if they were ultimately to succumb to change and time, would be yet another monster of nature, would be simply meaningless. (Krąpiec 1983, p. 358)[5]

The manner of obtaining fulfilment by a person involves an activity specific to this person, which in some way reflects their own nature: this activity is rooted in materiality, but its ends go beyond the material realm. For personal activity is directed towards "enrichment of knowledge, the enrichment of love, the attainment of a higher degree of freedom in relation to all determinants" (Krąpiec 1993a, p. 598). In conclusion, Krąpiec states that:

> These three actions—knowledge, love, and freedom—completing each other, like the angles of a triangle, give the typical outline to how the person transcends nature and the 'nature of the world' that man has in himself through his body. (Krąpiec 1993a, p. 616)

Through the phenomenon of the quest for fulfilment, in which the human being reaches outside the confines of nature, the personal dimension of hope is revealed as a basis for human desires and pursuits. The manner of extracting the person from nature through nature emerges in this manner. Thus, hope reveals a certain structural element of human existence, which consists in the passage from the natural level which somehow obscures the person, namely the level of humanity as a set of qualities essential for being human, to the level of a person "implementing" their human nature, i.e., to the point, when the unique, unrepeatable "I" of the person reveals itself. This can be described as a specific "birth" of the person, the emergence of the person from nature. However, as previously mentioned, this does not take place by means of opposing nature but results from the specific harmony between the person and nature.

This transition from nature towards the person draws attention to the understanding of human hope as a phenomenon which accompanies the human being throughout their entire lifetime, in every moment and in every action. For hope is the factor that imparts a meaning to all these acts and life as a whole, renders it something human, i.e., something proprietary, understandable, and heading towards a certain goal (Lysaker 2019). By virtue of this, human life acquires meaning, and therefore cannot be considered something absurd or trivial. Therefore, hope is a human act, which is present in a person's experience *implicite*, without realising its presence constantly as a road leading towards fulfilment—similar to the famous argument of St. Thomas, "while walking along the road one needs not to be thinking of the end at every step" (ST I–II, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3). In special cases, the act of hoping reveals itself *explicite*, e.g., when we ponder the meaning of life.

6. Openness of the Person

Primary experience seems to tell us, that without any expectations life loses its extraordinary and unique charm. When there is nothing to strive for or to expect, the horizon of life seems to inevitably undergo flattening and trivialization. Then, whatever is significantly human, whatever allows one to enjoy life and give it a relevant direction is missing. This means that hope is inscribed in the existential situation of the human being. The desire for fulfilment activates the search for completeness, which manifests itself in various personal activities.

Human hope contains "certainty" derived from nature, assuring us that fulfilment will come, but at the same time, unlike purely natural hope, it contains uncertainty—hence the tension and expectation—regarding when, how and by what means it will occur. For this reason, hope introduces an existential drama constituting an integral element accompanying almost every truly human experience. The same traits of human hope simultaneously reveal it as a gate open to the transcendent dimension. For hope not only exposes a person, but furthermore exposes their elementary openness. The openness to the unknown, reaching beyond the level of nature itself. Openness to "something more".

In a person's experience, the inclination to cross the boundaries of our cognition and willingness is clearly present, and its expression is an infinite range of objects falling into the scope of intellectual comprehension, as well as the infinite absorbability of will, seeking the satisfaction of the so-called desire for happiness. Hence, the openness in question denotes the openness of a person towards infinity, and thus the openness towards a higher

dimension of life, since infinity is by no means a dimension of the natural world, or a manifestation of any available empirical experience, which is proven by negation contained in the linguistic construction of this term (Justo Domínguez 2019).

The human being is an entity of thorough openness, receptivity, an entity directed towards something and expecting something. As K. Wojtyła indicated, even human subjectivity is not a closed structure, as turning towards oneself proves to be a way of opening up to reality. For human beings realize themselves in their acts, through the transcendent dimension of their action, the principle of which is the truth of the good (Wojtyła 1979b, pp. 287–90). Openness is therefore a tendency of human nature, the elementary existential attitude of man, which is closely connected to hope. A specific manifestation of this tendency is the previously mentioned presentiment that there is "something more", since the person transcends themselves, i.e., their natural, empirically available dimension, because they live in hope of attaining fulfilment in some transcendent reality. This experience at a later stage can and should lead to the discovery of the object of hope, as the seed is the beginning, and the purpose of the beginning is fullness and completeness.

Here, it is worth considering a certain opposition being of significance for these considerations. Namely, natural hope, underlying the existential hope experienced by a person, is contrasted with the everyday hope present in the practical dimension, the meaning of which is summarized by the colloquial phrase "everything will be fine" (and, for this reason, it is often criticized, giving natural hope a bad name). While the former is embedded in human nature and is associated with an irresistible search for fulfilment, the latter, trivialized as a result of experiencing everyday worries, is devoid of a solid foundation and—as is well-known—often fails, unable to match the circumstances that contradict the vision of the future constructed by certain people. Nevertheless, the saying "everything will be fine" contains some truth about human hope, about the fact that there must exist some good that will ultimately prevail, survive, and save us (Kadlac 2017).

The status of hope as a companion of the human journey indicates that the meaning of human life is in the state of striving, becoming, searching, deciding, and wandering. The human being is essentially a bearer of hope (*homo sperans*), which "nourishes" them existentially. Hope is therefore a very particular trait of the human species. It describes the meaning of its personal existence: a being rooted in nature and leaning towards and leaning beyond, living and breathing expectation (Bovens 1999; Meirav 2009; Waterworth 2004). The revelation of hope uncovers the meaning of life to a person, adds gravity to life, makes it possible to discover, appreciate and save the deepest desires. It also fills everyday choices with energy, encourages existential questions, causes anxiety and dissatisfaction with meeting natural needs. What is our fulfilment then? What are we waiting for? Since meeting ad hoc needs turns out to be insufficient, what does it mean to be fulfilled, to achieve a full life?

7. The Existence of the Object of Hope

Openness to infinity, to a higher dimension of life, to transcendent reality is nothing other than religiosity in a neutral sense (i.e., one independent of religion), as a religious sense with which the human nature is endowed. Religiosity, appurtenant to the human being out of necessity, poses the question of the real foundation of being, the guarantor of the meaning of life, purpose, fulfilment, etc. This problem has been a challenge for humankind since time immemorial. If the inclination to ask questions about the ultimate meaning and the supernatural dimension of life dwells in human nature, there must also be an answer, justified in the realm of nature. The confirmation of the existence of the answer is somehow contained in the very fact that the question arises, if it is born of nature (i.e., it is necessary). Thus, the existence of an answer is ingrained in the very dynamics of the person, and in the structure of humanity. The very emergence of the question existentially arouses one to confirm the existence of the answer—even though the answer goes beyond the horizon of what can be empirically learnt.

However, experiencing this existential tension in the normal course of life raises numerous problems. In this context, living in hope means enduring many hardships, which, in fact, is inscribed in its very essence. Mental difficulties cause certain complications. Lack of fulfilment, often acutely experienced, evokes, for example, feelings of anxiety, sadness, or loneliness. The extreme consequence of this type of experience is the attitude of rebellion and negation of life, namely, despair (Buss 2004). Based on the considerations so far, it can be argued that hope is more natural than despair as it is based on recognising the existence of the meaning of life, while despair, in a sense, implies that nature is false or absurd (ST I–II, q. 40, a. 4; II-II, q. 20, a. 1–4). Here, too, hope reveals its rationality. If we are rational beings, hope protects the meaning of our life; it is the ever-new willpower which enables us to continue our striving and positively experience the circumstances of life (Łukasiewicz 2021). Loss, pain, or suffering can be bearable as long as hope survives—and hope, objectively, is endless, because every person's life and existence is endowed with it.

In this context, it is worth discussing another psychological issue, which can be partially explained philosophically. The aforementioned existential tension and the related effort of "walking into the unknown" often lead to an attitude that can be called running away from oneself, namely, from taking one's own experience seriously. In practice, the anxiety related to the ever-imposing inevitability of human questions might be obscured by those created and consistently repeated habits, thanks to which one can forget (to some extent) about these questions and thus ignore the depth of one's own "self", which is expressed in hope. Running away from oneself, which is also an escape from reality, only worsens the situation, because when living in this way everything starts to seem alien, and life becomes burdensome and unbearable.

At the core of such thinking is, partly, the idea of modernity, with its characteristic claim to place the human subject at the centre—the "I" which was to have become the ruler of itself and all things. A further step is the idea of postmodernity leading to the arbitrary recognition of everything that evades human domination as an illusion or a game. Thereby, nowadays nihilism has become a very influential way of thinking and acting, turning out to be the main enemy of human hope.

The possibility of the existence of the unknown, the incomprehensible, as well as the possibility of an unpredictable event, is the culmination of human expectation, since a human being waits for a fulfilment whose timing and form is unknown. On the other hand, the contemporary person seems to say: "this is not possible" due to the cognitive difficulties they encounter. By denying the existence of an answer, they weaken the dynamism of the personal experience which leads to the answer through its natural power. If someone got lost in the forest and sensed a threat to their life, a cry for help would be the most reasonable option—but this cry implies the possibility that there is someone who will hear the calling. Otherwise, it would not make any sense (Carrón 2020, p. 25).

The assumption that an answer exists is therefore rational, hence the hope experienced by a person, based on their natural desires, is something deeply human, a real personal experience. Similarly, from the standpoint of personal hope, it is rational to maintain the assumption that something we cannot predict or understand may possibly exist or occur. However, taking a further step towards the content and object of hope, based mainly on rational and cognitive factors, is something not entirely evident, especially nowadays, and even, in view of the postmodern critique of cognition (Lyotard 1984; Sallis 1987), appears a bit suspicious.

The openness contained in hope is likewise infinite, because it exceeds all possible cognition (including imagination) of the object meeting the expectation. Therefore, if the object of hope exists (otherwise, hope itself would be futile), it is a mystery and an additional effort of the human spirit, an act of will, such as faith, is required to acknowledge it. However, due to the placement of faith in opposition to science in our times, the former seems to be a lost cause. Lack of trust in religious faith is one of the factors in the current crises related to the comprehension of the human condition, culture, and religion.

In a sense, personal hope evades the above problem, as it allows people to experience human questions in the perspective of unlimited existential openness, thanks to which the ability to comprehend becomes a careful observation of reality, rather than a measure which is imposed upon it, when cognition is bereft of passion and saturated with suspicion. The fact that the human being is a rational being means that they open themselves (owing to hope) to what is unknown, incomprehensible, and what may become their fulfilment. The natural openness contained in hope, together with the longing for fulfilment experienced through its prism, becomes a factor which stimulates that side of personal experience which is responsible for communicating with reality, focusing attention on it, and bonding with it in various relationships. Therefore, while faith is by its nature oriented towards the cognitive activity of the subject, it may be assumed that hope triggers and penetrates its other side, which, according to the classical tradition, constitutes the domain broadly understood as love.

8. A Person Is Fulfilled through a Person

There is no doubt that the openness which is in some way carried by human hope also implies, in a significant sense, openness to other people, because the human being becomes especially fulfilled through interpersonal relations. This quality had already been noted by Aristotle, and the issue of a person's relationality has been extensively discussed in contemporary trends of thought about the human condition, together with so-called participation in a community of persons: the latter term was used by K. Wojtyła to define one of the factors essential for being a person (Wojtyła 1979a, pp. 261–99).

In the Aristotelian–Thomistic tradition, the uniqueness of relationships between persons was displayed, in which something, which may be called the revelation of a person, occurs. Against the background of the search for various goods that satisfy human needs, the other appears as something completely distinct from other objects of appetite (*appetitus*). The subject discovers a new category of good in it: "a good which is coveted for its own sake", a transcendent good, namely, one that goes beyond the concept of good according to the criteria of nature, where everything is desired merely to satisfy the subject. This new, higher reality of a person was referred to as "the virtuous good" (*bonum honestum*), because this good is worthy of being chosen to the highest degree. This can also be understood from the Aristotelian theory of friendship that, by discovering this unique good in another person and by binding to them with a special relation, which is true friendship, people may discover themselves and allow themselves to constantly explore their own rational and free nature. It is as if owing to a friendship they gained the right foundation for verifying the truth about themselves (NE 1166a, 1177b-1178a; Biss 2011). In this exact context there appears something that constitutes a clear breakthrough in the understanding of personal relations: the possibility of selfless love for another person (Rogers 1994).

St. Thomas Aquinas, while reflecting on the reasons for friendship and mutual love, recognized, i.a., that the good of the human individual refers by nature to the good of the whole, that is, a natural community, constituted by the nature of the human species (ST II-II, q. 26, a. 3; I, q. 60, a. 4–5; II-II, q. 47, a. 10, ad 2).[6] Therefore, mutual love between people is something natural, and the closeness between people and the fact of forming friendships spontaneously is its trait:

> Now, it is natural to all men to love each other. The mark of this is the fact that a man, by some natural prompting, comes to the aid of any man in need, even if he does not know him. For instance, he may call him back from the wrong road, help him up from a fall, and other actions like that: as if every man were naturally the familiar and friend of every man. (CG III, c. 117, 6)

Love for a person as the virtuous good, as Aquinas claims, perfects the very subject of love in the spiritual order. Self-fulfilment, which people strive for by virtue of a natural tendency called self-love (Greek: *philautia*),[7] is achievable for a person to the highest degree by means of selfless devotion in love to another person (SE d. 29, a. 5).

Based on the above, it may be concluded that persons fulfil themselves in a special way through another person: by seeking the fulfilment of their deepest desires in nature, they find a unique possibility in another, as a presentiment of their fulfilment. Thanks to this, human beings also gain the ability to overcome their own limitations, which, by enclosing themselves in themselves, prevent the realisation of their personal potential. For while human beings, because of these limitations, are rather inclined towards egoism, which does not lead to their fulfilment, selfless love turns out to be a force which directs them towards their actual fulfilment (Gudaniec 2015, pp. 195–204). The state of a person's perfection is therefore expressed in a selfless act of giving oneself to another person, which allows one to experience the uniqueness of the good as such, which, in the practice of human life, appears as a difficult and often incomprehensible good.[8] Consequently, these themes fall within the scope of hope, the proper subject of which is the arduous good.

By virtue of personal existence, which is something most intimate and individual, untransferable and unique, the person was defined in classical philosophy as *incommunicabilis*—incommunicable. This expresses that unique quality of the person, thanks to which they have exclusive access to themselves and are "not transferred" outside themselves, and the limit of this non-transferability is freedom. Therefore, because of the experienced contingency and the resulting desire for fulfilment and being themselves more fully, people want to communicate to others this intimate part which they experience themselves. In this way, the essential incommunicability of the person becomes the basis of interpersonal communication, dialogue, interpersonal bonds, such as friendship, in which people unite to experience (in various aspects) their existence together and to be able to pursue improvement therein (Martinez 2006). The human race is called to this kind of community, as Aristotle seems to state, because only by creating such bonds are people able to help each other in the laborious pursuit of the ultimate purpose of their lives (PO 1253a; NE 1155a–b, 1171a–b).

In this existential drama of searching for the meaning of one's life and existence, people support each other by creating specific communities of hope. We are talking not only about psychological support, but also that which is inscribed in the very nature of hope: the other person "gives" hope, that is, calls to it, appears to be its image. The whole of mankind is also a great community of hope, a community of experiencing the human existential situation. The hope that unites all people becomes the basis of human solidarity, mutual respect, and kindness, for the sake of the desired good, which is something analogously common to all. The mutual love of human beings for one another, and the solidarity and compassion inspired by hope, as well as the foretaste of fulfilment in love, can be interpreted as the general human experience of the desire to be loved which lies at the heart of humanity. This factor, relevant for further analyses, is only mentioned here in the simplest possible formulation. Its existence and significant role seem to follow unquestionably from the arguments about love that have been considered so far.

9. Love Is the End of Hope

In accordance with a realistic concept of classical philosophy, which is to some extent verifiable in elementary personal experience, it is love—in opposition to cognition—which is associated with the object of love as it is in itself. This object is often insufficiently known, so love demands a constantly corrected and improved learning about it by abandoning one's own measures and discovering its truth. On the other hand, cognition, in accordance with its nature, takes its object in the form of a likeness, an image, adapting it to itself—that is, the inversion of what love does (ST I–II q. 22, a. 2; I–II q. 25, a. 2, ad 2; I–II q. 28, a. 1). The manner of uniting with what may lead a person to fulfilment, specific to human cognition, is therefore not able to guarantee this fulfilment, since it rejects the reality of the object, reducing it to its own scope (unless you rely on the supernatural refinement of cognition; ST III, q. 92, a. 1; Riplinger 2003).

Therefore, the certainty contained in personal hope is of a different kind than the certainty present in cognition, particularly in science. It is a certainty based on signs read

from some person. A good example is a mother's love: the only evidence of this love is to be found in the signs that someone receives from their own mother—but these are not evidence in the scientific sense and could be questioned using strictly epistemological criteria. Nevertheless, we become certain of her love based on the signs received from her. Thus, since hope means waiting for something whose conditions of appearance are unknown, the main problem is not cognitive certainty, but attention to signs, i.e., vigilance and concentration. In other words, the lack of certainty in hope is not due to a lack of cognition, but to a lack of vigilance and amazement, the lack of some elementary positive feelings towards reality—that is, love.

As already mentioned, the transgression of nature present in the structure of hope signifies the transcendence of the human subject beyond the material order, towards a higher, personal order. The hope experienced in the depths of human experience not only becomes present in the form of a promise of fulfilment, but also becomes the basis of the premonition that the human being is directed towards something, as if called to something: as a person they are supposed to become somebody/something more. An invitation or a call read in this way reveals above all the personal character of this reference: the person invites or calls. On the other hand, an invitation or call is something that can be rejected, because, while questions about the meaning of life emerge from nature, they do not impose themselves in a mechanical and unfree manner. Therefore, a personal response, dialogue, a voluntary attitude of undertaking the path of the quest is necessary.

Hence, love is required from the person, both towards themselves and their existential questions that demand answers, as well as towards the reality which forms the fabric of life. Moreover, in relation to love towards others, we have read an essential property of the person, namely, relationality: people are dialogical beings, fulfilling themselves in the context of interpersonal relations. If the relations of love are experienced as a kind of foretaste of fulfilment, the mutual selfless dedication of friends is an expression of openness to the good which has the power of fulfilling the person. Therefore, it can be said that by sharing life, recognized by Aristotle as one of the main conditions of friendship (NE 1157b; Sherman 1987; Bryan 2009), a person discovers love for others, and this especially in giving oneself to them, as a way of participating in the expected fulfilment.

At this stage of revealing the content borne by the phenomenon of human hope, the relationship of the person to the transcendent dimension can already be read. As has already been suggested, this relationship does not take place at the level of cognition, since the final goal of life remains a mystery, but in the sphere of love: hope of fulfilment is *de facto* expectation of love. The hypothesis that I am formulating here seems to be a consequence of the arguments made so far. First, we have shown that the personal structure of hope is expressed in the elementary openness which results in attentiveness, vigilance, and concentration, being manifestations of love towards reality. Another aspect of this theme is the positivity of experiencing existence and sensing the existence of purpose, covered by the scope of human hope. Secondly, interpersonal relations have been shown as unique factors, providing a premonition of the possibility that fulfilment takes place through another person, and therefore by virtue of love, particularly selfless love. The fundamental element explaining the meaning of this type of relationship is the intensely experienced desire to be loved, affirmed, and accepted. The third theme is the dialoguepersonal dimension of hope, opening to the possibility of a personal bond as a fulfilment expected by nature.

Thus, this hypothesis concerning hope has two essential components. The first one is as follows: love is an adequate way of fulfilment, the picture of which is formed in the experience of hope. It is *love that constitutes the expected fulfilment.* Looking at the experience of a person through the prism of hope, we can see that each day of life is a kind of waiting for fulfilment, waiting for meaning and some desired fullness of life. At the end of the "journey of hope", the person is revealed as a being existing towards and destined for love, since they are a being fulfilled in love.

The second element of the hope hypothesis follows from the first one. Since the person is fulfilled in love, the end of the love relationship is also a person. Here, hope

means opening up to the existence of the Person,[9] who can ultimately bring human beings to fulfilment through love. They themselves, in relations of mutual love and friendship, experience a foretaste of this fulfilment, but each person continuously experiences their own deep desire, which imprints the stigma of insufficiency on the interpersonal bond. Hope opens human existence to personal love because it is a deeply experienced expectation of the Person with whom one can create a perfect community and engage in an intimate personal dialogue. At this point, we should also mention the connection between hope and desire for forgiveness, victory over evil and obtaining mercy, omitted in this reflection. This is a moral aspect of human fulfilment strongly present in personal experience which would deserve a separate study. This theme reveals even more clearly the personal face of the object of hope, since only a person can forgive, annihilate evil, and show mercy.

Therefore, human hope leads to love: full, personal, and ultimate. In conclusion, hope may be considered as a specific structure, rooted in nature and transcending it, the purpose of which is to prepare and introduce a person to love as a way leading to their fulfilment. Inside the human "I", an urgent need for the ultimate meaning of life and existence is embedded, which is essentially the wait for a presence that will respond, save—preserve and fulfil—the human personal "I", humanity. In this way, in the process of experiencing hope, the personal dimension of the One who calls and "gives" fulfilment (happiness) is revealed before the human being. If the human "I" is attentive, it can perceive in the depth of its hope this mysterious You, attainable through the relation of love.

In the light of all these considerations and above all in the light of the final statements, hope can be considered as a kind of cry, a prayer offered by nature to what gives meaning to nature, a supplication of the reason and feeling of the human being who does not want to live their life in vain. It is a request which permeates every human act, made by people who do not know (and may believe at best) who is the "You" they are waiting for.

10. Final Conclusions

This reflection was carried out concentrating on three basic aspects perceived through the prism of the personal experience of hope: (1) hope distinguishes a person from the natural context, but it does so through the mediation of nature, based on the desires rooted in human nature; (2) hope is not only inscribed in the existential situation of the human being but also expresses the very meaning of human transcendence: the person transcends themselves because they live in hope of fulfilment in a transcendent reality; hope provides the foretaste of a better (more perfect) life; (3) hope is a deeply experienced longing for love, that is, for someone who loves.

The synthesis of the path of hope can also be expressed in three theses: (1) natural desires demand fulfilment: hope, rooted in nature, cannot be pointless; (2) life strives for its fullness, that is, it goes beyond contingency: the essence of personal acts is to go beyond contingency in search of fulfilment, and therefore the object of human hope transcends nature; (3) the person is fulfilled through a person, which also means that the object of hope lies in the personal order; it is achieved in the manner of a love relation. In view of the difficulties related to the search for meaning and uncertainty, the cognitively lost human subject, so to speak, is "transferred" through hope to the level of love.

In connection with the final conclusion, a hypothesis was formulated, according to which hope is an introduction to the order of love, which is the dimension of a person's fulfilment (as an alternative to faith introducing one into to the transcendent cognitive order). Perhaps this aspect, with its more precise formulation and more detailed elaboration, will be able to constitute a new aspect to the debate on the purpose of a person's life, the possibility of human fulfilment, the search for meaning, etc. It should be emphasized that this statement does not denote a philosophical theory of happiness, in which love precedes cognition. This is more about showing the natural relationship between hope and love. Hope leads to love, while not excluding cognition or freedom. In these acts, a human being also experiences an anticipation of fulfilment, and moreover, as mentioned, they are fused with love into one personal experience. Speaking of the fundamental relationship between

hope and love, I refer to a person's experience in the aspect of seeking fulfilment, which ultimately reveals itself as the Person: Someone who loves.

The phenomenon of hope calls for special justification. Its occurrence and the role it plays in personal experience causes us to face a serious dilemma: either there is a foundation of hope, and this phenomenon reveals a particular depth of the person, or we are forced to recognize the pointlessness of hope and thus the absurdity of personal experience at its core, in which personal transcendence is revealed. Absurdity would also mark the acts of a person, such as learning the truth for its own sake, admiration for beauty, selfless love, creativity, and finally religiosity, understood as openness to the transcendent dimension.

In the above analyses, two fundamental functions of hope were identified: (1) irresistible (because of its natural origin) striving for fulfilment—against obstacles which include various cognitive and existential difficulties (such as declines, doubts, suffering, etc.); (2) transgressing nature, i.e., transcendence, or revealing the person in the context of nature. The fundamental, individual experience of hope relates to the awareness that life is not an idyll and that there is still something to be fought for, to struggle with—but it has to be this way, it makes sense: hope gives meaning to life as if it were moving towards something. Depicting the pursuit of life fulfilment, hope imparts dignity to life, the maturity of experiencing often difficult circumstances. Hope says a lot about a person without saying anything specific. It is an open gate to something unknown, towards which all seem to be headed by the power of hope.

Perhaps this reflection has shown that in the current debate on the human being, the meaning of their life and the meaning of the world in which they live, the probably indispensable voice of philosophy is also required, especially the one that respects the seriousness of existential, human questions the most. Philosophical discourse may oppose naturalistic reduction, which is, in fact, a loss of faith in another dimension of human existence which eludes the methods of modern natural sciences. Naturalism is not capable of recognising the uniqueness of the human being but aims to prove their complete unity with the nature of the cosmos, perceiving the human being's existence as enclosed in temporality.

Who shall we be when we have been deprived of hope? Is it possible to be a person without hope? These questions provoke reflection on the role of hope in human life. It can be captured in a diagram showing the opposition between a person of hope and a person who rejects hope (a human being without hope). Whereas the former feels longing, doubts run through the mind of the latter. The former engages in the search, while the latter forces negation, the rejection of the existence of an answer. As a result, whereas the former is characterized by elementary openness, a readiness to accept the existence of what is unpredictable, the latter expresses the opposite, claiming "I already know". Hope, experienced in connection with the search for fulfilment, the meaning of life, gives the human being a sense of dignity, stimulates compassion, brotherhood, and solidarity with others. When hope and its activating force are missing, human life loses its personal dimension and often collapses, without the necessary support in the form of a guarantee of the purpose and strength to endure existential hardships.

The personal context of hope, according to how it is experienced and how it reveals the person, is not distant from the theological meaning of hope, related to the Christian context, which places hope in the middle of the great triad of supernatural virtues: faith—hope—love. Faith and love can be interpreted in a way analogous to the one in which we analysed hope from the perspective of nature (the latter has been sufficiently studied, as I have already mentioned). Faith would concern the question of the existence of the ultimate goal of life—hope: the path that leads to the goal, along with the hypothetically expressed intuition pertaining to the nature of this goal, which is the Person—while love, focused entirely on the personal order, would concern the union with that goal-Person. Thereby, it would be possible to philosophically map out the natural roots of the theological virtues which constitute the essential elements of natural theology.

The reflections presented here essentially exhibit the existential roots of hope, to the extent that philosophy can make them clearer, as a basis of what was perfectly incorporated into the theory that recognizes hope as a theological virtue, which appears to take into account the nature of the person to a considerable degree (Schoot et al. 2015; Milona 2020). Undertaking a reflection of philosophical nature, it is possible to demonstrate the road leading from existential hope to "sanctified hope", from nature to grace. In a sense, hope harmonizes those two orders, the order of nature and the order of grace, at the level of experience. To discover the order of grace and its existential dimension, one needs to walk the path from the beginning, that is, from nature, from what is obvious and basic, asking about the meaning, about what is final.

The above reflection constitutes a proposition for a specific way of viewing the phenomenon of human hope, as well as addressing certain significant elements thereof, at the same time provoking subsequent, perhaps more detailed and comprehensive analyses. My intention was to draw attention to the fundamental importance of hope in experience, and to reveal to a greater extent through this what constitutes the uniqueness of the person, which still remains relatively insufficiently investigated.

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Abbreviations

CG	Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles. On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*. Translated by Vernon J. Bourke. Edited, with English, especially Scriptural references, updated by Joseph Kenny O.P. New York: Hanover House, 1955–1957. Available online: https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/ContraGentiles.htm (accessed on 1 August 2021).
DT	Richard of St. Victor, *De trinitate*, in: J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completes. Latina series*, vol. 196. Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1880. Digitized copy Available online: https://www.scribd.com/document/59437361/Migne-Patrologiae-cursus-completus-Series-latina-1800-Volume-196 (accessed on 1 August 2021).
NE	Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 19. Translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1934.
PH	Aristotle. *Physics, Books I-IV*. In *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 4. Translated by P. H. Wicksteed, F. M. Cornford. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1929.
PO	Aristotle. *Politics*. In *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 21. Translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932.
SE	Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super III librum Sententiarum*. In *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, recognovit et instruxit E. Alarcón automato electronico Pompaelone ad Universitatis Studiorum Navarrensis aedes a MM A.D. Available online at: https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html (accessed on 1 August 2021).
ST	Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Second and Revised Edition, 1920. Available online: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1076.htm (accessed on 1 August 2021).

Notes

1 In anthropological reflection, describing and explaining the primary human experience, we repeatedly enter the field of individual experiences (so called first-person experiences), which cannot be captured using empirical methodology, but it is possible to interpret them using philosophical tools.

2 This type of understanding of nature, which in fact constitutes the common heritage of science in the broad sense, is derived from Aristotle's concept. A distinction is also made between nature as the natural world and the nature of things, which primarily concerns the essence of things in terms of the principle of action.

[3] This aspect of struggle and inclination is reflected in the Latin name of appetitive power: *appetitus*, which contains demanding and requesting—*ad-petere*. It is used as a term for the whole structure present in living beings, which directs them towards achieving appropriate objectives.

[4] St. Thomas Aquinas believed that a person is an existence proper and proportional for a given nature: "Ipsum esse est personae subsistentis, secundum quod habet habitudinem ad talem naturam" (ST III, q. 17, a. 2, ad 4); or elsewhere: "Nam esse pertinet ad ipsam constitutionem personae, et sic quantum ad hoc se habet in ratione termini. Et ideo unitas personae requirit unitatem ipsius esse completi et personalis" (ST III, q. 19, a. 1, ad 4).

[5] The answer to this obstacle in understanding human nature is Krąpiec's concept (hypothesis) of personal death comprehended actively (Krąpiec 1983, pp. 335–62).

[6] Elsewhere Aquinas says: "For there should be a union in affection among those for whom there is one common end. Now, men share in common the one ultimate end which is happiness, to which they are divinely ordered. So, men should be united with each other by a mutual love. Again, whoever loves a person must, as a consequence, also love those loved by that person and those related to him. [. . .] Besides, since 'man is naturally a social animal,' he needs to be helped by other men in order to attain his own end. This is most fittingly accomplished by mutual love which obtains among men" (CG III, c. 117, 2–4).

[7] According to Aristotle, self-love is an expression of the potential nature of the human being, out of necessity striving to realise the capabilities contained in them (NE 1166a, 1168a–1169a; Annas 1989).

[8] In Thomistic metaphysics the good as such (Latin: *bonum simpliciter*) is the proper object of the will as the power of wanting. This good reveals itself especially as a good which is wanted for its own sake. The subject of selfless love in Aquinas's philosophy is discussed in Gudaniec (2015).

[9] I intentionally do not introduce the term "God" here, although this is also a paper on theodicy. By using a capital letter in "Person", I *de facto* assume this theme, but thanks to this I do not leave the realm of personalistic considerations.

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Forgiveness and the Naturalistic Approach to Religion: A Contextual View of the Problem of Evil

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Abstract: Cognitive Science of Religion and evolutionary approaches in the study of religion have opened the rapidly developing field of naturalistic explanation of religion. Since its inception, this empirically driven project has undergone a slow evolution, giving rise to the view that explaining religion is not a matter of accounting for a single (cognitive or functional) trait, but rather involves explaining a very complex repertoire of patterns of thinking and behavior. In this paper, we would like to provide a philosophical analysis of the highly complex problem of forgiveness from the Christian religious and naturalistic perspectives. Our analysis demonstrates a crucial way to understand the concepts of guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation as discussed in the context of Christian theology. At the same time, we also discuss certain strengths and weaknesses of the naturalistic accounts. Finally, we formulate some suggestions for advancing the science–religion dialogue on the problem of evil.

Keywords: forgiveness; Cognitive Science of Religion; adaptationist account of religion; evil; wrongdoing; Christianity; science–religion

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1. Introduction

Even if it remains uncertain today whether the notions of "self-interest" and "mutual aid" as used to describe the behavior of members of different species are well formulated, it is a fact that the theory of evolution has become a useful tool in explaining the behavior (morality) not only of our evolutionarily closest relatives, chimpanzees, but also of humans (de Waal 2006). The naturalistic and evolutionary accounts of human origins, human behavior and morality are being systematically expanded to cover a wider range of explananda (Cole-Turner 2020; Moritz 2020; Uhlik 2020).

In recent decades, not only the origins of mankind and the human morality, but also religion itself have become challenging topics to study. For the purposes of our inquiry, we understand religion as "a symbolic–cultural system of ritual acts accompanied by an extensive and largely shared conceptual scheme that includes culturally postulated superhuman agents" (Lawson and McCauley 1990, p. 5). Even this brief pragmatic clarification reveals the multifaceted character of religion as a highly complex phenomenon. In recent years, the scientific study of religion has developed in a systematic way, largely inspired by the possibility of observing religion as a natural process in humans that reflects our mental schemas, behavioral expressions and social attitudes (Richerson and Christiansen 2013; Szocik and van Eyghen 2021). It appears that, considering the high complexity of the phenomenon of religion, a naturalistic explanation of the unique functions, components (behaviors, beliefs, values, moods and feelings) and content of religion may be insufficient (Sasa and Roszak 2020). Hence, we would like to demonstrate that a purely naturalistic explanation of the Christian religion can be problematic by discussing the complex problem of forgiveness in the context of Christian theology.

In what follows, we briefly introduce the main tenets of the two dominant naturalistic approaches to religion: the cognitive approach and the evolutionary approach. Those familiar with the literature on this subject can proceed directly to section three, where we provide a philosophical analysis of the complex problem of forgiveness and of the crucial

way to understand the concepts of guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation as discussed in the context of Christian theology. In section four, we juxtapose the religious and naturalistic perspectives on this issue, discussing certain strengths and weaknesses of the naturalistic accounts as they apply to the content of religious behaviors, beliefs and values. In our analysis, we opt for the religious perspective as being more appropriate for discussing the main issue of the paper. Finally, we formulate some suggestions for advancing the science–religion dialogue on the problem of evil.

2. Cognitive and Evolutionary Approaches to Religion

The above-mentioned project to build a new science of religion relies heavily on two major developments in the field of empirical sciences during the last decades. On the one hand, great progress has been made in the cognitive sciences and related fields (Miłkowski et al. 2018), and on the other hand, there have been some ground-breaking advances in the understanding of the multifaceted character of the biological sciences (including such a broad range of sub-disciplines as molecular biology, systems biology, evolutionary biology or developmental biology) (Braillard and Malaterre 2015). Broadly speaking, the application of the achievements in these fields to the study of religion has resulted in advances in the areas of Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) and Evolutionary Science of Religion (ESR).

Although CSR can be referred to as an evolutionary approach, it is better to separate CSR and ESR. The core difference between the two approaches can be expressed as follows. CSR explains the putative proximate mechanisms that generate and manage religious beliefs. However, in his well-informed defense of CSR, R. McCauley (2020) reviews recent contributions that show the vitality of this research paradigm and its expansion in three main directions: the growing interest in new neuroscientific findings, the cognitive analysis of religious experience and memories of such experience, and the increasing integration of cognitive and evolutionary accounts of explanations. Hence, in the light of recent developments in CSR, religion is not only explained as a phenomenon that is connected with human cognition as a by-product of other cognitive adaptations, but also regarded as an adaptation[1]. On the contrary, according to ESR, the main theoretical means of thinking scientifically about religion are extremely long-term diachronic processes and large-scale distributed systems (such as populations, cultures or religious groups). Within this approach, researchers have primarily concentrated in their accounts of religions on natural selection (arguing that some religious beliefs have evolved as traits because of their adaptive functions or as by-products of normal cognitive capacities), sexual aspects (whereby religions aid in the successful propagation of genes by helping people deal with complexities of the mating process) or cultural aspects (focusing on the gene–culture coevolution that ranges from the transmission of cultural ideas and practices to the enhancement of cooperativeness and prosociality among co-religionists). While differences in the content of research conducted within CSR and ESR are in fact not so clear cut, for our purposes we can stress that CSR is mainly the study of proximate causes (immediate cognitive mechanisms) of religious phenomena, whereas ESR studies their ultimate causes (historical causes, especially the action of natural selection) (Futuyama and Kirkpatrick 2017, p. 7).

We would like to emphasize two explanatory limits of CSR. Firstly, the cognitive sciences themselves have noted a significant shift from the naïve enthusiasm that conscious processes can be thoroughly explained in purely neural terms to the computational paradigm where the concept of information processing seems to be predominant. While cognitive internalist accounts have focused on the "isolated mind," the recent study of cognition has progressed towards building integrated explanations that take into account computing information, the role of emotions and the importance of intersubjective processes and social factors in cognitive experience (Oviedo 2018).

Secondly, the limits of CSR stem from a careful analysis of recent discussions on cultural evolution and from the explanatory shift in the biological sciences. The basic tenet of the scientific study of culture is that its many aspects should be understood as the ideas,

skills, attitudes and norms that people acquire by means of teaching, imitation and other ways of learning from other people. It seems that the still-dominant "epistemic tool" is to frame the cultural evolution of religion within evolutionary explanations (Richerson and Christiansen 2013). Religion as a cultural factor is essentially interpreted in Darwinian terms as an inheritance system where, as time progresses, different factors impinge upon a population to change the frequency of variant ideas and skills expressed in that population. This reduction of culture or religion to cognitive and biological mechanisms can be seen as highly problematic, since the complexity of human cognition still leaves us with a very incomplete understanding of the neurobiological underpinnings of cultural evolution. In fact, recent developments in biological sciences, such as epigenetics, introduce another level of complexity where the epigenetic system could be seen as "a vehicle for massive cultural influences on gene expression, but it could also be a vehicle for massive contingent epigenetic effects on factors which bias culture acquisition" (Richerson and Christiansen 2013, p. 16). Furthermore, in modern developmental biology and systems biology, successful research strategies have been developed in opposition to the "DNA-centered biology" that focuses on the presumption that all the complex information on an organism and its development is contained in genes alone. The genotype–phenotype relationship is a highly complex co-determination rather than a mere unpacking of "genetic information" (Moss 2003; Robert 2004).

While CSR mainly focuses on cognitive mechanisms and attempts to find correlations between human cognition and acquisition of religious beliefs on the basis of such mechanisms, ESR is a historical–phylogenetic approach that attempts to explain the ubiquity of religious components by their evolutionary functions in the past environment. According to ESR, religious components can be seen as adaptations that increase the chances of survival and reproduction within the population. Essentially, there can be two types of adaptations, namely phylogenetic adaptations (i.e., intra-individual characteristics passed through genes) and cultural adaptations (intra- or extra-individual characteristics).

Although there are theoretical problems when it comes to providing a precise definition of biological adaptations and individuation of adaptive religious components, proponents of ESR argue that one can successfully grasp—in a religious context—the adaptive functions that maximize fitness and increase chances of survival. For instance, one might think of characteristics such as the psychotherapeutic functions of religion (i.e., reducing stress, providing hope or helping overcome the fear of death) or the function of religion as an in-group marker. In the latter case, it is argued that religion confers social cohesion and benefits at the group level. These benefits can range from mutual trust to cooperation, and even to inter-sexual selection based on potentially adaptive traits. As regards the possible correlation between religious components and sexual selection, it can be noted that since sexual selection focuses on looking for the most fitted mate, "religious components can enhance the rate of reputation, and consequently, can work as efficient signals for the most beneficial mate" (Szocik 2018, p. 100). Certainly, ESR is not exempt from counterarguments. For instance, it can be argued that non-religious traits are definitely more accurate adaptive tools than counterintuitive religious components, for example making clothes versus making a petitioning prayer. We are aware that not only religious elements, such as the aforementioned petitioning prayer, but also other human activities—for example in the field of culture and art—which are not directly aimed at constituting social cohesion are an expression of human morality and undoubtedly have a beneficial effect on interpersonal relations. As R. Scruton rightly observes, "not everything that confers a benefit has a function. Entirely redundant behavior—jumping for joy, listening to music, bird-watching, prayer—may yet confer enormous benefits" (Scruton 2017, p. 24). The line of reasoning where only factors which have functions confer benefits as adaptive tools, however, is deeply committed to the Darwinian account, according to which one should evaluate culture, art or religion only in the grid of proximate or ultimate effects.

Progress in explaining religion is possible when large questions are decomposed into smaller questions. When addressed with appropriate methods, this reductive approach in

science is of great benefit to the understanding of the explanandum, as evidenced by the scientific study of religion. In recent decades, a more nuanced approach has been developed that explains the phenomenon of religion in terms of not only biological evolution, but also cultural evolution (Norenzayan et al. 2016). Certainly, looking at religion in the context of the above-mentioned explanatory shift in the biological sciences and in the context of the cultural evolution of humans opens the path to not treating it as an aberrant disease or dangerous delusion present in culture (Dawkins 2008). However, it is important to bear in mind that "our understanding of the linkages between genetic and cultural components is still primitive" (Norenzayan et al. 2013). In fact, it is not straightforward that biological evolution and cultural evolution are guided by the same rules (Szocik 2019). For instance, the difference between the two can be seen in the case of the transmission and acquisition of changes. While biological evolution is the result of variation (genetic mutation and recombination) leading to the extinction of the weakest forms, cultural traits may be acquired and transmitted by social learning, imitation or invention, and humans may intentionally produce the fittest forms. Moreover, while divergence and branching are basic processes in biological evolution (i.e., biological lineages do not mix), cultural evolution seems to work as a blending process (i.e., separated cultural lineages very often mix or merge into one).

Last but not least, a major problem in the biological study of religion is the question of the causal factors of natural selection and cultural traits (including religious ones). There are different possible causal agents of natural selection with regard to the evolution of religious components that favor their development and transmission: the need for social cohesion, the importance of human reproduction, the search for consolation, the capacity for mentalizing, etc. Although, according to some authors, such factors are not a direct cause of religion, as in their opinion it is only a mechanism of natural selection, it seems that—in the light of the current understanding of the process of evolution—we cannot yet fully explain the possible causal contribution of these factors. The obvious risk in the case of presumed causal explanations is that mere correlations might be confused with causal influence. For instance, in the case of prosocial behavior, it is not clear whether religious involvement is the cause of human prosociality, or whether having a prosocial disposition causes one to be religious, or whether there is a third variable (e.g., empathy or altruistic disposition) that causes both prosocial and religious tendencies (Sosis and Alcorta 2003; Feierman 2016). Furthermore, identifying the causal factors responsible for the evolution of religious components proves to be difficult if one considers that, in contrast to genes transmitted vertically from parents to offspring, cultural or religious ideas may be transmitted horizontally to all other members of the community. Such ideas are not necessarily correlated with the maximization of fitness and may be transmitted and acquired independently of it. The latter claim suggests that culture and religion are not narrowly oriented towards reproduction and survival of the fittest, but rather encompass diverse and highly complex phenomena. It seems that one should try to explain changes in cultural traits—including religious traits—by combining various explanatory frameworks instead of using only one.

Having assessed some of the advantages and limitations of the scientific study of religion, we would like to proceed to discussing the broad question of forgiveness in the Christian tradition. This will enrich our further analysis of the empirical study of religion.

3. Philosophical and Theological Analysis of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a remarkably complicated, multi-layered and complex phenomenon[2]. Important components of the process of forgiveness are guilt (which is preceded by committing an evil act or causing harm), the act of forgiveness and the reconciliation that usually follows. Forgiveness takes place in a relationship between people; hence, we are dealing with two correlates of this relationship: the wrongdoer and the wronged. All these elements of the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation are present in the formation of social order and communities. One may also distinguish the acts undertaken in the process

of reconciliation by the wronged, namely forgiveness and pursuit of reconciliation, and by the wrongdoer, namely contrition (expression of regret for the evil committed), satisfaction (which consists of two elements: reparation of the damage that is commensurate with the evil inflicted and repentance) and reconciliation itself.

For forgiveness to be granted to the wrongdoer, the wrongdoer's contrition and satisfaction are needed—these acts are prerequisite and sufficient for forgiveness to occur, assuming that there is a will to forgive on the part of the wronged. Importantly, in many cases, satisfaction comprises two elements: commensurate and fair reparation of all damage caused by the wrongdoer and some form of repentance that compensates for the harm done. Griswold distinguishes four elements of satisfaction: "repentance, apology, reparation, and what, for want of a better word, I shall call penance (though not all of these are always required)" (Griswold 2007, p. 60). We can, of course, speak of forgiveness that does not require satisfaction, or unconditional forgiveness, as Griswold further emphasizes. However, as Scruton counters, forgiveness cannot be given to everyone, because it would become a kind of indifference, failing to recognize the distinction between good and wrongful deeds. For it seems that only when "the person apologizes [and] the contrition is proportionate to the offense, a process begins that might have forgiveness as its outcome" (Scruton 2017, p. 85), and what follows is reconciliation.

From that standpoint, the wronged should refuse to forgive the wrongdoer unless the latter displays contrition and makes amends. Conversely, if the wrongdoer does express contrition and make amends, then the wronged would do unwisely to withhold forgiveness. Typically, it is assumed that forgiveness granted to the wrongdoer is a sufficient act in the pursuit of reconciliation: the wrongdoer is absolved of guilt, and the path to reconciliation between the wronged person and the wrongdoer is opened, making it possible for the latter to be restored to their normal place in the community. In truth, however, the matter is much more complicated.

3.1. The Case of John Newton

In his youth, John Newton made several voyages as captain of ships carrying slaves from Africa[3]. Thus, he contributed to the deaths of many of the slaves, and those who survived the journey were then sold. At a certain point in his life, however, Newton had a spiritual conversion as a result of which he later became an Anglican priest and a highly respected citizen. Over time, he realized the enormous amount of evil he had committed as a slave trader. He undertook to make amends: he publicly admitted his wrongdoings, thus putting his hard-earned social status at risk, and began to fight for the complete abolition of slavery. Ultimately, in 1807, his efforts contributed to the prohibition of the slave trade.

In Newton's case, one is presented with true contrition (sincere remorse for the evil he had committed) and satisfaction in the form of reparation of damage—the prohibition of the slave trade to which Newton largely contributed. However, Newton's actions as described above cannot be sufficient to achieve reconciliation. In that respect, two fundamental questions arise. Firstly, if the descendants of the former slaves have regained their freedom as a result of the abolition of slavery, can they grant forgiveness on behalf of those who died on the slave ships? Secondly, is such forgiveness sufficient for reconciliation to occur? In other words, can the wrongdoer be restored to his normal place in the community?

3.2. Forgiveness and Love

Love encompasses two interrelated desires: the desire for the good of the beloved person and the desire for union with that person (ST I-II, q. 26, a. 1). Forgiveness, which has reconciliation as its purpose after all, is connected with love. A refusal to forgive is tantamount to the absence of love, whereas forgiveness always means the existence of some degree of love towards the wrongdoer.

As noted above, love is the desire for the good of the beloved person and for union with that person, which means that the absence of either of these desires precludes the fullness of love. Additionally, insofar as forgiveness presupposes love, the absence of

either of the desires that constitute love also invalidates forgiveness. If this is indeed the case, one may not speak of forgiveness not only when there is no desire for the good of the one who has committed the wrongdoing, but also when the wronged has no desire of being united with the wrongdoer. Following this line of reasoning, forgiveness can be unilateral—without contrition or satisfaction on the part of the offender. It is the wronged person who decides whether they wish good upon (or for) the one who has wronged them and whether they wish to be united with the latter.

At the same time, whether the desires for good and union are fulfilled depends on the wrongdoer's state. How does one deal with the fact that the wrongdoer not only refuses to express contrition towards the wronged, but also continues to do harm? If the wronged wishes good upon the wrongdoer and desires union with the latter, but the wrongdoer intends to continue to harm them, then the desire for communion with the wrongdoer contradicts the wronged person's first desire; that is, the desire for the good of the wrongdoer. This is due to the fact that by allowing themselves to be harmed, the wronged person permits the wrongdoer to do harm towards them. This means that their desire for the good of the loved one is only apparent, which contravenes the ideas of love and forgiveness.

As discussed above, unilateral forgiveness is possible just as unreciprocated love is. However, neither the desire for love in connection with forgiveness nor the desire for love as such is—in and of itself—effective in fulfilling the ultimate goal of union. A person who loves or a person who forgives must always take into account the state of the person towards whom their love or forgiveness is directed; they cannot achieve what they desire (i.e., union) through the power of forgiveness or love alone.

Similarly, if a great evil is committed, then even if the wrongdoer displays contrition and makes amends, this may not be sufficient to erase the guilt or make reconciliation morally acceptable, since the reasons and consequences of the wrongdoing must still be taken into consideration. On the part of the wrongdoer, one may identify the following issues:

(i) Morally wrong states of intellect and will and the corrupt habits from which they stem or to which they contribute (when Newton traded in slaves, he saw no evil in it);
(ii) The fact that even if the wrongdoer feels contrition after a certain amount of time, he may still lack the inner restraint that says "I must not do it" with respect to certain morally wrong deeds;
(iii) The fact that Newton's wrongdoing remains part of his present (since the memory of the evil acts causes suffering).

In addition, one needs to consider the consequences of the offender's morally wrong acts in the external world, that is, the suffering that Newton caused to people (death, captivity, objectification). Newton's contrition alone, his remorse and amends are not sufficient, since there remains the question of the irreversible consequences of his wrongdoing (suffering and death) and of how they can be repaired.

3.3. Forgiveness and Theology

As clearly demonstrated above, the acts of the wronged and the wrongdoer may in themselves prove insufficient to lead to reconciliation, or in other words, to reincorporate the wrongdoer into the network of proper social relations. On the part of the wrongdoer, contrition may remove some of the wrongdoer's guilt, but it has no impact whatsoever on the effects of the evil acts in the world. Furthermore, contrition alone cannot restore the wrongdoer to the standing they had in the community before the evil was committed, and neither can the satisfaction—including both the wrongdoer's commensurate reparation of the damage inflicted and their repentance—invalidate the harm caused and the evil committed, thus leading to reconciliation. The acts performed by the wronged person—that is, forgiveness and love, even if one considers them obligatory[4] (towards those who display no contrition)—do not in and of themselves lead to reconciliation. Bilateral forgiveness can only be achieved in full through reconciliation (Spaemann 2001). If, however, one truly

wants to achieve the union that enables the bond to survive more than does its absence, then from that perspective, humans are obliged to both forgive and love. Incorporating a theological context into the discussion, it is important to expand the distinction between the wrongdoing committed (sin) as a deed/act and its effect (guilt) by considering the fact that the guilt incurred relates not only to the person who was wronged, but also to God. By committing an evil act, the wrongdoer is not only unable to repay his debts to the person whom they have harmed (as in Newton's case), but also, in and of themselves, unable to ever repay their debt to God.

This is due to the fact that the consequences of the wrongdoing are often irreversible from the human point of view, which is evident on a number of levels in relation to the Newton case under consideration:

(a) The acts in question will not bring the dead back to life.
(b) The consequences of the evil committed remain present in the perpetrator's memory, causing the perpetrator to have a guilty conscience.
(c) The consequences of the evil committed affect the relationships that are now being built with the perpetrator.
(d) The consequences of the evil committed upset the relationship between man and God.

A moral wrong that stems from misused freedom has an "ontic" dimension in that it reaches the depths of being itself, disrupting the creative order and upsetting the harmony between God and creation, and cannot therefore be reversed by man himself (Kałuża 2015).

For example, according to St. Anselm, the redemption brought by Christ is based on the conviction that while humanity has a great debt to repay due to the wrongful acts it has committed, it is unable to repay that debt (Anzelm z Canterbury 2006; Wójcikowski 1992; Kempa 2010). Only Christ—as both God and man, bringing together rather than blending the Divine nature and human nature—can repay the debt owed by man; as a man, He is part of the species that owes the debt, and as God, he has the means to repay it. At the same time, "in the union of these two natures, Jesus Christ is the guarantor and witness of our reconciliation" (Barth 1966). The teaching of St. Paul is very clear in that respect (Ephesians 2:14–17): reconciliation is a free and gratuitous initiative of God who unites humanity with Himself in Christ. The effectiveness of His grace of forgiveness and reconciliation also consists of the fact that in Christ, the dividing wall of hostility between people is torn down. Since reconciliation with God is not possible without reconciliation between people, it is through the Cross of Christ that the way to successful reconciliation with God and man is opened (Sesboüé 2015; ST III, q. 48, a. 1, a. 2 and a. 3).

This was also Newton's understanding, for he was convinced that only the "amazing grace" could have found him and renewed him. Newton's actions were only a response to the grace previously granted by God, and the amends made by Newton became incorporated into the effects of that grace. While it is not easy to set the limits of morality or pronounce what moral wrong is, it appears that—as Newton's story shows—the experience of suffering or misery, and especially misery of the most vulnerable, may serve as a "boundary stone." Limitations—not only physical, but also and above all moral—are statements about man, since they express our fundamental finiteness, fragility and fallibility (Gaitán 2019; Szopa 2021).

It is in this very context of experiencing the different forms of limitations that we would like to emphasize the special role of religion. Against the background of this dissonance between our growing desire to transform the world and our (in)ability to change our moral lives "for the better," the Christian religion seems to act as a belief system that can successfully integrate suffering and evil. It does so not by disregarding the issue of evil and suffering, but by relating these concepts to God and to relationships with other human beings, having in view the reconciliation that can be attained rather than moral justice alone. The Christian religion, and especially the Christian tradition, relates negative facts of life—suffering, failures, injustices and errors—to God's reality, thus making it possible to transform these facts into values which are interiorized and therefore capable of being accepted. Therefore, religion can in a sense be perceived as a

method of transforming empirical facts—such as death or injustice—into values. Thanks to this transformation, a "fact of life" is not merely what it appears in the empirical or phenomenological layer, but above all, a component of a teleologically organized order. The latter statement means that there is a deeply rooted mechanism of "explaining evil" in us whereby we typically perceive fate, suffering, evil, sin, injustice, etc. as pieces of a larger whole, that is, a network of relationships with God and with other people. Religion is the means by which one can acquire a more acute "elucidating" outlook on the problems of evil, suffering or forgiveness.

4. Forgiveness: Naturalistic and Religious Perspectives Confronted

4.1. Unity between People

From a naturalistic, cognitive or evolutionary point of view, human behavior and human moral norms (sense of guilt, duty of forgiveness, desire for reconciliation) can be construed as useful mechanisms through which human beings strengthen their inter-group or intra-group solidarity. Such solidarity is a precondition for the coherence of a given group or society, making humans capable of surviving and effectively defending against external or internal threats. In this context, the studies conducted by Sosis and Ruffle (2003) and by Sacco et al. (2017) are highly relevant to our analysis[5].

In the case of the first study, the quantitative investigation directly tested the prediction that religiously driven groups, particularly those incorporating costly signals of commitment to the community, exhibit greater intra-group cooperation. Sosis and Ruffle conducted experiments at Israeli kibbutzim that were aimed at measuring individual cooperative decision making. They found that members of religious kibbutzim engage in collective rituals much more frequently than do members of secular ones. The main conclusion from their investigation is that "collective ritual participation influences beliefs (perceived levels of cooperation) and behavior (cooperative decisions) and therefore assume [. . .] that ritual participation enhances the social bonds that connect its participants" (Sosis and Ruffle 2003, p. 721). It is important to note, however, that the data provided in their research, as well as the experimental game data (which captures the notion of cooperation as relevant to the social conditions of the kibbutz), are incapable of distinguishing the causal direction of this relationship.

In contrast to the above study, Sacco et al. do not directly discuss the impact of religious components on human behavior. Nevertheless, they describe certain general rules of a deontological strategy helpful for navigating moral conflicts that seem to confirm the special role of deontological concepts, moral values and ideas in facilitating positive relations among conspecifics. For the purposes of their study, the authors differentiate between deontological decisions, which rely on rule-based logic (e.g., it is always wrong to hurt someone), and moral decisions guided by utilitarianism, which rely on cost–benefit analyses (e.g., it is acceptable to harm one person if it saves several others). Their main idea is that "because deontological moral decision-making is defined by rule-based criterion [. . .], an individual who adopts this moral framework may be perceived as more interpersonally likeable and trustworthy because their moral decision-making strategy is predictable. Conversely, because utilitarian decision-makers primarily engage in cost-benefit analyses when making moral decisions [. . .], individuals may suppress their attraction toward this type of person because one might ultimately become a victim of this person's moral decision-making" (Sacco et al. 2017, p. 130). Thus, their research confirms that the constant sharing of certain ideas and beliefs can provide better chances of survival not only at the level of inter-group competition, but also at the level of intra-group competition. The authors' general conclusion is that "human morality may have evolved to maximize group cooperation by codifying a set of social exchange rules that reduce anti-social behavior of individual group members that would interfere with the effective survival of a particular group" (Sacco et al. 2017, p. 131). A possible extension of the results of their study to the case of religiously driven morality could be based on the fact that religion is one of the best possible cultural candidates for signaling trustworthiness to

other members of a given group. The sharing of religious beliefs—such as the belief that the way to successful reconciliation with God and man is opened through the Cross of Christ—can work as a signal of reciprocal altruism, which is a hallmark of cooperation despite difficulties in resolving moral conflicts between members of the community.

From a theological point of view, the fact that man was created in God's image and after God's likeness (Genesis 1:26) has a number of important implications to the understanding of unity between people. According to Thomas Aquinas, the idea of the "image of God" in man defines the dynamic reality planned out for him in the very act of creation (ST I, q. 4, a. 3), since man was not created by God in some "finite state," but rather endowed with certain immutable elements of nature and is therefore called to strive for a perfection that is yet to be attained. In addition to freedom and reason as the constitutive attributes of man, man's social nature also follows from the fact that he was created in the image and after the likeness of the Triune God. From a theological perspective, the understanding of human subjectivity begins with the acknowledgement of its relational character (Woźniak 2012), since man was created to live in communion with God and in communion with other people (Choromański 2015). Such a vision of theological anthropology also stems from the concept of the Triune God: a community of persons in a relationship of love. The grace that God grants to man does not abolish the relational nature of man, but perfects it and raises the natural powers of cognition and love to the level of supernatural life. In the words of Karol Wojtyła, "man finds in himself a certain imperative to live in community with others and carries this imperative in himself wherever he goes, even when he becomes separated from other people [. . .]. [Living in community with others] is therefore not a matter of choice by will. Man can, to a certain extent, choose the people with whom he socially affiliates more closely, but the very propensity for social affiliation is inherent in him by nature; it cannot be chosen or rejected" (Wojtyła 1982, p. 111). Wojtyła's understanding of moral behavior sheds new light on interpersonal relationships. For Wojtyła, the human person is such a value in itself that the only appropriate relation of a person to a person is the affirmation of personal dignity, and this affirmation is nothing else than love (Wojtyła 2001). A group or community of people is prerequisite for one's existence and development as a person, and living in a relationship with others is an inalienable attribute of a human being (Wojtyła 2011). However, as demonstrated above, the evil committed by a person disrupts the union with others and precludes the fulfillment of the relationality inscribed in the human nature (Kutarňa 2020). As a result, that person falls into a situation where the consequences of his or her own choices prevent him or her from fulfilling his or her own nature. A major question thus arises concerning the role of religion as the factor that enables not only acts of forgiveness, but also acts of reconciliation that make one capable of being fully reincorporated into the network of relationships between people and between man and God.

4.2. Reconciliation and Forgiveness

As we have previously demonstrated, in the moral life of a human person, the evil which that person has committed may prevent reconciliation with the perpetrator, thus precluding complete reconciliation. The question thus arises of where such a strong need for unity, forgiveness and reconciliation in humans comes from. Is this need only a type of cognitive mechanism or rather a social adaptation that makes us capable of creating both complex and stable forms of social life? In our analysis, we do not question the fact that CSR or ESR can, to a degree, describe the neuronal, mental or cultural mechanisms responsible for the biological inheritance of such abilities in our species and their evolutionary development within different civilizations, cultures or religious traditions. We are not denying that it is practically and theoretically possible to reduce various components of religion—such as behavior, beliefs, values, moods and feelings—to phylogenetic or cultural adaptations (Feierman 2009). At the same time, however, we can see that it may be problematic to apply such scientific explanations to the question of reconciliation.

It is our view that in the case of forgiveness and reconciliation, for instance, CSR would mainly try to pinpoint our capacity to seek reconciliation, most probably as a by-product or an adaptation of some cognitive mechanism enabling us to maintain effective intra-group and inter-group cooperation. However, as we have demonstrated above, the semantic content of reconciliation does not necessarily follow from forgiveness. In other words, reconciliation goes beyond what is required by mere forgiveness. ESR, on the other hand, might attempt to analyze the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation as a type of evolutionary adaptation that maximizes cooperation within a group by codifying a set of social and religious rules to reduce members' anti-social behavior which would interfere with the aims and survival of that particular community. Moreover, one's willingness to perform acts of reconciliation may allow one to achieve the status of a fair arbiter or moral exemplar unselfishly committed to the community. Again, we remain puzzled by the fact that mere forgiveness—rather than reconciliation—seems to be sufficient for an evolutionary adaptation aimed at maintaining effective intra-group and inter-group cooperation or eusociality (i.e., humans' capacity to put the welfare of their in-group breeding population above that of themselves).

One might argue that for cohesion and cooperation to occur, the norms in the form of a punishment and reward system must have a sufficient impact on social cohesion. However, in the anthropological vision we are presenting, externally imposed obligations are a necessary condition for building social relations, but not a sufficient one (Wood 2020). From the point of view of morality, our relationships do not merely function in terms of punishment and reward. On the contrary, personal relationships are often of the greatest importance to the foundation of conventional affordances: family relationships, responsibility, honor, sense of duty, love, friendship, etc.

Although we do not disregard the fact that moral acts of forgiveness and reconciliation (as defined above) may be partially heritable and evolutionarily driven at the social and cultural levels, it does not follow that such acts, when analyzed from a theological and philosophical point of view, are simply genetically heritable or produced by certain cognitive or adaptive mechanisms. The Christian moral experience of reconciliation is not the same thing as a propensity to cooperate with others and abide by established social rules, although such experience is not at odds with the natural cooperativeness that we are discussing below. Moreover, it seems to us that to treat the historical continuity of the Christian faith and the powerful and amazing role of forgiveness and reconciliation in human life (as in the case of Newton) merely as a useful fiction or a by-product of human cognition is explanatorily insufficient.

In the case of the above argument, holding the view that religiously driven reconciliation is a by-product of selection, a backward reasoning can in fact be suggested. Belief in the moral value of reconciliation may not have been merely produced by our brains or genetic heritage. Instead, by referring to the historical and, at the same time, supra-historical salvific event of Christ's death and resurrection as the absolutely unique yet universal path of reconciliation between God and humanity and between men, Christian tradition opens a path for believers in Christ to engage in social (community) learning of such religious behavior. Such a reference in the Christian tradition to the need for forgiveness and reconciliation is evidence of not only the role of deontologically based moral rules (i.e., the difference between moral good and evil), but also the immutable meaning of the Christian teaching on reconciliation. If the moral or religious act of reconciliation was to be treated as nothing more than a result of the evolutionary process of natural selection or a by-product of some cognitive mechanism, then one should provide some inductive scientific research that shows a positive correlation between potentially adaptive or cognitive features of the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation and the reproductive success of their bearers.

The main message that can be taken from our analysis is that there is an invariant value in reconciliation as seen from a religious point of view. Even if the issue of reconciliation is contextually and culturally driven in its different contingent expressions (i.e., various religious traditions, different theological models or explanations, etc.), it nevertheless

remains difficult to explain the powerful influence and insistence of the Christian idea of reconciliation on so many aspects of human morality from a cognitive or evolutionary perspective alone. The difficulty stems from the fact that acts of reconciliation are very costly from a psychological or emotive point of view. If the religious elements have arisen as evolutionary by-products of cognitive functions or as an adaptation or something that possesses adaptedness, the insistence on the importance of reconciliation seems to be an explanatory puzzle for the two reasons discussed below.

Firstly, if natural selection essentially maximizes fitness, it is puzzling why it has not stopped the development of religious components such as reconciliation, which are both costly and counterintuitive. Acts of reconciliation are costly in terms of time, energy and emotions. From one's long-term existential perspective, they may become highly useful and adaptive (offering such benefits as a sense of relief, reintegration of the wrongdoer in the network of social relationships, rediscovery of the meaning of life, etc.). Initially, however, they are too extravagant in comparison with other possible cultural tools, such as the basic sense of justice or acts of forgiveness.

Secondly, we notice at the same time that forgiveness does not always seem to be costly. In some cases, forgiving appears to be a quick and inexpensive way to restore harmony or cooperation. It appears that forgiveness may allow for less stress and anxiety within religious communities and societies. If one considers the Christian religion, they may note that certain kinds of rituals (such as the confession of sins) or moral norms (such as "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44)) regarding forgiveness are very effective tools in the process of restoring community or social structure. This easiness and quickness of experience of forgiveness may, from an evolutionary point of view, be due to the fact that costly acts can be chosen because the evolutionary benefits outweigh the costs in the long run, which, at the same time, seems to be compatible with the theological view. In fact, from a theological perspective, grace does not nullify nature, but perfects it. Therefore, even the natural facility to forgive and reconcile is not something that would exclude the action of grace.

Regardless of whether we want to explain the emergence of religious beliefs through the lens of CSR or through the lens of ESR, these explanations remain incomplete and rely on certain implicit anthropological assumptions, such as viewing human beings as being self-conscious and as bearers of advantages at the group level. In fact, as a rule, CSR considers religious content to be a by-product of other cognitive mechanisms and therefore treats cognition as the most primitive human function, thus essentially reducing the understanding of a human being to his or her cognitive functions; a similar approach, although from yet another entirely different perspective, was taken by Edmund Husserl (Galarowicz 2000). Additionally, as regards ESR, it sees religion as a carrier of certain adaptive functions that increase individuals' chances of survival by ensuring social cohesion and providing advantages at the group level. However, our analysis indicates that this perspective may at most explain the obligatory nature of acts of forgiveness in different religions, but does not differentiate between such acts and acts of reconciliation. At the same time, it appears that it is the acts of reconciliation that can fully restore a wrongdoer to proper social relationships.

5. Conclusions

Among the many modern empirical approaches to the study of religion, two clearly come to the forefront: the cognitive approach (CSR) and the evolutionary approach (ESR). Although the two methods attempt to explain religion through the application of, respectively, cognitive and neurological or biological/evolutionary means, it has to be noted that from the current point of view, explaining religion is not a matter of accounting for a single (cognitive or functional) trait. Instead, it involves explaining a very complex repertoire of patterns of thinking and behavior where any given religious belief is affected not only by cognitive or functional traits, but also by the cultural and social context and by the

pragmatic power of the content of supernatural beliefs (e.g., the concept of supernatural agents or the concept of an afterlife).

In our article, we pointed out the important differentiation—both philosophical and religious—between forgiveness and reconciliation. This differentiation helped us identify certain advantages and limitations of the empirical study of religion as it applies to our case study. On the basis of our analysis of the modern approaches to religion, we are convinced that in the context of CSR or ESR, we could propose to undertake an empirical study of the phenomenon of forgiveness that aims to determine whether religious components have an impact on the disposition to forgive. For instance, such a study could analyze how engaging in religious practices influences people's beliefs (the perceived importance of forgiveness in social life) and behavior (the decision to forgive). Alternatively, it could attempt to describe the mechanisms behind deontological decisions that rely on rule-based logic (i.e., "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"). At the same time, we endeavored to underline the fact that acts of reconciliation as presented by the Christian religion remain a great explanatory puzzle for the CSR or ESR accounts.

The latter conclusion does not mean that we assume a priori that an empirical study of religion cannot, to some degree, adequately explain the role, development and transmission of such religious components. We are not "protectionists" (McCauley 2020, pp. 100–3) who simply have objections to and try to displace comparatively successful scientific theories of religion. We assume the legitimacy of explaining religious phenomena in nonreligious terms in light of the explanatory principles employed in the social and natural sciences as well as in phenomenological or supernaturalistic terms. Our aim in making critical remarks about the empirical study of religion essentially concerns the fact that the reduction of biology to genetics is responsible for certain difficulties in explaining the evolution of religious components or the inadequate formulation of what needs to be explained. We consider it highly pertinent to move the debate on the study of religion beyond general concerns regarding "reductionism," towards a discussion on how to provide proper explanations of religious phenomena. Since religion and religious components cause a diverse and highly complex spectrum of effects (from direct impacts on survival, reproduction, social bonds and cooperative attitudes to spiritual or mystical experiences that do not maximize fitness or reproductive success), it can be suggested that religion should be treated as more than a reservoir of genetic or behavioral "tools" designated by natural selection for enhancing humans' chances survival and reproduction. The evolution of religion is driven not only by genes, but also by human choices and consciousness. One of such choices, as discussed above, is to "forgive those who trespass against us" (cf. Matthew 6:12) and "be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). In this context, religion seems to be a way of acquiring something that transcends moral (social or individual) abilities, rather than simply a domain of transmitting that which was inherited.

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Notes

[1] For the purposes of our discussion, we have adopted the definition of adaptation as "a structural design feature, which when possessed, confers a reproductive advantage (also known as "fitness" or survival value) to its bearer in a specific environment" (Feierman 2009, p. 52).

[2] The starting point for the analysis provided below is Professor Eleonore Stump's lecture entitled "Sunflower: Guilt, Forgiveness and Reconciliation," which was delivered on 22 June 2018 at the Thomistic Institute in Warsaw.

[3] John Newton (1725–1807)—slavery abolitionist known as one of the co-founders of Evangelicalism and the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace".

[4] It is also worth pointing out that if forgiveness is mandatory, then there exists a clear asymmetry where the obligation to forgive on the part of the wronged person is not matched by any right to forgiveness that the wrongdoer might claim (Spaemann 2001, p. 287).

[5] Although in our analysis we mainly focus on the fact that religion has played a role in human social evolution by serving to unite groups into coheisve, functional social units, we are nevertheless aware that at least two important aspects are in need of further analysis, which is beyond the direct aims of this paper: on the one hand, the evolutionary role of cohesion or trustworthiness signalling can also result in violence or other evil acts, and on the other, both cohesion and cooperation can also be achieved by excluding wrongdoers or calling for reparation or compensatory suffering (Teehan 2016; Eyghen 2021).

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The Evolution of Suffering, Epiphenomenalism, and the Phenomena of Life: Evidential Problems for Naturalists

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Abstract: Paul Draper argues that the central issue in the debate over the problem of suffering is not whether the theist can offer a probable explanation of suffering, but whether theism or naturalism can give a *better* explanation for the facts regarding the distribution of pain as we find them. He likewise maintains a comparison of relative probabilities considering the facts of suffering; atheological naturalism is to be preferred. This essay proceeds in two phases: (a) It will be argued that mainstream positions in naturalistic philosophy of mind make it difficult to take pain as anything but epiphenomenal and therefore not subject to evolutionary explanation. While the distribution of suffering is a difficulty for the theist, the naturalist has equal difficulty explaining the fact that there is any suffering at all in the first place. Thus, the facts of suffering offer no advantage to the atheist. (b) Phenomenologists suggest that there is an intrinsic connection between animal life, pain, and normativity (including a *summum bonum*). The mere occurrence of life and normativity are, at least *prima facie*, more likely on the assumption of theism than atheism, so the theist may have a probabilistic advantage relative to the atheist. Phases (a) and (b) together support the overall conclusion that the facts of pain as we find them in the world (including that there is any pain at all) are at least as great, if not greater, a challenge for the atheist as they are the theist.

Keywords: evidential problem of evil; epiphenomenalism; evolution; theism; atheism

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1. The Evidential Atheological Argument and Its Critics

Attempts to *demonstrate* atheism based on a supposed incompatibility of evil and the existence of God (an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator) have fallen out of favor among analytic philosophers of religion for the last few decades. Instead, recent atheologians have preferred a more modest evidentialist approach, according to which the overall distribution of suffering or the occurrence of particular horrors, though not logically incompatible with the existence of God, amount to strong evidence against his existence. In other words, there are readily available examples of apparently gratuitous suffering, i.e., suffering for which we cannot fathom any justifying good due to its seemingly unjustifiable intensity or ubiquity, and gratuitous suffering is not at all what we would expect to find on the assumption that God exists. While conceding that the distribution and intensity of evil are not strictly proofs of atheism, the evidentialist atheologian nevertheless claims that the undeniable empirical facts regarding apparently gratuitous suffering amount to very strong evidence in favor of non-belief. In other words, in the absence of strong contrary evidence, the evidential atheologian argues that the apparent fact of gratuitous suffering is ample justification for accepting atheism on broadly inductive grounds. We may then summarize the evidential atheologian's case in terms of the following simple argument:

(1) If God exists, then there is no gratuitous suffering.
(2) It is probable that there are a great many instances of gratuitous suffering.

Therefore:

(3) It is probable that God does not exist.

Premise (1) is typically undisputed, and the atheologian claims that we have good reason to accept (2). Given our knowledge of the available goods and their connections

with suffering, it appears that there are quantities and intensities of suffering that are not connected with any sufficiently valuable justifying good, which is to say that appearances favor the occurrence of a good bit of gratuitous suffering. Since a morally perfect being would not allow such horrors to occur, except for the sake of a justifying good, we may conclude that it is likely that God does not exist based on prevalence of inscrutable suffering in the natural order (Rowe 1979; Howard-Snyder 2008).

Some theists use traditional *theodicies* to cast doubt on (2). The strategy here is to argue that certain well-known goods are sufficiently valuable and connected to the kind of suffering we find in the actual world so as to offer a reasonable justification for God's allowance of what the atheologian claims to be inscrutable suffering (Swinburne 1998, 2008). Other less ambitious theists eschew theodicy proper in favor of a more modest *defense*. Using this strategy, the theist points out that there are certain goods within our ken that are valuable enough to justify the horrors the atheologian cites. The theist may, at the same time, admit that we have neither a high degree of certainty that God would pursue such goods, nor are these goods clearly necessarily connected to the facts of suffering in the natural world. Nevertheless, the theist employing a defensive strategy believes a plausible theological story might be told in which God would pursue such goods, and for all we know this story is true. That is, we cannot rule out that God is up to something for the sake of such goods when he allows the distribution and intensity of suffering we find in the actual world (van Ingwagen 1991, 2008). Whether one offers a bold theodicy or a more cautious defense, it would seem that (2) is undercut, because we cannot conclude that it is highly probable that God would be without justifying reasons for what the atheologian claims to be gratuitous sufferings; the atheologian's supposedly inscrutable goods are not really so inscrutable.

However successful theodicies and defenses might be, one of the most powerful objections to (2) does not require that we are aware of any good sufficient to justify God's allowance of suffering. Rather, the *skeptical theist* argues that God, as omniscient, would know (or very likely would know) of both goods sufficiently valuable to justify the empirical of about suffering and connections between such goods and sufferings that are beyond our meager human ken. Thus, the fact that any a particular horror or overall distribution of suffering is *apparently gratuitous* in no way increases the probability that it is *actually gratuitous*, because we would expect (or at least we would not be entirely surprised to find) that God pursues goods beyond our ken. In other words, if God exists, then the human intellect is not a reliable indicator of what actually is or is not a gratuitous instance of suffering, and therefore premise (2) begs the question, i.e., we would only accept such a premise if we had some antecedent reason to believe the conclusion. Another way to put the skeptical theist's position is first to point out that the appearance of gratuitous suffering weighs in favor of (2), only if we would expect that the justifying reasons for all sufferings would be apparent to us. The skeptical theist, however, argues that if God exists, we would not be surprised to find that the justifying reasons for much suffering are beyond our ken. Thus, the *appearance* of gratuitous suffering is no evidence in favor of (2), at least for the theist or somebody who has not ruled out theism entirely for independent reasons (Wykstra 1984; see also Rowe et al. 2001; Wykstra 2017; Hendricks 2020).

The slightest bit of formalism will be helpful as we move forward with this discussion. Let "G" be the proposition stating theism, "K" be the proposition regarding the common evidential background shared by atheists and theists alike, and "P" be the proposition stating the occurrence of suffering we find in the actual world. The key claim of the evidential atheologian is:

(4) $\Pr(P/G\&K) < \Pr(P/K)$.

The skeptical theist, however, denies that (4) is true, and in fact defends something like the following:

(5) $\Pr(P/G\&K) = \Pr(P/K)$

That is, the skeptical theist argues that the assumption of theism is an undercutting defeater for the atheologian's evidence for (2). If God exists, then our judgments about what

is or is not a case of gratuitous suffering are unreliable; supposing that God exists, we just are not good judges on such matters. Thus, the occurrence of suffering, even inscrutable suffering, is of no evidential value for the atheist, i.e., the probability of the given facts of inscrutable suffering are neither more nor less probable on the assumption of theism.

2. Theism, Naturalism, and the Distribution of Pain

The debate between evidential atheists and skeptical theists has been active for three decades now, and declarations of stalemate have not been uncommon. Various strategies for breaking the deadlock in favor of either the atheist or the theist have been proposed and defended in detail (Adams 1999; Schellenberg 2000; Davies 2006; Russell 2018; Tooley 2019). We, however, will focus on just one such approach, which begins with the claim that the basic issue has been misconstrued. Paul Draper agrees with the skeptical theist that the standard evidential atheologian's defense of (2) involves a questionable inference "from being no *known* morally sufficient reasons" for God's permission of certain sufferings to there "probably being no such morally sufficient reasons" (Draper 2008, p. 213). His intention is not to defend skeptical theism, as Draper believes that both sides of the debate "have failed to recognize . . . that one cannot determine what facts about evil theism needs to explain or how well it explains them without considering alternatives to theism" (Draper 1989, p. 332). That is, the question is not whether theism is likely or unlikely given the particular facts of suffering we encounter in the actual world, but "whether or not any serious hypothesis that is logically inconsistent with theism explains some significant set of facts about evil or good and evil better than theism does" (Draper 1989, p. 332). Draper's point is, even supposing that theism is improbable given the intensity and distribution of inscrutable suffering we find in the actual world, all may not be lost for the theist. If theism is nevertheless the best available explanation of the facts about suffering, then those facts can hardly be counted as significant evidence against theism. Even if the theist's account of suffering is on equal footing to the atheists, the evidential atheologian's case fails; in that case, all things being equal, both positions would be reasonable. The question is then not whether the facts of suffering are likely under the assumption of theism, but whether the facts of suffering are more or less likely under the assumption of theism than they are under the assumption of other competitor hypotheses.

Draper argues that when compared to its primary competitors as an explanation of the facts of suffering, theism comes out quite badly. Philosophical naturalism, theism's primary alternative, certainly entails what Draper calls the "hypothesis of indifference" (HI): "neither nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human beings" (Draper 1989, p. 332). Let us once again call the propositions stating theism "G", the proposition stating the facts about suffering "P", and the proposition stating the shared background knowledge "K". Draper then defends the following claim:

(6) Pr(P/HI) is much greater than Pr(P/G)

If Draper is correct, then naturalism (which entails HI) has a much better explanation of the facts of suffering than theism, and therefore we have a strong evidential argument for preferring naturalism to theism.

Draper claims that "it is the biological role played by both pain and pleasure in goal-directed organic systems that renders" (6) true (Draper 1989, p. 334). Part of an organic system (S) is biologically useful, according to Draper, "just in case (i) it causally contributes to one of S's biological goals . . . , and (ii) its doing so is not biologically accidental" (Draper 1989, p. 335). He uses the example of the experience had by a cat when it encounters a hot oven as to motivate the biological usefulness of pain. Since a cat reacts quickly to the pain and thereby avoids grave injury (and his memory of this painful experience will make it more likely that he will avoid such injuries in the future), his biological goals of survival and reproduction are furthered. Much of the distribution of pain and pleasure among sentient beings seems to be connected to biological usefulness; sentient organisms seem to find things bad for their survival and reproduction painful (or at least devoid of pleasure)

and things good for their survival and reproduction pleasurable (or at least devoid of pain). Given that evolution by natural selection is perfectly consistent with HI, it would not be entirely surprising to find that pleasure and pain are mainly distributed along the lines of biological usefulness. Of course, there is a good deal of apparently biologically gratuitous pain (and pleasure) among sentient beings, but this once again is not entirely surprising under the assumption of HI; such evolutionarily inscrutable suffering is just the result "from nature's . . . failure to 'fine tune' organic systems", and such fine tuning is not what we would expect given HI (See Draper 1989, pp. 338–39).

Whereas the biological usefulness of pain and pleasure renders the distribution of suffering we find in the actual world plausible given naturalism (HI), it seems that it is far less likely under the assumption of theism. The key, for Draper, is that "pain and pleasure . . . have a specific sort of moral significance", namely, "pain is intrinsically bad, and pleasure is intrinsically good" (Draper 2008, p. 215). Since pain is intrinsically bad, a good moral agent will cause or allow a sentient being to suffering pain only inasmuch as she has some morally relevant justifying reason for doing so. Theists claim that a perfectly good moral agent is ultimately responsible for the distribution of pain and pleasure in the actual world, so theism is plausible only inasmuch as God has morally relevant justifying reasons for *all* of the pain involved in this distribution. Note that the naturalist has no worries in this vicinity, because she does not claim that a moral agent, much less a perfectly good moral agent, is responsible for this distribution. The biological usefulness of pain is insufficient as a morally justifying reason for the distribution of suffering in nature by God. Here, the atheist can readily point out that it is antecedently uncertain that God, an omniscient and omnipotent being, could not obtain all the biological usefulness he could want without pain, and there is still the lingering problem of explaining the pain suffered by sentient beings over and above what is biologically useful (God is not expected to broker unnecessary and morally bad side-effects). Thus, Draper concludes that biological usefulness does not provide God "with a morally sufficient reason for permitting humans and animals to suffer in the ways they do" (Draper 2008, p. 215). The theist then can plausibly claim that the distribution of suffering among sentient beings is the work of God only if the demands of biological success and "some unknown justifying moral goal happen to coincide in such a way that each could be simultaneously satisfied. Such a coincidence is (to say the least) antecedently far from certain" (Draper 2008, p. 215; Crummett 2017). Since this happy accident is at least *prima facie* highly unlikely and naturalism requires no such coincidence, we have good reason to accept Draper's (6). Draper then concludes that naturalism (HI) is much more likely than theism given the facts of suffering, and we therefore have a strong evidential argument for naturalism.

Of course, theists who develop theodicies and defenses are not without resources to mount replies. For instance, one can point out that there are some known goods that make the coincidence of biological usefulness and God's moral ends not nearly so unlikely as Draper supposes. That is, we might have good reason to believe that, or at least for all we know, some known good does in fact justify God in using pain as a mechanism of biological usefulness in just the manner we find in the actual world (see van Ingwagen 1991, 2008). Draper dismisses the theodicies and defensive strategies by pointing out that "they explain certain facts by making others even more mysterious" (Draper 2008, p. 216). For example, if the theist claims that God (for all we know) allows pain in moral agents as punishment for sin or as an occasion for the development of virtues of character, this makes the suffering of non-moral agents all the more mysterious. Draper's point is that any story the theist tells to justify God's allowance of suffering is going to encounter some complicating factors that will decrease the overall probability of the theistic hypothesis. Thus, neither theodicy nor defense is a promising reply.

The skeptical theist will try to undercut Draper's argument by claiming that we would not expect to be aware of what God's reasons are for allowing sentient beings to suffer pain, so the fact that it *seems quite unlikely* to us that there are such reasons is no indication that there are *actually no* such reasons. Draper, however, is not troubled by skeptical theism.

Notice, as Draper points out, the skeptical theist must admit that an omniscient being would just as likely have access to reasons beyond our ken for preventing suffering as he would have access to reasons beyond our ken for allowing suffering. Thus, the skeptical theist's conjecture makes the facts of suffering neither more nor less likely, and therefore it does nothing to improve the theism's prospects as an explanation of the actual distribution of pains and pleasures. In short, skeptical or otherwise, theism does not fare well as an explanation of the facts of suffering when compared to naturalism (HI).

3. Epiphenomenalism and the Problem of Pain

In what follows, no effort will be made to improve theism's intrinsic prospects as an explanation of the distribution of pain in the actual world as we find it. The position taken here is doubtful that anything can be done to help the theist along these lines, and, on this point, Draper is without fault. For the purposes of this argument, the theist may concede that she does not possess a terribly good explanation for the distribution of pleasures and pains among sentient beings; though one should note that there are significantly different lines of thought from what we have considered here to which the theist might appeal (Davies 2006, 2011; McCabe 2010). Draper, however, is wrong regarding theism's prospect as an explanation of the distribution of pain in the actual world *relative to naturalism*. Specifically, none of the most plausible versions of naturalism offers much of an explanation of the occurrence of pain *as such*, because in each of these views pain is most plausibly to be taken as epiphenomenal. Draper rightly claims that biological usefulness is the most likely naturalistic explanation of pain and pleasure and that biological usefulness requires that pleasure and pain play causal roles in the behavior of sentient beings. If pain is epiphenomenal, as it seems most naturalists should conclude, then it is not biologically useful, and likewise naturalism leaves the occurrence of pain utterly mysterious. However complicated theodicies and defenses might make the explanation of pain, they are still better explanations than no explanation at all.

Draper's argument is focused on pain inasmuch as it is morally relevant; indeed, in his view, pain is intrinsically bad. One might mean various things by pain, but Draper seems to have mind here pain as a *conscious experience*. Pain is morally relevant because of how it *feels*, its qualitative aspect. The issue is then whether naturalism is in a good position to offer an explanation of painful *qualia* in terms of biological usefulness. Most mainstream naturalists eschew any sort of substance dualism or hylomorphism about sentient beings, so the naturalist's treatment of qualia is most likely to amount one of the following positions:

> *Eliminativism*: there strictly speaking are no such entities as qualia, including pain qualia.
>
> *Reductive Physicalism*: qualia, including pain qualia, are type-identical to neurophysiological states.
>
> *Non-reductive (supervenience) Physicalism*: though qualia are not type-identical to neurophysiological states, they supervene on neurophysiological states (certain neurophysiological states necessitate certain qualia, and there can be no difference in qualia without a difference in the neurophysiological base).
>
> *Emergent Property Dualism*: qualia are *sui generis*, non-physical properties (they are neither reducible to nor strictly supervenient on neurophysiological states), but they are nevertheless entirely dependent on and exhaustively explained by their neurophysiological base.
>
> *Panpsychism*: qualia are not reducible to, supervenient on, or *sui generus* emergent from neurophysiological states; rather, qualitative consciousness is a fundamental, non-derivative feature of the most basic physical entities in the same way that charge and mass are non-derivative features of basic physical entities.

If eliminativism is our naturalist's preferred account of qualia, then there really is no evidential problem of pain for the theist (or anybody else), because there is no need

to explain what does not exist. The reductive physicalist strictly claims that there are such things as pains, but they turn out to be the very same things as neurophysiological states; to be in a pain just is to be in certain type of neurophysiological state. The status of reductive physicalism is very controversial even among naturalists (Polger 2009), and even more contentious is the sense in which the reductive physicalist can say there really are qualia (Dennett 1990). It is, to say the least, difficult to understand in what sense it can be said that neurophysiological states are the very same thing as certain qualitative states. The reductive physicalist does not claim that there is anything like an extra, qualitative property that neurophysiological states have over and above their straightforward physical properties, which seemingly leaves our intrinsic, some would say undeniable, awareness of qualitative states such as pains out of the final ontological story (see Searle 1992). Thus, we can safely conclude that any naturalist who accepts either eliminativism or reductive physicalism has no better explanation of the distribution of pain in the natural world than does a theist armed even with a far-fetched theodicy, because it is unclear that such a naturalist can accommodate pain qualia at all.

The non-reductive physicalist does not claim that qualitative states are type-identical to neurophysiological states, but she typically claims that every token quale supervenes on a token of some neurophysiological state-type or other. Similarly, take the example of a statue of Gandalf the Grey that arises from clay being in a certain configuration, C^1. Certainly, *being a statue of Gandalf* is not identical to *being in* C^1 (other configurations could make for equally good statues of Gandalf). Nevertheless, *being in* C^1 necessitates *being a statue of Gandalf* (in the appropriate context), and something could not fail to be a statue of Gandalf without failing to be in C^1, so there is nothing wanting for an explanation as to why something is a statue of Gandalf, given that it is clay in C^1. The relationship between *being a statue of Gandalf* and *being in* C^1 is what is meant by supervenience. Particularly interesting to the physicalist is that, even though these properties are not strictly identical, this token of *being a statue of Gandalf* does not seem to be anything ontologically over and above this token of *being in* C^1. Likewise, the non-reductive physicalist claims that pain quale, though not type-identical to neurophysiological states, supervene on neurophysiological states such that pain quale are explained by neurophysiological states (neurophysiological states necessitate pain quale and there can be no difference in pain quale without a difference in neurophysiological state), and their tokens are nothing over and above tokens of neurophysiological states (Melnyk 2008; Kim 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2005; Madden 2013, 2017).

The primary problem with supervenience accounts of qualitative states, for our purposes anyway, is that they seem to render qualia causally epiphenomenal. That is, it is unclear that there is anything for the supervenient features to contribute to causal relations that is not already accounted for by the supervenience base. Thus, one must either accept a theoretically extravagant overdetermination thesis or conclude that the supervenient features make no causal contribution. For example, if one were to throw our statue of Gandalf through a window, the shattering of the glass would be accounted for perfectly well by the clay's *being-in-*C^1 (which is itself probably causally redundant, given the properties of the microphysical constituents of the clay). There is not any unique causal work left to be done by *being-a-statue-of-Gandalf*. Overdetermination is not typically taken as good news, though there are philosophers willing to accept it (Merricks 2001; Sider 2003; Kim 2005). Even if pain qualia overdetermine their supposed effects, it is still rather difficult to see how they can be accounted for in terms of biological usefulness. That is, overdetermining pain qualia would be biologically unnecessary, because all their work could just as easily be done by their neurophysiological supervenience base. We are still left with a "Why both?" question to answer, and since the supervenience theorist is apt to take the supervenience base as explanatorily more fundamental, the qualitative aspect is left as a nagging curiosity. The point here is that a supervenience account of pain qualia likely renders them epiphenomenal or causally redundant (Kim 2005, pp. 170–73), and therefore a naturalist who accepts such an account of pain qualia cannot explain them in terms of biological usefulness.

A supervenience naturalist might reply by pointing out that it may just be the case that pain qualia happen to supervene on biologically useful supervenience bases, even though the pain qualia themselves do no work. We would then have a perfectly good explanation as to why there are useless pain qualia, i.e., they supervene on biologically useful neurophysiological states. In other words, maybe pain qualia explanatorily piggyback on the biological usefulness of their supervenience bases, even though they are biologically useless. The problem, however, is that this seems to be a very curious coincidence. It is quite legitimate to ask why it just so happens that a *morally relevant* property supervenes on a cluster of biologically useful, though morally irrelevant, properties that pervade nature. Maybe sentient beings are just monumentally unlucky that intrinsically bad qualia supervene uselessly on some of their biologically useful physiological systems, but this hardly approaches an explanation. At least the theist employing a far-fetched theodicy or defense could shed some light on this unhappy coincidence. For all we know, the theist employing a defense might claim that God may have arranged some things such that certain biologically useful physiological structures necessitate pain qualia, because he is punishing all sentient beings for the bad acts of a few. Such a story requires all sorts of probability-diminishing special pleading and promissory note theology, but that still leaves the theist better off than the naturalist relative to the fact that there is pain. A low probability explanation that coheres a broad background theory is better than no explanation at all.

The emergent property dualist typically claims that pain qualia are non-physical inasmuch as they are not identical to or strictly supervenient on their neurophysiological correlates, though they are physical inasmuch as they are causally dependent on and arise nomonologically from their neurophysiological correlates; as Sellars and Meehl put it in a classic paper on emergence, a mental state like pain still "belongs to the space–time network" (Meehl and Sellars 1956, p. 252; see also Bedau and Humphry 2008). Moreover, emergentists frequently claim that emergent properties can exert a top-down sort of causal influence on their neurophysiological correlates, so the biological usefulness of such properties would be far less surprising (O'Connor 1994, 2000, 2001; Searle 2005). A fairly obvious problem, however, is that the concept of *sui generis* emergence is itself far from transparent. That is, the idea that non-physical (at least qualitative) entities are somehow caused by the straightforwardly physical entities composing the nervous systems of sentient animals strains credulity, or at least it has the air of an appeal to a brute fact more so than an explanation (Strawson 2008; Moreland 2009; Nagel 1998). The idea here is that the contemporary naturalist typically accepts the "dualist sorting" of classical Cartesian fame, according to which the mental and the physical are categorically distinct ontological realms (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, pp. 11–16). On the one hand, we have the *res extensa*, i.e., the entity understood solely in terms of spatial and other quantitative properties; while on the other hand, we have the *res cogitans*, i.e., the entity bearing only qualitative and otherwise intentional properties. The Cartesian dualist famously has an intractable difficulty in accounting for how there can be causal interactions between these categorically disparate ontological orders. No doubt, even if the mind–body interaction problem does not amount to a decisive refutation, it is difficult enough to affect the overall plausibility of the Cartesian position for the worse. One should wonder, however, then, how plausible the naturalist emergentist position is, given this problem. That is, the notion of the *essentially quantitative–spatial* somehow causing the *essentially qualitative–non-spatial* is no less perplexing than Cartesian mind–body interaction; especially since these notions of the "physical" and the "mental" are typically defined in contradistinction. Hans Jonas makes this point as follows:

> deprived of the dualistic shelter, lonesome "matter" must now account for mind and thereby lose the unambiguous nature of "mere matter" as once conceived. In other words, its concept is, by this very demand upon it, already reabsorbed into a concept under the name of matter; and this in effects reopens the issue of ontology which materialism claims to have settled. (Jonas 2001, p. 129)

Emergent property dualism may well then create as many mysteries as it solves, in which case it does not provide naturalism any advantage over theism in explaining the distribution of suffering. Specifically, there certainly may be some mystery as to why the omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God of classical theism would tolerate the distribution of suffering we find in the natural world, but it is not clear that the mystery of how mechanistically construed matter can give rise to beings subject to qualitative states is any less improbable. Indeed, God's allowance of inscrutable suffering does not require any such bridging of categorical gulfs like that which opens between the standard, modern account of the mental and the physical. In short, if the naturalist's best option for accounting for pain is *sui generous* emergentism, then it is not clear that her position comes out ahead of theism in an overall probability comparison.

Leaving aside the worries over the very notion of *sui generis* emergence, grave worries remain for the emergentist naturalist. Consider the following remarks from David Chalmers:

> People put forward speculation—maybe the function of consciousness is planning or decision-making or integrating information or whatever. But then as soon as such a hypothesis is put forward the questions just gets raised 'Why couldn't that have been done without consciousness? Why couldn't you just have had these brain processes which produced that conclusion with no subjective experience anywhere?' (Chalmers 2006, p. 47)

Chalmers's point is that the emergentist account does nothing to improve over the supervenience account in terms of the causal redundancy of qualia. The problem is that the underlying neurophysiological processes from which qualia supposedly emerge seem to be sufficient for causing biologically useful behavior. It does not matter whether the cat is conscious of the heat emanating from the oven so long as it is caused to avoid grave injury when in the presence of such stimuli, and the unconscious neurophysiological correlates of the pain qualia are apparently sufficient for that task. Suppose upon encountering the extreme heat stimulus from the oven, the cat is in an overall, global neurophysiological state *zeta*. It seems perfectly plausible that we could predict the cat's "downstream" behavior simply on occurrence of *zeta*. It is *zeta* that has the direct causal connection to the immediately subsequent neurophysiological events culminating in the cat's retreat from the oven. Even if *zeta* has the distinct effect of also causing a state of *feeling-a-burn*, it is obscure as to what, if any, role this qualitative effect has in the downstream behavioral effects. In any event, if *zeta* is sufficient for the behavioral outcomes, it is unclear why the qualitative effect arises at all. In short, the supposed downward causation of emergent states on their neurophysiological grounds faces the same worries over causal redundancy as those encountered by supervenience theories. It is, therefore, once again far from clear in what sense pain qualia are at all biologically useful (Nagel 2012).

Finally, some naturalists troubled by the problems facing non-reductive physicalism and emergentism, though still interested in preserving the reality of qualia, have suggested that qualitative consciousness might be among the non-derivative properties of fundamental physical entities, just like charge or mass (Chalmers 1996; Strawson 2008; Nagel 2012). According to these *panpsychists*, there is no more need to explain why a fundamental particle is conscious (or quasi-conscious) than there is need to explain why it is charged; in both cases, we have hit explanatory rock bottom. There is no explanation for the essential properties of fundamental entities. Not surprisingly, it is doubtful that this proposal will help naturalism relative to theism as an explanation of pain qualia. First, the panpsychist asks us to revise our understanding of physical reality nearly beyond recognition; it requires that the common, mechanistic understanding of nature is globally off-base (Nagel 2012). Is such a proposed revision of the basic naturalist picture any more plausible than a theodicy or defense that would exculpate theism? The correct answer to this question is not obviously affirmative. Moreover, even if one is willing to concedesuch a massive revision of our picture of physical reality, the fact it just so happens that basic physical entities have at least the rudiments of morally significant properties is a very unlikely coincidence. At

the very least, if moral relevance is written fundamentally into the physical constants of the universe, we would have to strain to take any rigid version of naturalism seriously. Once again, the theist at least could appeal to any one of many standard theological stories explaining why God might do so, all of which are explanatory paupers in their own right (though not completely bankrupt), but relative to a naturalist panpsychist's appeal to brute coincidence, they fair at least as well, if not better.

Certainly, a great many issues in the philosophy of mind have been dealt with here in a cursory fashion, and many of these critical points are addressed by proponents of the positions we have discussed (with varying degrees of success). None of the foregoing is aimed at defending any particular account of qualia, and there is much to be said in favor of the view that the entire "qualia debate" is not in good order (Scruton 2012, pp. 40–43; Scruton 1998, pp. 104–6; Rudde 1998). The point here is only to show that Draper has been too quick in helping himself to (6). Without a doubt, theodicies and defenses create as many problems as they solve for the theists, and Draper's claim that skeptical theism cuts both ways has great traction. The fact, however, that the naturalist's attempts to account for pain qualia in terms of biological usefulness either bank on very controversial views in the philosophy of mind or create intractable mysteries of their own casts serious doubt on the claim that the probability of the distribution of suffering as we find it in the actual world is much greater on the assumption of naturalism than it is on the assumption of theism. While the actual distribution of suffering is difficult to square with theism, its proponents have resources (even if not entirely impressive resources) that can in principle explain why there is suffering, e.g., free will, divine retribution, the work of the devil and his minion, etc. Naturalism, however, might be able to explain why suffering is distributed in its currently ghastly manner, but it seemingly has no resources for *explaining why there is suffering at all*. Under the basic assumptions of mainstream, naturalist philosophy of mind, it is unclear what evolutionary advantage is conferred by pain (or any qualitative state for that matter), and that is the primary explanatory resource in the naturalist's toolkit. Given that there is a distribution of suffering to be explained, naturalism is on better grounds, but it cannot (at least given the philosophical options currently abroad) explain why there is any such distribution of suffering in the first place. We thus have no good reason to accept an argument for naturalism as the best available explanation for the *facts of* suffering, as *the fact* of suffering is among the states of affairs to be given an account. In fact, rather than Draper's (6), we have better grounds for

(7) $\Pr(P/HI) = \Pr(P/G)$

That is, as it stands, neither theism nor atheism is on terribly good grounds to explain the distribution of suffering in the world as we find it. The theist, admittedly, has a challenge in explaining the ubiquity of seemingly gratuitous suffering, whereas the atheist seems to have little, if any, resources to explain why there is any suffering at all.

4. Life, Value, and the *Summum Bonum*: Phenomenological Problems for the Atheologian

Thus far, using Draper's position as a representative foil, we can see that on a narrow "point-scoring" basis, the atheist and the theist are on par, at least with respect to their explanatory resources to make sense of the facts of suffering as we find them. On the one hand, there is a *bona fide* problem for the theist regarding *the particular distribution of suffering* in the world as it stands, which can be rather neatly explained by an evolutionary naturalist story available to the atheist. On the other hand, *the very fact there is suffering* (living beings subjected to qualitative states such as pain) is equally mysterious for the atheist availing herself of the standard naturalistic positions in the philosophy of mind. That is all very careful, but now we will indulge a bit of speculation on the phenomenology of life, or the philosophy of nature, that will suggest more substantive advantages to the theist's position with respect to these issues.

Has Jonas argues that one of the most revealing marks of life, in contrast to non-living being, is that "life by its nature faces forward and outward at once" (Jonas 2001, p. 100).

Living beings have a curious mix of transcendence and dependence with respect to their composing parts: though an organism is necessarily composed of some set of parts or other, it is never identical to any one set of parts. For example, Fluffy the cat is not identical to the particles or even grosser parts that compose him (he can gain or lose many of them while maintaining his identity as this *individual cat*), but, like any organism, Fluffy, as a material being, must be composed of some set of parts in order to exist. The metabolic nature of living things, their constant exchange of components with their environment, is what marks them off from the rest of material being. As Fluffy is a living being, it is necessary that he be composed of some set of parts or other, but which set exactly varies over time.

Jonas observes in this light that organisms "face outward" in the sense that they must be oriented *spatially* beyond their boundaries to obtain nutrients in the external world, and they also "face forward" in the sense that they must be oriented *temporally* beyond their present state in the pursuit of these nutrients and to continue to the process of development. In other words, living things have an orientation to spatial externality and the future:

> The transitory relation of organic form to its matter distends from the beginning two "horizons" "into" which life continually transcends itself: internally that of time as the next impending phase of its own being toward which it moves; externally that of space, as the locus of the co-present "other" on which it depends for its very continuation. (Jonas 2001, p. 100)

Thus, organisms, because they are not identical to their parts, are always in a state of *directed transition*; absolute stability in material identity is death and undirected change is injury, so to be alive is to be on the move toward (spatially and temporally) the functional incorporation of externalities. Living things are always oriented toward alterity in their constant need for self-maintenance, which is to say "openness to the world is basic to life" (Jonas 2001, p. 99). It is impossible to describe life without availing ourselves to such terms as "orientation" and "openness", which themselves have unavoidable intentional connotations. Thus, for Jonas, the spatial–temporal orientation of the teleological character of metabolism shows that consciousness is pre-figured in the very rudiments of living being, which certainly is not entirely comfortable for a naturalist (Jonas 2001, pp. 128–34; see also Nagel 2012).

With the emergence of not just life, but animal life capable of the long-range pursuit of needed alterity, e.g., the pursuit of prey or the avoidance of predators, comes "not only developed motor and sensor faculties but also distinct powers of emotion" (Jonas 2001, p. 101). That is, on Jonas's account, there is an intrinsic relationship between distinctively animal life (itself marked by the ability to pursue spatially and temporally distant alterity) and *qualitative consciousness*: "The appearance of directed long-range motility . . . thus signifies the emergence of emotional life. Greed is at the bottom of the chase, fear at the bottom of flight" (Jonas 2001, p. 101). The possibility of the pursuit of a long-range goal presupposes something internal to the pursuant animal keeping it on target, which is partly taken up (along with increased sensory powers) by sentience, i.e., the felt gap between desire internal to the organism and the external object of the desire. In other words, there is an intrinsic link between qualia and animal life. An essential difference between the merely living and the animal is the movement from implicit consciousness or orientation toward alterity to the *felt need* for the external object. To be an animal is necessarily to be a subject of qualia. To deny that there are qualia or to claim that qualia are ephemeral epiphenomena is all well and good, but Jonas would point out with good reason that such moves are essentially to deny that there are animals or to ignore that animal life has causal traction in the world. One can be forgiven for balking at a metaphysics so austere as to exclude those seemingly obvious phenomena. At the very least, for the purposes of our discussion, any position that would require us to give up such observations would suffer injury to its overall plausibility.

The point to emphasize is that any reasonable phenomenology of life must include pleasure and pain as essential aspects of living being, especially for animal life:

> Responding to the lure of the prey, of which perception has given notice, alertness turns into the strain of pursuit and into the gratification of fulfillment: but it also knows the pang of hunger, the agony of fear, the anguished strain of flight. Pursuit itself may end in the disappointment of failure. In short, the indirectness of animal existence holds in its wakefulness the twin possibilities of enjoyment and suffering, both wedded to effort. The two evolve together, and the liability to suffering is not a shortcoming which detracts from the faculty of enjoyment, but its necessary compliment. (Jonas 2001, p. 105)

To be alive, then, is, in some sense, to be conscious (oriented to alterity), and in the animal, this consciousness carries with it essentially qualitative aspects of both pleasure and pain, which can only be inter-defined and constituted. In other words, there cannot be animals, on Jonas's reckoning, that are not subjects of pain and pleasure. Once again, one might deny that there is such a qualitative state as pain or that pain makes any causal difference, but that is to ignore the plain phenomenal fact of the reality and efficacy of animals.

Phenomenological approaches to life likewise emphasize not just the irreducible psycho-qualitative character of life (especially animal life), but also its value-laden character. Merleau-Ponty observes that the description of living things is impossible without terms implying value: "Already the mere presence of a living being transforms the physical world, makes 'food' appear over here and a 'hiding place' over there, and gives to 'stimuli' a sense that they did not have" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p. 195). That is, a world in which living things can emerge or evolve (or otherwise arrive on the scene) is a place wherein *normativity* likewise arises: "Biological autonomy thus necessarily includes the bringing about of norms" (Thompson 2007, p. 158) as beings transcendent to but dependent on their composing parts are subject to benefit or harm, success or failure, good or evil. Evaluative standards, at least taken as the standard of flourishing for a certain natural kind, are intrinsic to the very phenomenon of life, and therefore a world in which life can occur cannot itself be utterly indifferent to values. That is not to say that the world cares about its living denizens, but only that a world in which life can occur is a place where valid normative claims can be made. Life, which transforms the environment into "a place of valence, of attraction and repulsion, approach or escape", entails "a process of sense-making, of bringing forth of significance and value" (Thompson 2007, p. 74). One may deny normativity as an objective fact following on the being of living things, but that, once again, is to fail to take seriously some of the most salient phenomena of what it is to be a living thing.

Jonas suggests, though without necessarily committing himself to the suggestion, the admission of value into the universe with the emergence of life may further necessitate the notion of a *summum bonum*, a highest good:

> Without the concept of good, one cannot even begin to approach the subject of behavior. Whether individual or social, intentional action is directed toward a good. According to some, the scale of lesser and greater goods that become objects of desire, and thus motivate behavior, culminates in a highest good, the *summum bonum*. (Jonas 2001, p. 127; see also Jonas 1996, pp. 59–74, 99–114)

From Plato's original arguments for the Forms or Ideas to at least Aquinas's Fourth Way (and likely far beyond that), much of the Western philosophical tradition claims comparisons of *better* or *worse* entail an ultimate *best*. That is, relative normativity presupposes absolute normativity. Of course, many thinkers today would argue that such a principle is at best an optional premise, and, following Jonas, there is no need to commit ourselves to it here, let alone do anything to motivate it. Jonas, however, does note that the fact that life entails relative or more-or-less normativity *suggests* that there is an absolute normativity. In other words, the relative normativity of life renders plausible or leaves us unable to rule out an absolute normativity. The fact that the natural course of things in the universe even suggests an absolute good does not sit well with the supposition of atheism. The

universe seems to be a place where a *summum bonum* might be operative, even if nothing we encounter necessitates The Good as such. At the very least, if we take the phenomenon of life seriously, *for all we know* there is an absolute best toward which living things move, and our inability to rule out a metaphysically significant hypothesis is not without evidential weight (Menssen and Sullivan 2007).

These phenomenological reflections have taken us a bit far afield from the issues at the forefront in our earlier discussions. Suppose, however, that Jonas' description of life does capture the phenomena in their essence (and certainly little has been done to motivate that claim in the foregoing). It is then the case that there can be no life, at least animal life, without pain and suffering; dissatisfaction is intrinsically related to animality. Indeed, we would even expect there is a wide distribution of pain and suffering among living things; that is "quite simply, the price we pay for consciousness" (Scruton 2012, p. 39). That is not to say we can justify any seemingly otiose distribution of pain and suffering in particular, but only to say that wherever higher-animal life (or maybe any life at all) arrives, these ills necessarily follow. Consider who between the theist and atheist can provide a better explanation for the fact that there is pain in the universe at all, which is part of explaining the distribution of suffering. If our phenomenological reflections are correct, then this is really the question of who can better explain the occurrence of life in the universe, as life is the most fundamental explanation of pain. On which hypothesis, theism or naturalism, is the occurrence of life, particularly higher-animal life, more likely? Certainly, the theist has some advantage here, inasmuch as she accounts for animal life in terms of the ultimate activities of a living being, the Living God of Western monotheism. We can plausibly expect that there would be living things, even higher-living things, under the assumption of theism. Under the supposition of theism, it is not in the least surprising that there are living beings, even higher-animals. No doubt, the naturalist can do much to explain the occurrence of life through the ample resources of evolution, the tremendous age of the universe, etc., but under an atheistic hypothesis it is hard to say that we would *expect* there to be in a universe in which life occurs. Draper rightly points out that the atheist is likely better able to explain the fact that life evolves; if atheism is true, we would expect speciation to occur through some natural process or other, and the fact that it is indifferent to the distribution of pleasure and pain is not surprising to the atheist. (Draper 2008). That, however, is not to say atheism explains that *there is any life at all* very well, and on this point the theist has an advantage. Moreover, the initial occurrence of life might be *explicable* naturalistically, but that is not to say that it is at all antecedently probable under the assumption of atheism, nor does that show life is as likely under the assumption of atheism as theism. There are also considerations of the meaningfulness and significance of life and suffering that seem to go beyond the explanatory resources available to the atheist, but those issues, albeit important, are outside the focus of our current discussion (Oviedo 2019). Thus, the fact that there is any distribution of pain at all is an evidential advantage to the theist, however slight.

Moreover, following the phenomenology of life we developed above, living things and their qualitative foibles are necessarily connected to normative standards, and that fact suggests (though may not entail or even strongly imply) that there is a *summum bonum* operative in the universe. At least we cannot rule out the latter in a universe wherein living things come to be. Here, too, we should ask which hypothesis seems more apt to these facts regarding life, theism or atheism? Certainly, the normativity and an orientation of living things to the highest Good is intrinsic to Western monotheism, whereas these are not facts we would expect at all under the assumption of atheism. The latter seems to rule out the notion of *a summum bonum*, but the universe as is stands does not clearly conform to that ruling. Thus, once again, it seems that the fact that life, including its ghastly economy of pain and mortality, is no liability, and may even provide positive support for theism relative to atheism. Is an atheistic universe one in which we would expect that, for all we know, there is a *summum bonum*? Kant, at least, famously thought the possibility of a unifying highest good required the positing of a robust form of theism, and this is a point

made by other thinkers from disparate moral and theological traditions (MacIntyre 2016, pp. 314–15). There then seems to be another advantage, however tentative, to theism in accounting for the facts of living beings under the conditions in which we find them, even if those conditions inherently involve the possibility (and even actual ubiquity) of failure and pain.

Of course, little has been done here to support the phenomenological descriptions of life that undergird this argument, and all these conclusions are tentative and, even in the best-case scenario, merely probabilistic and not decisive. That being said, take these reflections as a suggestion of a path of inquiry for the theist. The answer to the atheolgical challenge ultimately lies not in an analysis of divinity and the proposals for divine justification in the allowance of suffering, but in a renewed philosophy of nature, which takes seriously the most salient phenomena of life. These phenomena, as suggested above, though they are not felicitous, are ultimately more on par with realistic expectations of the theist than the atheist.

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Article

Ratzinger on Evolution and Evil: A Christological and Mariological Answer to the Problem of Suffering and Death in Creation

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Abstract: This article argues that a compelling way to address the presence of suffering and death across evolutionary history lies in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI. By situating human evolution within the broader divine plan for man's salvation through the cross of Jesus, Ratzinger is able to show that the presence of natural evils in this world is not incompatible with God's goodness but on the contrary is an eminent means by which the love of God is made manifest. Exploring Christ's *kenosis* and the sinless suffering of the Blessed Virgin, it is argued that suffering properly embraced is the raw material for love and thus essential for true human flourishing in this life. The real problem for man, it is contended, is not having to suffer and die, but *how* to suffer and die well. Finally, it is suggested that the full Christian answer to the problem of suffering connected with evolution nevertheless lies in the eschatogical hope for a new heaven and new earth, where man—and all creation with him—will undergo a definitive "evolutionary leap" of "transubstantiation" in Christ.

Keywords: Ratzinger; evolution; theodicy; evil; suffering; death; love; kenosis; Mariology; eschatology

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1. Introduction

The classical theological synthesis assumed by most Christian theologians until the mid-twentieth century emphasized that the presence of death in our world is the consequence of human sin (Rm 5:12 RSV; Lombardo 2019). However, advancements in evolutionary science have made it clear that nature had been "red in tooth and claw" for billions of years before *Homo sapiens* arrived on the scene of history. For its part, our species is mortal and suffers from natural evils by virtue of having descended from hominin ancestors who were themselves the product of this history. Indeed, not only do we now know this, the theory of evolution by natural selection further reveals that death and the selective pressures associated with it played an essential role in the development of life from bacteria to the myriad flora and fauna that grace our planet today. Can the evolutionary story about suffering and death be reconciled with the Christian claim that the world owes its existence to the God who is love?

While his contribution to this topic has remained largely unexplored, Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI made many contributions in this regard over the course of his career.[1] Developing insights from this towering theological figure, the present essay will contend that a theodicy that would wish to unlock the mysterious relationship of evolution, suffering, and death requires an answer that lies beyond philosophy—in the self-emptying *kenosis* of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:6–8), the true Adam who reveals man to himself. In view of rethinking the interconnectedness of these realities, a fresh framework will be proposed that also explores the Virgin Mary's embrace of suffering—and possibly death—as a privileged lens of insight into the presence of these phenomena in nature. In the end, it will be argued that, while suffering and death are not desirable for their own sakes, they do not militate against the divine goodness but on the contrary are an eminent means by which the love of God is made manifest. For, paradoxically, the suffering inherent to our

world's evolutionary dynamic is precisely what conforms creatures to the cross of Jesus Christ, allowing man to share in the divine life and for all of creation to be renewed on the Last Day.

2. Putting the Last Adam First: Suffering and Death in the Light of Christ Crucified

Throughout his corpus, Ratzinger variously refers to Jesus as the "last man", "second Adam", "definitive Adam", and even "Counter-Adam" (Ratzinger 1957, p. 6; de Gaál 2019, p. 98).[2] However, his most extensive systematic treatment of the relationship between Adam and Christ can be found in a section of *Introduction to Christianity* dedicated specifically to "Christ, the Last Man." Here, Ratzinger teaches that to confess Jesus of Nazareth as the only begotten Son of God is to recognize him as the exemplary man, which in his view is "probably the best way to translate accurately the . . . Pauline concept of the 'last Adam'" (Ratzinger 1990, p. 234). As he says elsewhere, Christ is the "index for how 'person' must be understood in the first place" and that in Christ "the truth about what is meant by the riddle named 'man' . . . first becomes fully evident" (Ratzinger 2011b, p. 192). Winsomely summarizing this view, Ratzinger elsewhere relates: "From the standpoint of Christian faith one may say that for *history* God stands at the end, while for *being* he stands at the beginning" (Ratzinger 1990, p. 242).

What, precisely, does Ratzinger mean in calling Christ the archetypal or "final" human being? As the definitive man, Jesus is "pure relation", the one who empties himself in a complete gift to others. That is to say, "the decisive feature [*Gestalt*] in the figure of Jesus" is that he "oversteps the bounds of [his] individuality" by being "the completely open man in whom the dividing walls of existence are torn down, who is entirely 'transition' (Pasch)" (Ratzinger 1990, pp. 234, 236, 239–40). According to Ratzinger, this dynamism is captured perfectly in the notion of *exodus*, which he describes as "the definitive fundamental law of revelation and at the same time the fundamental law of the spirit", adding that "[t]he Paschal way of the cross, the breaking down of all earthly assurances and their false satisfactions, is man's true homecoming" (Ratzinger 2011a, p. 161).

To draw out this point, Ratzinger reminds us of Pilate's infamous words in Jn 19:5: *Ecce homo*! The irony of the procurator's unwitting prophetic utterance is that, when we behold the crucified and risen Christ, we are beholding the perfection of man himself:

> The question "what is man?" does not find its answer in a theory, but rather the answer lies in the following of Jesus Christ, in living the project [of God] with him. In the steps of this path—and only in this way—can we learn with him day after day, *in the patience of life and pain*, what it means to be man and thereby become men. (Ratzinger 2009, p. 72, my translation)

The Letter to the Hebrews captures this same point from John's gospel when it tells us that Jesus was "made perfect" only after he "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb 5:8–9 RSV). Putting these teachings together, we may therefore say that *to be human is to be like Christ, and therefore to attain perfection through suffering*. That is to say, the connection between the nature and perfection of man and the nature and perfection of Christ is so tight that, for Ratzinger, Christology *is* anthropology (Ratzinger 1969, pp. 118–19).

3. The Cause(s) of Suffering and Death in the Natural World

Ratzinger's emphasis on Jesus as the exemplary man goes hand in hand with his view that the root rationale for human suffering and death is something other than sin: Namely, that these trials play an indispensable role in conforming our lives with that of Christ crucified and risen. That is to say, for Ratzinger, the structure of creation and of our finite creaturely existence within it is and was always intended to be *cruciform* (cross-shaped) or *paschal* (structured according to the pattern of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection). To affirm that creation has a paschal structure is to take Christ's incarnation as the key to interpreting reality, to rejoice in God having modeled creation after the Paschal Mystery, with all the suffering and consequent glory that it entails. For, if Christ is the *logos* who bears the meaning of creation and man within himself (Col 1:15–16), and if the key to

understanding the person and mission of Jesus is his paschal mystery (cf. Lk 24:26), it stands to reason that the experience of redemptive suffering that characterized the Final Adam's entire earthly existence is at the heart of the human vocation as such.

In his 1985 Carinthian lectures, Ratzinger read Jesus's words in Jn 12:24 as teaching that not just man but the entire cosmos has a kenotic or paschal structure: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Ratzinger understands this dynamic to be a fundamental law of creation, whereby the suffering and death of organisms ultimately makes possible the rebirth and flourishing of life: "[T]he paschal mystery, the mystery of the dying grain of wheat appears before us already among the ideas of creation. Man must become with Christ a grain of dead wheat, to truly rise again and truly be lifted up, to truly be himself. Only then does he attain his real goal" (Ratzinger 2009, p. 63, my translation; Sanz 2014).

This cosmic vision traces all the way back to Ratzinger's time in the academy. Indeed, Professor Ratzinger's lecture notes—while early and unpublished—contain his most strongly worded statements to the effect that the world itself has a cruciform shape. Specifically, Ratzinger's teachings from his 1964 course on the doctrine of creation (*Schöpfungslehre*) illustrate this conviction. Noting that the fate of death is not a special destiny of sinful man, Ratzinger here remarks that "the whole creation bears the stamp (*Prägeform*) of the mystery of death" (Ratzinger 1964, p. 211, my translation; Sanz 2014).[3] Later in the course, Ratzinger teaches that suffering and death are the "foundational principles (*Grundprinzipien*) upon which the whole interplay of the world is built" and "are not peripheral, but belong to the structuring principles (*Bauprinzipien*) of the world." Ratzinger sees suffering as so important, in fact, that he makes this bold claim: "Whoever wanted to take that away would dissolve the world as such" (Ratzinger 1964, p. 215). In the end, Professor Ratzinger thus concludes that all the evidence we have at our disposal today "makes it impossible to uphold the said teaching (i.e., the connection between death and original sin) *in the usual way*" (Ratzinger 1964, p. 215).[4]

All this being said, Ratzinger does not pretend that his *aggiornamento* of the Christian tradition constitutes a definitive theodicy that resolves the problem of evil associated with life's evolutionary history. Indeed, even with an understanding that the very fabric of the cosmos is paschal, this theological giant still considers the "law of brutality" or the "riddle of the terrible element in nature" to be "one of the great riddles of creation" (Ratzinger 2002, p. 79). At a conference on faith and evolution, Pope Benedict expanded upon this point:

> Despite the rationality that exists, we can observe a component of terror, which cannot be further analyzed philosophically. Here philosophy calls for something more, and faith shows us the Logos, who is creative reason and who incredibly at the same time was able to become flesh, to die and to rise again. With that, a completely different face of the Logos is manifested from what we can manage to glimpse on the basis of a groping reconstruction of the fundamental reasons for nature. (Benedict XVI 2008a, pp. 115–16)

This passage is noteworthy for our purposes; for, while not employing the precise word, the then-pontiff suggests that the fundamental structure of the universe—its rational nature—is at the same time a paschal one. Because Christians profess the Trinitarian mystery that love and reason together structure reality and that the dying grain will ultimately rise, we also believe that none of the terrible suffering and death in the created world is ultimately a waste. Ratzinger's approach invites us to see these trials less along the lines of absolute evils and more as variations upon a musical theme—as temporary dissonance or minor chords that contribute to the overall beauty of God's perfect symphony.

4. Two Reasons We Suffer

While Ratzinger the academic sees suffering and death as constitutive experiences of the graced condition of human nature in which we were created, it is perhaps even more telling that Benedict XVI continued to write along these lines throughout his tenure as

Supreme Pontiff. In his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Benedict thus distinguishes two reasons that suffering is present as part of human existence. On the one hand, it stems "partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history." This evil trajectory, he adds, "continues to grow unabated today", a problem that "none of us is capable of eliminating." On the other hand, "Suffering stems partly from our finitude" that none of us is able to "shake off" (Benedict XVI 2007c, para. 36). In other words, a certain pain inevitably results from being an imperfect creature modeled after the image of the Triune God and called to divinization while not yet having achieved it.

Although suffering is inevitable in this vale of tears, believers look forward to that state in which God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more (Rv 21:4). In *Spe Salvi*, we thus find Benedict acknowledging that, despite the fact that man does not want to die, "neither do we want to continue living indefinitely, nor was the earth created with that in view" (Benedict XVI 2007c, para. 11). Indeed, in the then-pontiff's existential analysis of the human condition, "To continue living forever—endlessly—appears more like a curse than a gift" and "more of a burden than a blessing", as it would be "monotonous and ultimately unbearable" (Benedict XVI 2007c, para. 10). To this, Benedict adds that another reason we would not wish to live forever in this sphere of existence has to do with bearing the burden of sin. Citing the homily St. Ambrose delivered for his brother's funeral, Benedict speaks of death as a mercy for man in his wretched state, a way of limiting the evils that can be inflicted upon him and, most importantly, a means to our salvation (Benedict XVI 2007c, para. 10). In the end, Benedict teaches that all of us—sinless or not—eventually have to undergo a miraculous and merciful transformation at the end of our earthly life before we can see God face to face and at last know fully what we now know only in part (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).

5. There Can Be No Love without Suffering

Not only does Ratzinger consider suffering integral to our created universe, but a remarkable feature of his approach is that he goes so far as to insist that suffering and death are necessary for human flourishing in the world here below. So strongly does he hold this conviction that Professor Ratzinger said that one who has never endured suffering is not truly a person: "[A] person without suffering in the world in which we live would be a monster and impossible . . . Suffering and death are essential (*wesentlich*) to the structure of things" (Ratzinger 1964, p. 215). Along these lines, Ratzinger would later add in *Eschatology*: "Of course, suffering can and should be reduced... But the will to do away with it completely would mean a ban on love and therewith the abolition of man (Ratzinger 1988, p. 103). In his interview *God and the World*, Cardinal Ratzinger spoke similarly while emphasizing the positive role that suffering plays in making us "more human":

> Pain is part of being human. Anyone who really wanted to get rid of suffering would have to get rid of love before anything else, because there can be no love [*Liebe*] without suffering [*Leiden*], because it always demands an element of self-sacrifice, because, given temperamental differences and the drama of situations, it will always bring with it renunciation and pain.
>
> When we know that the way of love—this exodus, this going out of oneself—is the true way by which man becomes human, then we also understand that suffering is the process through which we mature. Anyone who has inwardly accepted suffering becomes more mature and understanding of others, becomes more human. Anyone who has consistently avoided suffering does not understand other people; he becomes hard and selfish. (Ratzinger 2002, p. 322)

It turns out, then, that in Ratzinger's view, "suffering is the inner side of love", and it is only in learning how to suffer well that each of us is "reshaped" (Ratzinger 2002, p. 323).

If Ratzinger is correct about the relationship of suffering and love, this sheds important insight into God's will to create life by means of evolutionary processes. For, if man is to be truly conformed to the image of the crucified and risen Christ, we too must give ourselves

away in a sincere gift of self through suffering and death. As the above citations reveal, this appears to be the case not merely because of sin but rather because of the finite nature of our existence and the paschal shape of the world that serves as a means to conform us to Jesus Christ. Further, if it conforms us to the True Adam, our suffering enables us to do something even further: To share in the life of the Trinity itself.

Pope Benedict eloquently spoke to this point in a conversation with a group of Italian clergies. After affirming that humans are "truly the reflection of creative reason", he explains that our conformity to the Creator's inner life has much to do with how we lovingly bear suffering:

> [I]n suffering there is also a profound meaning, and only if we can give meaning to pain and suffering can our life mature. I would say, above all, that there can be no love without suffering [*non è possibile l'amore senza il dolore*], because love always implies renouncement of myself, letting myself go and accepting the other in his otherness; it implies a gift of myself and therefore, emerging from myself . . . *The inseparability of love and suffering, of love and God*, are elements that must enter into the modern conscience to help us live. (Benedict XVI 2007b)

As we see here, the reason that Benedict considers suffering and death so essential to our experience in the natural world is that our ultimate fulfillment—*theosis*–is only attainable by means of suffering *kenosis*. Moreover, these comments suggest that he views suffering—like all things in this world—as somehow a reflection of the inner life of God himself.

To this point, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict goes so far as to affirm that *eros* (yearning, need-based, suffering love) may be ascribed to God in an analogical sense (Benedict XVI 2006a, para. 3–10). As creatures made in the likeness of the one true and compassionate God, Ratzinger says that we humans too are "beings of word and of love, beings moving toward Another, oriented to giving themselves to the Other and only truly receiving themselves back in real self-giving" (Ratzinger 1995, pp. 47–48). As creatures made in the image of the God who "suffers with" us, Ratzinger views the ineluctability of suffering in this life as a reality that flows from the "logic of self-giving", which is grounded in the inner life of the Trinity and "written into creation and into the hearts of men" (Ratzinger 2013, p. 82; Benedict XVI 2007a, p. 87).

Benedict's thought on the relationship of suffering and love is especially poignant when he explicitly casts our experience of suffering in a Christological light. At a General Audience we hear him saying: "The Cross reminds us that there is no true love without suffering, there is no gift of life without pain" (Benedict XVI 2008b). In other words, "The world in which we stand is marked by suffering and can grant joy only through the Passion . . . [T]he grief of death itself carries the final, true joy of man (Ratzinger 1964, p. 211). Given this view, it will come as no surprise that Professor Ratzinger called the suggestion that sinless man would have gently and painlessly fallen asleep at the end of his life "no solution" to the problem of death (Ratzinger 1964, p. 209).

In his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Benedict adds that, while we can try to limit suffering, we cannot eliminate it entirely. If we do make this our goal, he continues, "we drift into a life of emptiness, in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment is all the greater." Offering some sage pastoral advice, he concludes, "It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love." In sum, Benedict teaches that, "if we embrace our pain in closeness with Jesus Christ and his *kenosis*, then our suffering "without ceasing to be suffering becomes, despite everything, a hymn of praise (Benedict XVI 2007c; Ramage 2020a, pp. 112–19).

6. Suffering, the Raw Material for Love

To drive home Benedict's thought on the relationship of suffering and love, I would now like to connect it with some complementary reflections from Bethany Sollereder, a BioLogos author and researcher at the University of Oxford who specializes in evolution

and the problem of suffering. Drawing the same conclusion independently of Ratzinger, Sollereder argues that the mass of suffering and death that has littered evolutionary history does not constitute an argument against the goodness of God but on the contrary bespeaks his loving plan for man's sanctification. Echoing Andrew Elphinstone, Sollereder argues that "the present primacy of pain and unrest in the world is part of the raw material of the ultimate primacy of love" (Sollereder 2014, p. 24; Elphinstone 1976). Expounding this claim at greater length, Sollereder writes:

> By going through the process of pain, love opens up a new option of finding healing, and turning the pain from the agent of evil to the use of good . . . [Pain] is the key to understanding our high calling of love. When we are in pain, more than any other moment, our passions are invoked and shaped. When our pain leads us to violence, hate, or revenge, our desires turn to evil. If instead, in the moment of pain, we choose to forgive, the power of pain is broken, it is not passed on in aggression or turned upon the self in shame. Forgiveness is the ultimate defeat of evil and freedom from it. While we may still be in pain, we may also find joy in the transformation of love". (Sollereder 2014, pp. 24–25)

Developing a helpful analogy that captures Benedict's teachings from another angle, Sollereder argues that the many shades of pain in our world are much like the raw ingredients of a good beer or loaf of bread. These sources of nourishment are not found in nature, and thus it takes human culture and industry to produce them. More to the point, the sweetness we find in them is the product of ingredients that are of their own accord bitter and distasteful to us. Rich beer is made from bitter hops. Savory bread requires sharp salt and foul-smelling yeast. More fundamentally still (and with Eucharistic associations), bread comes from grain that is *ground*, oil from olives *pressed*, and wine from grapes that allow themselves to be *crushed*. In the same way, suffering and pain of all kinds are the raw ingredients of a rich and holy life. Though certainly not desirable in themselves, the experience of being "ground" and crushed" is the means by which God mysteriously transforms us into something altogether new and glorious. As Josetxo Beriain writes, death is "a major contributor to the evolutionary enhancement of life, and thereby it becomes a significant part of the aggregate 'gift of life' that all particular lives" (Beriain 2020, p. 684).

Sollereder contends that this analysis applies to the violence we observe in nature as a whole—what we have seen Benedict call the "law of brutality" that is one of the "great riddles of creation." Contemplating the apparent gratuity of pain and waste throughout the natural world across evolutionary history, Sollereder draws a parallel between the process of a person's spiritual transformation and that of the physical formation of the cosmos. The conversion of a man to the state of being fully alive—that is, becoming ever more conformed to the image of Christ crucified—is a "cataclysmic" process analogous to the manner in which volcanoes, earthquakes, and meteorites shape our universe's development. Though destructive in one order, these forces are eminently creative in another. Volcanoes destroy life, for example, but in doing so they make possible great new things like wine. Pruning a vine increases its quality and quantity of its yield. The death and decay of organic matter gives life to bacteria and plants. Supernovae result in the destruction of stars but the creation of elements.

In light of the new understanding of the natural world that we have thanks to evolutionary science, Sollereder thus proposes that we update our narrative of human origins in the following way that has many points of affinity with Benedict's approach:

> [I]n place of a perfect couple in a pleasant garden, our nonhuman ancestors were engaged in a long struggle for survival. They moved sharply in response to pain, they were protective of their own and aggressive toward perceived threats . . . They had skill, strength, intelligence, even altruism, but not love. Love is a uniquely human attribute—or perhaps we should say it is a divine attribute, imparted to humanity—that transcends the evolutionary process and shapes us into hybrids of earthly and heavenly forms. Somewhere along the evolutionary process, nascent humanity acquired the ability to exercise a moral will over our

> innate desires, and with that came the capacity both to sin and to receive divine love and make it our own. (Sollereder 2014, pp. 22–23)

Building on this analysis, Sollereder sees the experience of suffering and death—indeed, even the tempestuous emotions that we inherited from our evolutionary ancestors—as "the raw ingredients of love, awaiting 'divine alchemy'" (Sollereder 2014, p. 22). This leads her to a conclusion that is very close to that which Benedict draws: "We therefore cannot object to God's goodness when we see around us a world of violence. This is the means to produce love" (Sollereder 2014, p. 23). This perspective just may allow us to see how evolutionary theory works not *against* but *with* the Christian understanding of divine goodness, as Sollereder explains well:

> In light of evolution, the existence of violence and hatred in the world appears not as an insoluble theological riddle but the outcome of a long and necessary process that is still in development. The bitter raw products of evolution are slowly being brought to transcend evolution itself. We are, through the painful process of forgiveness, being transformed into the image and likeness of Christ. (Sollereder 2014, p. 25)

Benedict's successor writes along the same lines as he and Sollereder. Creating a world that unfolds through evolution, Pope Francis remarks that nature is such that "many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which he uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator" (Francis 2015, para. 80).

Yet, as Ratzinger taught for decades, the reality of this dynamic we have been exploring is not something that can be proven in a deductive manner or whose truth would be evident to anyone who has not first lived it. For the emeritus pontiff, rather, the beauty of many things in life—from a work of art to a human person we encounter, to the experience of suffering, to the divine revelation of God himself—comes only through the *laboratory of life* by engaging in what he terms "the experiment of faith." To adapt an image deployed by Benedict himself: While a Gothic cathedral's stained-glass windows appear dark and dreary on the outside, seeing the same work form the inside reveals a resplendent beauty with the capacity to draw man upward toward the infinite—provided we are willing to enter into its domain.

Perhaps nowhere is this expressed more eloquently than in the following words of Ratzinger's dear friend Hans Urs von Balthasar: "In order to experience its form, a person must become interior to the work, must enter into its spell and radiant space, must attain to the state in which alone the work becomes manifest in its being-in-itself" (Von Balthasar 1983, p. 619). So, it is with the good world that God made. If we wish to experience the truth and beauty of God's work in creation through redemptive suffering, we ourselves must "become interior" to it by aligning our entire being with its cruciform, paschal structure.

7. Sinless Yet Sorrowful: The Blessed Virgin and the Problem of How to Suffer Well

Having reflected on Benedict's conviction regarding the reciprocity of love and suffering and the crucial role of the latter in our universe, we are in a position to catch a glimpse of how this cruciform existence might have been lived out in a sinless world. This exploration will further reveal that suffering is not contrary to God's goodness but on the contrary is present in the world in order to reveal it by conforming us to the image of Christ.

As Christians know well, the cross of Christ reveals that virtuous suffering—and even death—can coexist with sinlessness. Jesus's earthly life gives us the perfect picture of what suffering before the Fall would have looked like. While it still would not have been a desirable experience for its own sake, suffering nevertheless would have been the occasion for a synergy of wills in which man handed himself over to God, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done!" (Lk 22:42).

That said, Christ was not the only individual to live a sinless earthly life. Importantly, Ratzinger's corpus includes material devoted to unfolding what sinless suffering would

have looked like in the life of a mere creature: That is, in the sorrows of the Immaculate Conception. In what follows, then, we will consider what Ratzinger has to say about the Blessed Virgin Mary's embrace of suffering—and possibly death—and how this may serve as a privileged lens into the origin of these realities and a guide to help us face them in a more Christ-like manner in our own lives.

It is no surprise that a Catholic theologian like Ratzinger holds that Mary experienced a great deal of suffering and sorrow over the course of her earthly life. After all, one of her titles is "Our Sorrowful Mother", and indeed Simeon prophesied to her at Jesus's presentation that a "sword will pierce through your own soul" (Lk 2:35). Because of this, the fact that suffering and sinlessness coexisted in the earthly life of Mary is so clear as to appear trivial.

What is not so obvious to many today, however, is something else that Ratzinger holds regarding the Blessed Virgin. While many believers today assume that Mary was taken to heaven without undergoing death, this is a relatively recent view that has never been taught by the Magisterium. Ratzinger, on the other hand, follows the ancient tradition that the Blessed Virgin died before her dormition. What I would now like to propose is that this dimension of Ratzinger's Mariology is an extension of his Christology that we have been examining. As such, it may be of added benefit in our quest to understand the relationship of sin, suffering, and death.

A number of Ratzinger's statements take for granted that suffering and death were essential features in the life of this creature who, while "certainly . . . free from all sin", nevertheless "knows pain suffering, and death" and even "matured as Mother of God" in such a way that "her merits increased until her death" (Ratzinger 1957, pp. 47–48). Mary suffered and died on Ratzinger's view. Unlike the rest of us, though, she made the perfect choice when it came to *how she would respond to suffering and death* with the help of God's grace, that is, *receiving them as gifts that lead to greater conformity to Christ*. Ratzinger thus taught in his Mariology course that the Blessed Virgin's death was not merely a passive affair but the active bursting forth of love in a final grand *fiat*: "Mary's death is not the answer [*Antwort*] to sin, but the self-giving away of love, or the overwhelming power of love, which broke the outer shell and prepared the way for [its] true form [*Gestalt*]" (Ratzinger 1957, p. 51).

To better understand Ratzinger's thought on this matter, it is instructive to begin by pondering his words on the Assumption. In *Daughter Zion*, a book specifically dedicated to explaining the Catholic Church's key Marian beliefs, he teaches that this dogma is not concerned with the issue of whether Mary died but rather with the veneration of Mary who has "arrived at her goal *on the other side of death*." To this, he immediately adds a sacramental dimension, "In her, everything still resisting baptism (faith) has been conquered without remainder *through the death of her earthly life*" (Ratzinger 2005, p. 74). What is perhaps most telling about these texts is that Ratzinger takes it for granted that Mary died and does not even feel the need to argue for it.

After affirming the historical reality of Mary's assumption, Ratzinger considers the meaning of death, grace, and the immortality that the Blessed Virgin gained through her Assumption. Addressing what these mean from his characteristic existential perspective, Ratzinger replies:

> Man is not immortal by his own power, but only in and through another, preliminarily, tentatively, fragmentarily, in children, in fame, but finally and truly only in and from the Entirely-Other, God. We are mortal due to the usurped autarchy of a determination to remain within ourselves, which proves to be a deception. *Death*, the impossibility of giving oneself a foothold, the collapse of autarchy, *is not merely a somatic* but a human phenomenon of all-embracing profundity. (Ratzinger 2005, pp. 78–79, emphasis added)

For Ratzinger, in other words, biological death is one thing, but *true* death is something we bring upon ourselves when we live our life as if we were self-sufficient. The reverse side of

this, the good news, is that this more important death can be conquered (as happened with Mary) even as we meet our bodily demise and shuffle off this mortal coil:

> Nevertheless, where the innate propensity to autarchy is totally lacking, where there is the pure self-dispossession of the one who does not rely upon himself (=grace), *death is absent, even if the somatic end is present*. Instead, the whole human being enters salvation, because as a whole, undiminished, he stands eternally in God's life-giving memory that preserves him as himself in his *own* life. (Ratzinger 2005, p. 79, emphasis added)

In sum, the above texts strongly suggest that Ratzinger viewed Mary as having suffered and died like the rest of us, with the difference lying in her *response* to these trials. Because she was perfectly receptive to God's gift of suffering, Mary did not experience death as an evil to be dreaded—much less as evidence against God's goodness—but rather as the definitive path to conformity with her son.

8. The Main Problem Is Not Having to Suffer and Die, but How to Suffer and Die Well

The above texts indicate that Ratzinger considers Mary to have died before being assumed into heaven. This, combined with the fact that he did not even feel the need to argue for this position, confirms Ratzinger's broader understanding that suffering and death are in the world not primarily because of sin but in order to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. In light of the above discussion, we may now add that redemptive suffering and death also unite us to the New Eve, his blessed mother. I would now like to draw out some implications of Ratzinger's approach to the Blessed Mother's immaculate acceptance of suffering and death.

In light of Ratzinger's understanding of Mary combined with the integral role of suffering and death in the evolutionary design of the cosmos, it seems appropriate to conclude that mankind's ultimate problem is not suffering and physical death per se but rather our *resistance to accepting these crosses as our path to sanctification*. To put it in Ratzinger's personalist language, the ultimate problem is rather our *orientation towards* or *relationship with* these trials through which we all must pass—i.e., whether we play the victim, raging and rebelling against them, or rather whether we overcome them by receiving them as gifts. From this perspective, the grace lost by our forefathers was not something that would have prevented us from suffering and dying but rather that which *allows us to suffer and die well*—with Christ and like his Blessed Mother in a cruciform gift of self-abandonment to the Father's will.

Ratzinger's vision is one of a human race that has likely always experienced suffering of many kinds. However, as we have seen above, this would not have caused in Mary or our first parents the experience of misery, absurdity, and dread that the rest of us experience because of our inept response to trials. I find that C.S. Lewis captures this point well when he, like Ratzinger, says that the problem of how to bear suffering well is crucial to our fulfillment as human beings: "[T]he proper good of a creature is to surrender itself to its Creator . . . the problem is how to recover this self-surrender. We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved: we are, as Newman said, rebels who must lay down our arms" (Lewis 2001, p. 76). From here, Lewis makes a poignant suggestion that sheds light on how Christ, Mary, and our first parents may have experienced their suffering:

> Even in Paradise I have supposed a minimal self-adherence to be overcome, though the overcoming, and the yielding, would there be rapturous. But to surrender a self will inflamed and swollen with years of usurpation is a kind of death . . . The self-surrender which he practiced before the Fall meant no struggle but only the delicious overcoming of an infinitesimal self-adherence which delighted to be overcome—of which we see a dim analogy in the rapturous mutual self-surrenders of lovers even now. (Lewis 2001, p. 76)

This portrait of sinless suffering is sublime, yet everyday experiences may also serve to illustrate what an unfallen response to pain and suffering might look like. Consider the

satisfaction that comes from having completed a hard day's work or the gratification that ensues upon completing a demanding workout with all the sweat and pain it involves. Frequently, the sense of fulfillment that we receive from achieving these goals comes not *despite* but precisely *because of* hardships endured and obstacles overcome along the way. Indeed, while the journey was not necessarily pleasurable, it was not miserable and indeed was ultimately a source of great joy.

This, then, is the key: Even if the human race has always suffered and died, the experience—like that which we ourselves sometimes glimpse in the midst of great trials—need not be one of affliction and despair. For, just as the self-giving that we find in the life of Christ and the Trinity itself is one of sheer bliss, so too man in his graced state could have found rapturous joy through his surrender of self in loving suffering. While we today cannot simply return to this original state, the good news is that God *does* offer us the grace to live our sufferings well, and he has left us examples of how to do so in Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

9. Conclusions: Evolution, Evil, and Eschatology

As I have argued in this essay, the person of Jesus Christ and our participation in his *kenosis* are essential to any theodicy that wishes to do justice to the problem of suffering and death in the evolutionary path that led to the emergence of human beings. I hope to have shown that, for Joseph Ratzinger, man's real problem does not lie in suffering and death per se but rather our disordered *relationship with* these trials. That we rage and rebel against our pain is not evidence against God's goodness. Rather, it is a summons to look to the cross of Christ as the model for *how to suffer and die well*—with Christ and like his Blessed Mother in a cruciform gift of self-abandonment to the Father's will. That said, in drawing this essay towards a conclusion, I would be remiss not to mention one more key dimension of the Christian response to the problem of evil: The ultimate answer to life's sufferings lies in the hope for resurrected life in a new heaven and new earth. In this vision, man's *kenosis* of bearing the cross leads to *theosis* and resurrection—and not just of human beings but the transfiguration of all creation at the end of time.

Significantly, for our purposes, Ratzinger has often described this eschatological transformation as an "evolution." For instance, in his classic *Introduction to Christianity*, he writes that Christification—the transformation of all in Christ—is "the real drift [*die eigentliche Drift*] of evolution . . . the real goal of the ascending process of growth or becoming" (Ratzinger 1990, pp. 236–37). This applies to individual human beings but also to the glorious transformation of all creation (Ramage 2020a, pp. 106–9). Ratzinger's lofty claim about the destiny of the created world finds its basis in multiple New Testament texts. With their exalted expectations for the future of the created universe, these letters clearly share the profound conviction that the evolving world we inhabit is "very good" (Gn 1:31) and therefore destined in some way—however inscrutable it is to us here below—to share with us in eternal glory.

Perhaps most famously, St. John envisions "a new heaven and a new earth" to be revealed in the fullness of time (Rv 21:1; cf. Is 11:6–9; 25:7–9; 65:17–25; 66:22) and sees the Lord declaring, "'Behold, I make *all things* new'" (Rv 21:5, emphasis added). In the same vein, 2 Pt 3:8–14 informs us that, when the day of the Lord arrives like a thief, "then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire"—not in order to abolish creation but rather to *renew* it as a "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Expanding on this eschatological vision in his own turn, Paul depicts the whole creation "groaning [*systenazei*] in travail" as it waits to be "set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rm 8:21–22).

Pope Benedict described this grand eschatological vision in Scripture as having a "great Christological—indeed, cosmic—dynamism" (Benedict XVI 2007a, p. 270). In his first Easter homily as pope, Benedict preached along the same lines using biological terms to describe Heavenly life anagogically:

> If we may borrow the language of the theory of evolution, [Christ's resurrection] is the greatest "mutation", absolutely the most crucial leap into a totally new dimension that there has ever been in the long history of life and its development: a leap into a completely new order that does concern us, and concerns the whole of history . . . It is a qualitative leap in the history of "evolution" and of life in general toward a new future life, toward a new world, which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this world of ours, transforms it, and draws it to itself. (Benedict XVI 2006b; Benedict XVI 2011)

As an indication of just how close this theme was to his heart, it is telling that the emeritus pontiff chose to expand upon it in his rare writings penned in retirement. For instance, in one he writes, "If we really wanted to summarize very briefly the content of the Faith as laid down in the Bible, we might do so by saying that the Lord has initiated a narrative of love with us and wants to *subsume all creation* in it" (Benedict XVI 2019). In his landmark volume *Eschatology*, Ratzinger spoke of this state that encompasses all of creation as a "pan-cosmic existence" that leads to "universal exchange and openness, and so to the overcoming of all alienation." Making his own the words of St. Paul, he expounds, "Only where creation achieves such unity can it be true that God is 'all in all' [Eph 1:23] . . . where each thing becomes completely itself precisely by being completely in the other" (Ratzinger 1988, p. 192; Eph 1:23; Col 1:20).

In another, even more stunning text—this time a brief post-retirement address given on the sixty-fifth anniversary of his priestly ordination—Benedict went so far as to speak of this transformative dynamic as one of *cosmic transubstantiation*:

> The cross, suffering, all that is wrong with the world: he transformed all this into "thanks" and therefore into a "blessing." Hence he fundamentally transubstantiated life and the world [*fondamentalmente ha transustanziato la vita e il mondo*] . . . Finally, we wish to insert ourselves into the "thanks" of the Lord, and thus truly receive the newness of life and contribute to the "transubstantiation" of the world [*transustanziazione del mondo*] so that it might not be a place of death, but of life: a world in which love has conquered death. (Benedict XVI 2016)

In this short paragraph, the emeritus pontiff emphasizes that the "transubstantiation of the world" is a reality that has at once already begun and yet which will continue to unfold to the extent that we disciples insert ourselves into Christ's saving work as his co-redeemers. While Benedict certainly thinks that happiness can be found by embracing suffering and death in the earthly realm, this text manifests his conviction that all our present sufferings will one day come to an end in the joy of eternal bliss.

What, exactly, will it look like in the new heaven and new earth when the entire cosmos and its sufferings are transformed in Christ? The truth is that Scripture reveals to us *that* this is the vocation of all creation but comprehending *what it means* is another thing. As Scripture teaches, no eye has seen, no ear heard, and no heart conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9, citing Is 64:4). Yet what believers do know is that what awaits us on the other side of death is infinitely more glorious than we could ever imagine. We also know that the path there comes by way of embracing the experience of suffering and death that is so crucial to the evolutionary dynamic of the cosmos.

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Notes

[1] This essay at times refers to the one man Ratzinger/Benedict by his surname and at other times by his papal name in the effort to distinguish writings composed during his pontificate from those preceding it. When not referring specifically to a text, the name Benedict or "emeritus pontiff" is also employed since this text has been written during the period of his retirement. For another treatment of Ratzinger on evolution, see (Novo 2020; Ramage 2015; Ramage 2020b). For a notable endeavor to explicate Ratzinger's approach to suffering, death, and original sin in light of advancements in evolutionary theory, see Sanz (2018).

[2] The lecture notes of Ratzinger's (1957) Mariology course at Freising Seminary are housed in the *Benedikt XVI Institut* in Regensburg and have been expertly summarized in de Gaál (2019). In what follows, I will refer to this manuscript of Ratzinger's Mariology lecture notes as *Mariologie* and reproduce de Gaál's translations of the text.

[3] A thorough survey of Ratzinger's (1964) *Schöpfungslehre* manuscript can be found in Sanz (2014). For a discussion of the weight that ought to be accorded these unpublished works along with a helpful comparison to the value that we duly accord to Aristotle's lecture notes, see (de Gaál 2019, p. 82).

[4] Beyond Ratzinger's approach, for other valuable positions regarding the relationship of original sin with the onset of suffering and death in the cosmos inspired by Thomas Aquinas and Maximus the Confessor, respectively, see Austriaco (2015) and Lombardo (2019). For a remarkable ecclesial document that treats the relationship of sin, love, and suffering, see John Paul II (1984).

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Article

Biases for Evil and Moral Perfection

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Abstract: I argue that deeply ingrained dispositions to do evil do not render moral perfection impossible. I discuss various accounts of moral perfection and the evidence from cognitive (neuro)science that points towards a strong disposition for evil. Afterwards, I discuss three strategies that can allow humans to overcome their evil dispositions. These are: cognitive enhancement, avoiding triggering situations and structural solutions.

Keywords: cognitive bias; evil; moral perfection

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1. Introduction

The need for or impossibility of moral perfection is a recurrent theme in philosophy. Most claims in favor of or against the possibility of moral perfection rely on a priori arguments or anecdotal evidence. In this paper, I investigate how empirical evidence on biases towards morally bad behavior drawn from evolutionary biology and cognitive science weighs in on the debate. I argue that while evolved human dispositions for morally bad behavior render moral perfection more difficult, humans can achieve moral perfection through various routes. I conclude that moral perfection remains possible for human beings in spite of deeply ingrained dispositions for evil.

Like other authors discussing the possibility of moral perfection I have in mind a concept of "possibility" closer to metaphysical possibility than to logical possibility. Since the concept of moral perfection does not appear to be internally inconsistent, logical possibility is easily granted. Deeply ingrained biases for evil appear to challenge whether moral perfection is possible for humans (homo sapiens) in this world. I argue that this remains the case.

This paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, I discuss what moral perfection is and what varieties can be distinguished; in Section 3, I discuss the evidence from evolutionary biology and cognitive science for a disposition to do evil in man; in Section 4, I discuss how the evidence challenges the possibility of moral perfection; in Section 5, I discuss how the challenges can be met and lay out three ways how humans can overcome their dispositions for evil.

2. What Is Moral Perfection?

The amount of discussion over moral perfection is fairly limited in contemporary philosophy. There is considerable debate over related terms like (the possibility of) God's omnibenevolence or moral virtue. Because both terms refer to different phenomena or different beings, the discussion is not straightforwardly applicable to moral perfection.[1] In this section I make an attempt at defining "moral perfection". In later sections I assess whether humans can ever achieve moral perfection in light of recent advances in evolutionary biology and cognitive science.

While the need for or importance of moral perfection is rarely discussed by contemporary ethicists and other philosophers, the idea of moral perfection or similar traits is prominent in a number of (religious) traditions. Christian traditions often refer to Matthew 5:48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." to regard moral perfection

as a personal duty. The catechism of the Roman Catholic Church affirms that all Christians should strive towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity. Humans are able to do so with help from divine grace (Catholic Church 1994). For Eastern Orthodox churches, moral perfection is part of the doctrine of theosis, a process whereby humans are granted likeness to God or union with God. Wesleyan, Methodist doctrine affirms that sanctification through the work of the Holy Spirit is possible. Sanctification is a gradual, progressive process where humans grow in grace and obedience to God culminating in a state that nears moral perfection. Some non-Christian traditions also accept some form of moral perfection. A large number of Buddhists affirm that humans can achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth through the eightfold path of right practices (right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right Samadhi).[2] Following the right path is often regarded as having the power to transform the individual morally beyond its normal limitations. Stoic ethics allow for the possibility of morally perfect acts performed in the right way with an absolutely rational, consistent and formally perfect disposition (cf. Stephens 2004).

I will be using the term "moral perfection" as signifying a (potential) trait of humans. What I claim therefore has no ramifications for the discussion over God's omnibenevolence or the moral status of non-human animals. I do so because the question whether moral perfection is attainable is usually applied to humans, and humans appear to be the most interesting moral actors in our world.

Moral perfection is a character trait that humans can or cannot possess. In that sense, moral perfection is similar to moral virtue. Unlike moral virtue, moral perfection is not something humans can possess to a greater or lesser extent. Whereas humans can be more or less morally virtuous, they cannot be more or less morally perfect. As with all perfections, moral perfection consists of possessing something to the greatest possible extent.

Earl Conee distinguishes four forms of moral perfection:

(1) Doing everything that is morally right and nothing that is morally wrong.
(2) Doing what is supererogatory at every moment.
(3) Doing what is morally right without any liability.
(4) Doing everything that is morally good with the right frame of mind (Conee 1994).

Conee argues that true moral perfection consists of all four traits. He argues that subjects that merely possess (1), (2), (3), or (4) fall short of moral perfection because there remains a possibility for improvement or being even more moral (Conee 1994).

Susan Wolf defines a *moral saint* as "a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person (. . .) who is as morally worthy as can be" (Wolf 1982).[3] Her definition of moral saint does not state that moral saints never do anything morally wrong. Whether someone achieved moral saintliness depends on how morally worthy one can be. Her account of moral saintliness (which she explicitly equates with moral perfection) therefore allows that a moral saint has to do morally bad things for the greater good or has to make moral trade-offs. Wolf thereby suggests a fifth form of moral perfection:

(5) Doing as many morally good acts and as few morally bad acts as possible.

The fifth form of moral perfection raises some questions of vagueness. It is not obvious what lies within the range of possibilities for humans. On certain strands of Calvinism, humans are regarded as totally depraved and incapable of doing what is morally right without divine help. Below, I discuss evidence that in-group favoritism and out-group hostility are very hard (if not impossible) to overcome. On both views, the moral possibilities of men are severely limited. Nonetheless, people could meet Wolf's conditions for moral sainthood because they are doing as many morally good acts as possible within their possibilities. Wolf, however, adds that the lives of moral saints are dominated by a commitment to improve the welfare of others or of society as a whole (Wolf 1982). Wolf, therefore, appears to have a more positive view of what humans can achieve morally in mind.

Wolf's account puts far fewer limitations on moral perfection than Conee's. Because she ties moral saintliness to possibilities, humans can perform a considerable number of evil acts and still be regarded as morally perfect. Only performing evil acts that a subject could have refrained from are causes to not grant them moral perfection. Therefore, only acts that stem from malicious intent or weakness of will preclude moral perfection. On Wolf's account, people suffering from psychopathy or sociopathy can in some cases be ranked among the morally perfect because their psychological conditions make it impossible for them not to do certain evil acts. Not only does Wolf's account run against common sense, it also does not call for moral transformation or effort to overcome moral limitations.

I noted that Conee argues that moral perfection must involve all possible moral perfections and therefore must include 1–4. Contrary to Conee, I will mostly be investigating the possibility of (1) in the rest of this paper. I do so because discussion on related topics often relies on this understanding of moral perfection. Since the other forms pose stricter constraints on moral perfection, a negative answer to the question whether moral perfection (1) is possible will imply a negative answer for other forms of moral perfection as well. A positive answer does not necessarily have implications for other forms of moral perfection.

3. Empirical Challenges to Moral Perfection

Some authors defend arguments against moral perfection drawn from intuitions or a priori reasoning.[4] The argument I discuss draws on empirical evidence on the psychological nature of humans. While most research focuses on altruism and (evolutionary) explanations thereof, a growing number of psychologists and cognitive scientists argue that humans have deeply ingrained biases or propensities. Some of these propensities would make humans prone towards doing morally bad acts. While this claim is compatible with the possibility of moral perfection, some authors continue that some propensities to commit evil cannot be overcome because they are deeply rooted within human psychology. Any attempt to achieve moral perfection would therefore be doomed to fail. I return to this last point in the next section.

While there is considerable anecdotal evidence for dispositions for evil, the theories I discuss below provide explanations for why such dispositions came about. They do so by pointing to the adaptive use of having certain biases. These adaptive biases give rise to dispositions for evil as a by-product, or the dispositions for evil have adaptive value in themselves. A common objection to these and other evolutionary explanations is that they lack direct empirical confirmation. Defenders point to how their evolutionary explanation can plausibly account for observed phenomena, like regularities in human behavior, or can predict human behavior. Direct evidence for how natural selection ran its course in selecting human cognitive functions is, however, nearly impossible. The main reason is that current science lacks a clear understanding of how cognitive biases or dispositions are encoded in the human genome. Furthermore, DNA strands of ancient human fossils are usually too degraded to give a clear image of their genome. For these and other reasons, direct evidence is probably too much to ask for.

I will note some criticisms but will make little attempts to critically evaluate the scientific evidence I discuss in this section in great detail.[5] Such an evaluation falls beyond the scope of this paper and outside of my expertise. I note that all approaches I discuss have a lot of traction within their respective scientific communities and are widely discussed and accepted. When evaluating the implications of the evidence on moral perfection, I will proceed as if the conclusions drawn from the evidence are true. I also do not discuss evidence for propensities that are conducive to morally good behavior.[6] While a strong case can be made that natural selection also endowed humans with dispositions for morally *good* behavior, this need not affect my overall point. Since I aim to assess whether certain dispositions preclude moral perfection, these dispositions need not occur very often. It suffices if humans are on some occasions disposed towards morally bad behavior to raise serious doubts about the possibility for moral perfection. If dispositions for evil turn out to be widespread and affect humans on many occasions their existence might also raise

worries for the possibility of moral virtue building or moral progress. These questions, however, lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Before I discuss some of the scientific evidence in more detail, I want to clarify one more point. The authors I discuss below aim to describe general features of the human mind. They offer evidence in support of biases or propensities that are shared by all or most normally developed and normally functioning humans. They do not argue that some subset of the human population (like psychopaths) suffers from deeply ingrained propensities to do evil, but instead argue that most normally functioning humans develop these propensities throughout their lifetime. The empirical evidence could therefore have ramifications for the general possibility of moral perfection for the vast majority of human beings.

3.1. Evolved Bias for Belief in Moralizing Gods

The first evidence for a deeply rooted propensity for evil states that humans have a natural inclination for a particular form of religious belief, which in turn makes humans prone for evil. A number of authors argue that belief in moralizing gods served an adaptive benefit. Believing that there is a God who monitors human moral behavior and who rewards or punishes humans accordingly would lead to better cooperation. People who believe that moralizing gods are watching their every move would be less likely to free ride and more eager to do their fair share in cooperation. Since cooperation is highly important for the human species, belief in moralizing gods would have been selected for by natural or cultural selection.[7]

The idea of gods as a social monitor is rather congenial to moral perfection. If belief in moralizing gods leads to better cooperation, it helps humans do what is morally right. Some authors noted, however, that there is a flipside. Adherence to moralizing gods leads to organization in religious communities. In the past, the scope of religious communities coincided with scope of cooperation. Nowadays, various religious communities exist alongside one another. Religious communities involve membership. Often members are distinguished from non-members by outward markers (usually bodily markers, symbols or clothing). Membership easily leads to exclusion. As John Teehan notes, outsiders are not invested in the group and have less motivation to cooperate or reciprocate cooperation. They are therefore perceived as free riders more easily and as a danger to the community (Teehan 2010).

Others argue that belief in moralizing gods leads to discrimination of subjects that do not share this belief. If belief in moralizing gods is linked to trustworthiness and refraining from free riding, people will tend to distrust those who do not believe in moralizing gods. Nowadays, most non-believers in moralizing gods are atheists. Therefore, the disposition to believe in moralizing gods could explain discrimination of atheists throughout the world (Gervais 2013).

From its onset, the theory has been subject to a number of criticisms. For example, Inti Brazil and Miguel Farias argue that belief in moralizing gods is better explained by a human motivation to reduce uncertainty than by their role as social monitor (Brazil and Farias 2016). Pascal Boyer and Nicolas Baumard argue that belief in moralizing gods is better explained by increased affluence (Boyer and Baumard 2016). Assessing the plausibility of the theory lies beyond the scope of this paper. I do note that both criticisms do not call into doubt that belief in moralizing gods is widespread and was historically important. Disagreements lie in the reasons why (cultural) evolution selected for belief in moralizing gods. Authors arguing for a connection between belief in moralizing gods and in-group preference draw support from the close connection between such belief and cooperation. If belief in moralizing gods was selected for other reasons, the connection to in-group bias is probably less strong.

Excluding outsiders from cooperation or distrusting outsiders is generally considered morally evil. Excluding outsiders can easily lead to xenophobia or parochial behavior, which is generally considered morally bad behavior as well. If an evolved inclination for religious belief leads to an inclination to exclude outsiders, humans therefore have

an inclination for evil. However, the present situation shows that the inclination to believe in moralizing gods is probably not very strong. A considerable number of people in contemporary societies do not hold beliefs in moralizing gods. Nonetheless, some evolutionary biologists hold that even they suffer from evolved inclinations that foster out-group hostility. I turn to an example next.

3.2. Evolved Limits to Altruism

Robert Dunbar argues that there is an upper limit to stable human group size and associated altruism. Maximal stable group size is determined by the volume of the neocortex. The volume of the neocortex sets the cognitive constraints that determine the maximum number of individuals any animal can keep track of. Group cohesion is in turn maintained by various practices. For nonhuman primates, group cohesion is maintained through social grooming. The amount of social grooming is literally related to group size. The relationship between group size and time spent grooming is a consequence of the intensity of grooming with a small number of key "friendships". These key friendships function as coalitions that have the purpose of buffering members against harassment by other members of the group. The larger the group, the more harassment and stress an individual faces. The mean group size of a species is related to the mean size of the smaller coalitions. Therefore, the total group size is limited by the number of individuals others can keep track off within the range of their cognitive abilities (Dunbar 1993).

Like nonhuman primates, humans are limited by their cognitive abilities as well. Humans have a significantly larger neocortex (roughly 30% more volume than nonhuman primates) and therefore can keep track of more individuals. Mean human neocortical size predicts that human group sizes range from 107.6 to 189.1. Dunbar notes from surveying a number of hunter-gatherer groups that a lot of tribes have a membership of well beyond 190, often ranging in the thousands. However, tribes often consist of intermediate-level groups with an average number of 148.4. These intermediate-level groups appear to be characterized by interaction on a sufficiently regular basis so that they have strong bonds based on direct personal knowledge (Dunbar 1993).

While the discussion up to this point focused on (the limits of) group sizes in traditional cultures, Dunbar's surveys evidence that 150 may also be a functional limit on interacting groups in contemporary western industrial societies. Research suggests a negative effect of group size on group cohesion and job satisfaction. Some businesses informally hold on to a limit of 150 for effective coordination of tasks and information flow through direct person-to-person links. Larger companies usually have substructures of smaller size. Studies on the number of different acquaintances in modern urban societies also tend to average on a number around or below 150. Dunbar also notes that most organized professional armies also consist of basic units of about 150 men (Dunbar 1993).

Humans do not maintain group cohesion through grooming like apes do. Grooming roughly 150 people would take up too much time and effort. According to Dunbar's calculations, it would take up 42% of our time. Instead, humans maintain relationships by other forms of social bonding like ritual behavior or language. Dunbar suggests that language evolved as a "cheap" form of grooming. Language does not only serve to exchange information about one's environment. It also allows individuals to spend time with their preferred social partners and allows them to acquire knowledge about the behavioral characteristics of other group members (Dunbar 1993).

The limit on core friendship groups imposed by limits in human cognitive abilities in turn lead to limits in the size of societies. Dunbar does suggest that the size of societies could increase because of social dispersal. In dispersed societies, individuals meet less face-to-face and are less familiar with each other. Language also raises the possibility of increasing group size by categorizing individuals into types. Individuals can be identified as belonging to a particular class in virtues of having a particular cue (some piece of clothing or bodily marker). By virtue of this, humans need only learn how to behave towards a general type of individual rather than learning how to behave towards every

individual. This could allow for larger human societies. Dunbar does note that super large states have not proven to be very stable through time. Most large empires eventually collapsed or were maintained by means of oppression. He also notes that larger groups appear to be less cohesive than groups that are smaller than the critical limit (Dunbar 1993).

Dunbar's evidence has similar implications like the theory on moralizing gods. The evidence suggests that there is an upper limit to human cooperation. While humans can cooperate well enough with people from the in-group of 150, the evidence suggests that most humans will frown upon intense collaboration with non-members. The evidence from nonhuman primates even suggests that interactions with an out-group easily involve harassment and stress.

A recent attempt at replication called the limit of 150 members of stable groups into doubt (Lindenfors et al. 2021). Other critiques pointed to the importance of the quantity of nutrients human brains consume compared to apes (Pfeifer and Bongard 2006), and differences in diet (DeCasien et al. 2017). Dunbar does not take both into account. However, all criticisms call for a revision of the maximal group size for stable altruism. Unless the maximum is revised dramatically, revised numbers would still point to serious limitations to human altruism.

A strong preference for members of an in-group is hard to reconcile with moral perfection. While a limit of human group sizes to 150 would allow for moral perfection is small isolated communities, most human societies are far larger. A morally perfect person should be expected to treat everyone equally well. While preferences for closely affiliated fellow humans might not impede moral perfection (everybody has at least some preferred fellow humans), the ease with which in-group fidelity leads to out-group hostility poses a real problem. I turn to this issue next.

3.3. Evolved Tendency for Group Conflict

The dispositions discussed so far can easily lead humans towards doing morally bad deeds. The implications are, however, still rather limited. Both dispositions imply that humans tend to have preferences for members of the in-group in their choice of cooperating partners and will tend to behave more altruistically towards in-group members. Pascal Boyer argues that propensities for in-group behavior can easily have much more profound implications.[8] I turn to his account now.

Boyer argues that no human population is immune from potential ethnic rivalry and conflict. These can escalate into full-blown civil war and genocide surprisingly easily. This disposition can be explained by the evolutionary roots of human behavior. Ethnic rivalry, or other forms of out-group hostility, are the flipside of the human propensity for cooperation. Humans rely more on cooperation than any other species. Cooperation enables human to divide tasks like gathering food or taking care of offspring within their communities. As a result, humans can be more successful in their endeavors. Because cooperation is that important, a large number of evolutionary biologists and evolutionary psychologists argue that natural selection selected for deeply ingrained, strong intuitions and dispositions for cooperation.[9] These intuitions and dispositions make humans prone to find partners for cooperation (Boyer 2018).

Having strong dispositions to cooperate is rather congenial to moral perfection. Nonetheless, they can easily lead to out-group hostility. They do because relying on cooperation also makes human vulnerable. When tasks are divided among a community, the danger of free riders lurks. Free riders reap the benefits of cooperation but do not contribute anything or little themselves. A high prevalence of free riders undermines trust and lowers the benefits of cooperation for non-free riders. For this reason, humans were also endowed by natural selection with dispositions to be on guard against potential free riders. People monitor commitment and defection to avoid investing resources and efforts in coalitions with free riders. As a result, people are easily mistrusting of newcomers and of people from outsides their in-groups because they have not proven to be trustworthy

collaborators. Humans often rely on tokens like language, skin color or traditions as cues or markers of belonging to the in-group (Boyer 2018).

According to Boyer, a disposition for mistrusting members of an out-group can easily lead to out-group hostility. To safeguard their own in-group and its associated cooperation, humans easily perceive any interference from out-group members as attacks. Small infringements by individual members of an out-group, like petty thefts or insults, can easily trigger strong defensive reactions.[10] Boyer notes that inter-group conflict often takes a predictable form. In many cases, conflicts start with a minor episode, like a scuffle between youths or an angry reaction to a sporting event.[11] In some cases the minor event is amplified by rumors of deliberate acts of aggression by the out-group. After the rumors have disseminated (and in some cases were amplified by media reports), members of one group grow to be cautious in their interactions with members of other groups. When a new minor event occurs after a few days, the conflict escalates and more serious reactions like storming out-group districts or even killing members of out-groups occur (Boyer 2018).

Like other evolutionary psychologists, Boyer argues that human cooperation and the human dispositions for in-group preference and out-group hostility are the result of unconscious computations. While the reason for the strong dispositions is often not accessible through introspection, they have a strong effect on human behavior when triggered in the right way. The dispositions were selected for by natural selection because cooperation is very important and because free riding poses a serious threat for human survival (Boyer 2018).

The effects of an inclination for out-group hostility are clearly morally bad. Whereas the moral effects of limits to altruism where still rather limited to xenophobia or distrust of strangers, the effects of the dispositions discussed by Boyer are much more far-reaching. It is clear that a disposition for aggression towards members of the out-group is morally bad behavior.

4. The Impossibility of Moral Perfection

While some authors defended a priori reasons for doubting the possibility of moral perfection (e.g., Conee 1994), the evidence I discussed in the last section gives empirical reasons to doubt that humans can achieve moral perfection.[12] The evidence strongly suggests that humans have strong dispositions for morally bad behavior like preferences for in-group altruism and out-group hostility. The evidence also suggests that the dispositions are triggered easily so that a lot of humans will suffer from their effects.

Having strong dispositions for morally bad behavior does not render moral perfection impossible but merely renders it difficult. Through virtue development, exercise of the will or other means, humans might be able to overcome their natural dispositions and learn to avoid morally bad behavior. Overcoming evolved dispositions will, however, prove to be difficult for a number of reasons. First, as Boyer noted, some dispositions consists of unconscious mental computations. Because these are not open to introspection, most humans are not aware of the dispositions and triggering conditions. Lacking information about dispositions for morally bad behavior and how they work will prevent humans from finding the means to overcome the dispositions. This problem can be solved by making information more widely available. By instructing people about their dispositions for morally bad behavior, people can learn how their dispositions are triggered and take steps towards overcoming them.

A second problem runs deeper. There is ample evidence that dispositions rooted in evolved psychology tend to resurface when subjects lack the time or resources for adequate reflection. Some authors suggested that young children are prone to answer why-questions teleologically (e.g., Kelemen 1999). The bias recedes when humans learn mechanistic, scientific explanations for facts. However, when put under time pressure, even trained scientists are again prone to give teleological answers (Casler and Kelemen 2008). Another evolved disposition is fear of snakes (cf. Öhman and Mineka 2003). Information about snakes or reflection can remove fear of snakes in safe conditions. Nonetheless, humans are

still prone to have fear reactions when they encounter a snake or something resembling a snake off-guard. A final evolved disposition is our craving for sugar and fatty food. Eating as much sugar and fatty food as possible made evolutionary sense when calories were scarce. Nowadays, humans can overcome these cravings and choose to eat more healthy food. On occasion (e.g., under the influence of stress or anxiety), many do slip back into preferring sugar or fatty food.

The evidence suggests that although humans can overcome evolved dispositions on many occasions, the dispositions tend to resurface when humans let down their cognitive guard and act unreflectively. Given that it is near impossible to never let one's guard down, we should not expect that the dispositions for morally bad behavior will never resurface. The question remains how often the dispositions will resurface when humans put in the effort to overcome or suppress them. Considering that we are investigating the possibility of moral perfection, they need not resurface often.

5. The Possibility of Moral Perfection

Having discussed evidence for a strong tendency towards out-group hostility, I will now discuss various pathways how moral perfection might still be possible in spite of deeply ingrained propensities to do evil.[13] I will not challenge the empirical evidence I discussed in Section 2 and proceed as if humans have a deeply rooted propensity for out-group hostility that easily resurfaces when humans let down their cognitive guard. I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of three strategies.

5.1. Cognitive Enhancement

Dunbar's evidence for a correlation between maximum group size and cognitive abilities raises the suggestion that maximum group size can be increased by having larger cognitive abilities. Being able to compute a larger group size might also help humans in expanding the in-group and limiting out-group hostility. Usually cognitive abilities in species change as a result of mutations in the genome, which are transmitted if they lead to increased fitness.[14] Waiting for natural selection to select for increased cognitive abilities would, however, take too much time and would not help humans achieve moral perfection in the short run. Humans might intervene in the evolutionary process by selecting individuals with higher cognitive abilities and having them reproduce. Such practices are, however, not deemed morally acceptable and are condemned in most contemporary codes of law.

Cognitive enhancement, however, need not imply intervention in the human genome. Some authors suggest that cognitive enhancement is possible by pharmacological or other means. These are able to alter not just human action but also human dispositions. As Bostrom and Sandberg note, cognitive intervention can be both therapeutic (where a pathology or impairment is cured) or enhancing (where human abilities are increased) (Bostrom and Sandberg 2009). Given the evidence cited in Section 2, it appears that humans need enhancing intervention to obtain increased cognitive abilities. One form of cognitive enhancement is psychological interventions like learned tricks or mental strategies. Basic examples are education and training with the goal of improving mental faculties like concentration or memory. Other forms of psychological interventions move beyond these, like mindfulness training, yoga, meditation or martial arts (Bostrom and Sandberg 2009).

Other forms of cognitive enhancement involve drugs or other substances. Bostrom and Sandberg note that humans have been using caffeine to increase attention for centuries (Bostrom and Sandberg 2009). Some have suggested that medicines used for the therapeutic treatment of *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder* (ADHD), like methylphenidate, dexamphetamine, lisdexamfetamine, atomoxetine and guanfacine, could also increase human capacities for attention in non-therapeutic contexts.[15]

A worry for using drugs to increase human cognitive abilities is that not much is known about their potential (side) effects and their long-term consequences (Bostrom and Sandberg 2009). Drugs that have a lasting effect on the brain might also raise issues

about bodily integrity and even personal identity. More importantly for our purposes, it is unclear whether drugs can solve the limitations in neocortical volume, which leads to limitations in group size according to Dunbar. While drugs can alter the operations of neurotransmitters or might impact brain activity, it is doubtful that they can increase the volume of the human neocortex.

Another form of cognitive enhancement could be more promising. Bostrom and Samberg note that cognitive enhancement can also be achieved by external hardware and software systems. Humans have been using calculators or personal computers to increase their cognitive abilities for quite some time. Software can help displaying information, keep more items in memory and perform routine tasks (like mathematical calculations) more rapidly. Data mining and information visualization make large quantities of data easier to handle (Bostrom and Sandberg 2009).

Cognitive enhancement by means of hardware or software can come in two forms. In its classical form, humans use an external device (e.g., a calculator, PC or personal digital assistant) to help them perform cognitive tasks. At any point in time, the user can decide to turn the device on or off. Despite being external to the human brain, devices can have a tremendous effect on human cognitive abilities. More recent, internal hardware enhancements became possible. Humans can have electrodes implanted in their brain. The hardware can make use of software that can interpret incoming sensory signals and commands (Bostrom and Sandberg 2009).

If humans are to increase their cognitive abilities to allow for (far) greater group size, much more is needed than hardware and software that merely imitates human cognitive behavior. Hardware and software must be developed that surpasses human abilities, and the hardware and software must be coupled to human brains in an external or internal way. Current development in artificial intelligence still seems far removed from this goal. However, there is no a priori reason to think that the necessary advances cannot be achieved. In any case, increasing cognitive abilities by means of hardware and software is still science fiction and not of any help for humans to achieve moral perfection in the near future.

5.2. Avoiding Triggers

Another solution does not put its hope on technological developments but on practices humans can adopt to avoid the nefarious effects of dispositions for evil. Knowing about their cognitive limitations and the effects they can have on treatment of outsiders, humans can choose to avoid contact with individuals beyond their core-group of roughly 150. By doing so they avoid the stress and potential harassment than easily comes with contacting outsiders. In a similar way, they could avoid situations that trigger dispositions for out-group hostility

Consider this example:

> Rupert has an innate propensity to steal jewelry. On the road from Rupert's home to work is a jewelry store. Whenever he walks past the store, Rupert is triggered to go in and try to steal some of the jewelry on display. Though having tried to contain his urges, Rupert finds himself unable to refrain from trying to steal the jewelry. To avoid actually stealing any more jewelry, Rupert decides to take a different route to work. He no longer passes by the jewelry store every day and tries to avoid passing by it on other occasions as much as he can.

Rupert's solution to avoid doing evil is somewhat similar to the psychological interventions we discussed above. Rather than trying to change his propensities (what psychological interventions often try to do), Rupert changes his behavior in such a way that he is no longer triggered to do evil acts. His dispositions are still there. If Rupert would decide to take the old route to work, he would again be triggered to steal. By changing his behavior to avoid the trigger, he manages to avoid the real-world effects of his propensities.

In a similar way, humans could avoid the effects of their disposition towards out-group hostility by avoiding the trigger. If humans are able to keep their contact largely within their core-group, they could avoid the effects of their limited cognitive abilities. They can

happily cooperate with people within their core-group and not be bothered by outsiders. Because of the lack of contact with outsiders, they are not triggered to treat outsiders in a bad way and are therefore not triggered to do morally bad acts.

The strategy seems to suffice to achieve moral perfection (1). By not being triggered, humans refrain from doing anything bad and focus on the good they can do within their core-group. They, however, fail to achieve moral perfections 2–4.

A worry for this solution is whether limiting contacts to the in-group is always possible. People living in large urban areas or practicing jobs that involve meeting a lot of people will be unable to limit their engagements to their in-group. Increased interconnectivity by means of the internet and social media also increase the number of contacts (far) beyond 150. The contemporary, globalized society therefore calls into doubt whether the second strategy is tenable.

5.3. Structural Solutions

A last solution that can enable moral perfection despite deeply rooted propensities for evil is building top-down structures to avoid the consequences of propensities. Like in the previous solution, subjects are prevented from doing evil by avoiding triggers. Unlike the previous solution, the subject does not avoid triggers in a bottom-up way but is prevented from encountering triggers by structures put in place in a top-down way by the state, organizations or others.

Structural solutions are widely discussed as a solution for (evolved) biases like those that lead to collective action problems (situations where society would be better off by cooperating but individuals fail to do so because of conflicting interests between individuals that discourage joint action). Some proposed introducing procedures that nudge or even force subjects towards cooperation. Subjects can be nudged by offering monetary or other rewards or by presenting more information about the effects of cooperation.[16]

Another domain where structural solutions have been proposed to help subjects overcome biases in judgment is medicine. Schleger, Oehninger and Reiter-Theil suggest using checklist as a mean to help subjects become aware of biases in medical decision-making and to adjust their judgments accordingly (Schleger et al. 2011). Other means of overcoming biases in the medical domain are crosschecking of diagnoses by multiple doctors. Similar protocols have also been put in place in other domains of medicine.

Protocols that automatically kick in when needed could be put in place to avoid a distrusting reaction towards outsiders or to avoid violent reactions. Considering that distrusting reactions towards outsiders appear to be triggered very easily, avoiding violent reactions seems more manageable.

What could structural solutions that avoid triggers for the dispositions I discussed in Section 3 be like? Dunbar gives us a cue to a solution for the cognitive limitations for altruism. He argues that multiple individuals can be represented as a type. By using types, human minds can keep track of more people. For example, by categorizing individual police officers as "police agent", humans do not need to store individual police officers in their mind but can rely on a type. As a result, humans behave similarly towards police officers (Dunbar 1993). By having people classify more people as various types, education can help humans keep track of more individuals in their mind and increase the scope of altruism.

Another structural solution to prevent out-group hostility could consist of institutions for inter-cultural or inter-group dialogue. Historical examples of institutions to guide inter-group dialogue are the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. Both commission had rather different goals, namely reconciling two or more groups after years of conflict. The institutions I have in mind would be *preventing* inter-group conflict rather than healing or reconciling groups. A preventive institution would need to focus less on forgiveness or healing past trauma and more on discussing and resolving grievances before they escalate. The closest thing in existence that resembles such an institution are the parliaments of Lebanon, India and New

Zealand. In Lebanon, seats are allocated to various religious groups to prevent dominance of one group. In India, a number of seats are allocated to members of the Dalits. The New Zealand parliament reserves a number of seats for members of Maori groups. Since parliaments usually have rather different goals than discussing grievances (i.e., legislating), other kinds of institutions seem preferable. Furthermore given that inter-group conflict usually escalates at a local level, more localized institutions seem preferable.

Discussing how such institutions should be construed in detail lies beyond the scope of this paper. I end with some general reflections on how the institutions can proceed. Because of the high emotional salience of inter-group behavior (as laid bare by Boyer), conversation should be structured in a non-violent, deescalating way.[17] People participating in conversations should also be mindful of the history of interactions and conflicts between all participating groups. Lastly, participants should be aware of the various biases and cognitive limitations that foster inter-group hostility.

6. Conclusions

I argued that evidence for deeply ingrained biases for evil that are hard to overcome do not give us sufficient reason to doubt that moral perfection is impossible. I discussed evidence pointing towards deeply ingrained dispositions to do evil in humans. I also pointed to a number of ways how humans can overcome these limitations.

Showing that humans can overcome these propensities, however, does not suffice to show that humans can achieve moral perfection. Other propensities or biases that lead to evil acts could still be at work, and it is not clear whether the strategies I discussed will help humans in overcoming these. There could also be other (a priori) reasons to doubt the possibility of moral perfection. My arguments do suffice to show that a deeply ingrained propensity for evil need not definitively preclude humans from achieving moral perfection.

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Notes

1 Most of the discussion whether divine omnibenevolence is possible boils down to questions over the logical possibility of moral perfection since God is not bound to a fallible mind or worldly influences like humans are. See for example: (Garcia 2009). Other questions concerning divine omnibenevolence are whether divine omnibenevolence is compatible with a wide prevalence of evil (e.g., Rowe 1979)

2 Achieving moral perfection is not the main goal of Buddhist spiritual practice. The main goal is achieving liberation or enlightenment. Nonetheless, moral transformation appears to be an indispensable part of what Buddhists are striving for.

3 Wolf's main thesis is that moral saintliness puts too high a burden on people (Wolf 1982). I will not be concerned with this debate throughout this paper.

4 See for example: (Conee 1994).

5 I also don't discuss issues concerning chance in human evolution (see for example: Alexander 2020) or criticisms of the core tenets of evolutionary psychology (see for example: Ketelaar and Ellis 2000).

6 See for example: (De Waal 2008; Pinker 2011).

7 The theory comes in two varieties. The first maintains that belief in moralizing gods is a *biological* adaptation (Johnson 2015). On this theory religious belief was selected for when our ancestors lived in the African savannah and transmitted through human genetic material. The second variant maintains that belief in moralizing gods is a *cultural* adaptation. On this theory, belief only began to serve an advantage when our ancestors began living in large-scale communities during the Neolithic revolution. Around that time, groups with belief in moralizing gods outcompeted other groups (Norenzayan 2013).

8 Although some of Boyer's other views have been subject to considerable criticism (e.g.,: Sterelny 2018; Gregory and Greenway 2017), his more recent views on evolutionary explanations for out-group hostility have not so far.

9 See for example: (Tooby and Cosmides 2010).

10 William Swann and others argue that processes of identification with group members can explain why interferences or attacks on group members are often perceived as personal attacks (Swann et al. 2012).

11 A clear example to which Boyer refers are the Nika Riots in Constantinople 532.

[12] Lari Launonen makes a similar argument stating that cognitive limitations might prevent humans from achieving *cognitive perfection* (Launonen forthcoming).

[13] Another possibility that I will not discuss is that humans can overcome evil dispositions by some process of transformation induced by God. Many Christians believe that humans will be transformed by God in the eschaton. This transformation could very easily include a transformation of the mind and its dispositions. For example, Alvin Plantinga argues that (some) human cognitive dispositions can be transformed by the intervention of the Holy Spirit (see: Plantinga 2000). Proposals like these are usually wedded to the idea that moral perfection is impossible for humans without divine help. My arguments, if successful, show that a form of moral perfection can be achieved by humans themselves.

[14] Biologists also allow that mutations can spread as a result of genetic drift or as a by-product of other adaptations.

[15] Some also discussed the possibility or duty to use attention-increasing drugs for pilots or surgeons (see: Kloosterboer and Wieland 2017). The goal is increasing attention to perform certain tasks in a better, more responsible way and not for epistemic or moral purposes.

[16] See (Ostrom 1990) for a discussion of procedures of this kind.

[17] See for example: (Rosenberg 2002).

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Article

God as Highest Truth According to Aquinas

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Abstract: Contemporary public opinion has come to assume that we live in the post-truth era, in which judgments on the most relevant realities of human life have been left in the hands of mere emotions. In such a context, it is very opportune to redirect our gaze toward the concept of truth, in order to help to adequately ground such a primordial reality as that of the personal being. Furthermore, this is the object of the present research, following the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. To this end, we attempt to argue that the primacy in the analogical significance of the truth corresponds precisely to the person, as a subsistent being whose esse is intelligible to himself. Following the analogical ascent, we consequently arrive at God, who is absolutely intelligible to himself. We have to conclude, therefore, that the personal God is the highest truth. As a corollary to this argument, we add that the perfective dynamism of the personal life is realized in an eminent way in the communication of truth through words, also in God.

Keywords: person; truth; God; analogy; intelligible; universal; knowledge; metaphysics; Thomas Aquinas; Thomistic School of Barcelona

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1. Introduction: Wondering about God in a Post-Truth Era

Contemporary public opinion has come to assume that we live in a post-truth era (Ibáñez 2017). A consequence of this is that judgment about the most important realities of human life are left in the hands of mere emotions (Belmonte 2020). Is this post-truth age affecting how we understand the personal being? From the fruitful encounter between faith and reason, Western culture has articulated its worldview of human life based on the concept of person (Martínez 2010). However, nowadays, we talk about "non-human persons" when referring to orangutans, cyborgs, etc.

In such a context, it is opportune to redirect our gaze toward the concept of truth, in order to adequately ground such a primordial reality as that of the personal being. Furthermore, this is the object of the present research.

To this end, we attempt to argue that the primacy in the analogical significance of the truth corresponds precisely to the person, as a subsistent being whose esse is intelligible to himself. Following the analogical ascent, we consequently arrive at God, who is absolutely intelligible to himself. We have to conclude, therefore, that the personal God is the highest truth. As a corollary to this argument, we add that the perfective dynamism of the personal life is realized in an eminent way within the communication of truth through words, also in God.

Following Saint Thomas Aquinas, this thesis has been defended in the Thomistic School of Barcelona mainly by Jaime Bofill and Francisco Canals (Forment 1988, 1998). This position follows the line of interpretation of the Thomism of John Capreolus, Louis Billot, Étienne Gilson or Cornelio Fabro, which identifies the esse as the formal constituent of the person. Different positions are those of Thomas Cajetan or Jacques Maritain, more essentialist, or those of the transcendental Thomism of Johannes Baptist Lotz, which identifies the formal constitutive in consciousness (Contat 2013). In addition, we must refer here to Saint Bonaventure in order to acknowledge another way of ascending to God (Lázaro 2019).

Summarizing what we wish to develop later regarding this issue, Canals (1987, p. 576) states the following:

> Not only in the line of the transcendental good (...) but also in the line of the transcendental truth, we must affirm the primacy of the spiritual subsistent, of the person. Only the person is capable not merely of the language about what things are, but also of being the one to whom one can say what the spirit is originally and constitutively capable of saying (...) We only talk to persons.

2. The Primacy of the Universal in the Intelligible Order

The thesis set out by Canals consists, therefore, of affirming that the person, in his singularity, comes first in the order of transcendental truth. However, we must begin with a considerable objection: it seems that what is true must be said first of the universal and not of the person, which is something singular. This is what we read from Saint Thomas Aquinas (1889, I, q.12, a.8 ad 4) himself:

> The natural desire of the rational creature is to know everything that belongs to the perfection of the intellect, namely, the species and the genera of things and their types, and this everyone who sees the Divine essence will see in God. But to know other singulars, their thoughts and their deeds does not belong to the perfection of the created intellect, nor does its natural desire tend to these things.

Jaime Bofill (1950, p. 231) laments, "an unfortunate interpretation of this passage has led many authors to conceive the intellectual goal in the horizontal level of generalizing abstraction."

Before solving the objection, it seems opportune to know how the primacy of the universal has been established in the order of the intelligible.

Moreover, we consider that the affirmation of the aforesaid primacy is the result of judging as belonging to knowledge, as such that which is only specific to Man's knowledge. Let us see why.

The corporeal condition of the human person necessarily involves limitations that leave his intellect in potency with respect to the intelligible. How then does human intellect reach the actuality of knowing?

We can identify various solutions. Thus, for some, the intelligible is found in the same singular corporeal being, which is then intelligible in itself prior to the act of knowing—now, this is the case in Scotistic and Nominalist entitative intuitionism. By contrast, for others, it is necessary to take the intelligible to the intellect, separating it from the singular corporeal being, with a universal species resulting from this separation; this one would be known either intuitively –from the standpoint of rationalistic and idealistic eidetic intuitionism—or through representation—within Aristotelian–Thomistic conceptualism.

However, it seems as if certain universal agreement has been generalized inasmuch as that intuition is the way that corresponds to the essence of knowing as such, together with a rejection of the concept as representation, thus accusing it of substituting and moving away from reality. Henri Bergson (1946, pp. 145–46), for example, says:

> Here is a point upon which everyone will agree. If senses and consciousness had an unlimited scope, if in the double direction of matter and spirit the power of perceiving was unlimited, there would be no need to conceive nor to reason.

This way the object could be reached in the intelligibility that it would have in itself prior to the act of knowing. We read this, for instance, in Francisco Suárez (1856, III, c.5, n.6):

> And if it is argued that such a specie is required as a "substitute" instead of the "object", this will easily be refuted, because the object, and therefore everything that substitutes it, precedes the act of knowing: then it cannot be produced by it.

This primacy of intuition, which would be the proper way of knowing as such, leads to affirm—except in Nominalism—the primacy of the universal in the order of the intelligible, which, not to depart from reality, is intuitively known. In other words, we once again

encounter the Platonic world of ideas, where "idea" means "what is seen". Canals (1987, p. 136) offers us a succinct relation of these forms of eidetic intuitionism that consecrate the primacy of the universal:

> Hence, the immediatist postulate, which we have seen before functioning in the disintegration of all essence, has also been exerted as a requirement to attribute the character of true reality, and only truly known, that is, intuited, to the contents of the intellect, to the essences and the *ideas* –that is, the realities *seen*–, while recognizing as the most proper *seeing* or *perceiving* the capturing of them. From the *being* contemplated by the Eleatics, and even from the numbers and figures of the Pythagoreans; from the intelligible world constituted by the hierarchy of ideas, *genera* and *species* of the Platonists; even the *clear and distinct ideas* of Cartesianism, and even the *essences* or the *values* grasped through immediate intuition, according to modern Phenomenology; the intuitionist postulate has worked in all these cases to affirm the immediate patency of cognitive contents, universally attainable by every man who has truly achieved knowing.

This brief state of question presents a primacy of the universal in the intelligible order, which goes hand in hand with the primacy of intuition. This way, what is proper to Man's way of knowing due to his corporeal limitation—that is, generalizing abstraction—has ended up being postulated as corresponding to knowing as such. In conclusion, universality has become the formal reason of intelligibility.

3. The Essence of Truth and Reason of Intelligibility

Next, the approach set out above is contrasted with St. Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics of knowledge, in an attempt to determine whether, according to the latter, universality is the formal reason of intelligibility.

First, it is worth recognizing that the aforesaid primacy of intuition, and the universal is explained ultimately by having forgotten that the esse or act of being is act and perfection, as Domingo Báñez (1585, I, q.4, a.1 ad 3) here states:

> And this is what Saint Thomas most frequently claims and what Thomists do not want to hear: that the esse is the actuality of every form or nature and is not found in anything as container and perfectible, but as received and perfective of that in which it is received.

Indeed, that the esse is act and perfection allows us to understand knowing, formally, as a certain esse. This way, whatever belongs to the essence of knowledge as such, including the reason of intelligibility, should also be understood as act and perfection. In contrast, forgetting this fundamental metaphysical principle is what leads us to judge knowledge and intelligibility only from the perspective of potentiality.

We can see this in Saint Thomas Aquinas, identifying in his work the different meanings of "truth", that is, of intelligibility.

The first of these meanings is, precisely, the esse as an act, as the foundation of all truth or intelligibility. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1976, q.1, a.1 in c.) states:

> [Truth is defined] according to that which precedes truth and is the basis of truth. This is why Augustine writes: *The true is which is*.

A second meaning refers to every being that, because it has the form or nature that corresponds to it, it is "true" or intelligible, namely, adequate to be understood (Aquinas 1889, I, q.16, a.2 in c.): "Everything is true according as it has the form proper to its nature". According to this second meaning, it is also said that the intellect—as a knowing being—is true or intelligible inasmuch that it has the form that corresponds to it, which is the species or likeness of the known thing:

> It is necessary [continues the aforementioned text] that the intellect in so far as it is knowing, must be true, so far as it has the likeness of the thing known, this being its form (...)

Finally, according to a third meaning, we refer to "true" as the conformity between the known form and the thing to which it is similar:

> (. . .) as knowing [continues the same text]. For this reason, truth is defined by the conformity of intellect and thing and hence to know this conformity is to know truth (. . .) yet it does not apprehend it by knowing of a thing *what a thing is*. When, however, it judges that a thing corresponds to the form, which it apprehends about that thing, then first it knows and expresses truth.

This third meaning is what is signified by the definitions given by Aquinas (1976, q.1, a.1 in c.), quoting Saint Hilary and Saint Augustine; that is, truth as a manifestation of the esse:

> In a third way, what is true is defined as the effect that follows, and Hilary defines it thus, saying that *what is true is what manifests and declares the esse* and Augustine, in the book *De Vera Religione*, says that *the truth is that through which what is, is revealed*.

Therefore, the most proper meaning of "truth" is given in saying what a thing is and not in the apprehension of the species.

Assuming these distinctions of the different meanings of "truth" in Aquinas, we can now ask ourselves about the reason of the intelligibility of the being—adequate to be understood—as well as that of the species in the intellect—adequate to be known in its conformity with the thing. Furthermore, the answer lies in the first meaning of "truth": the esse in act. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1889, I, q.16, a.1 ad 3) says:

> In the same way, the *esse* of the thing, not its truth, is the cause of truth in the intellect. Hence, the Philosopher says that a thought or a word is true *from the fact that a thing is, not because a thing is true*.

Furthermore, there is no universal subsistent, and we must deny that the formal reason of the intelligibility of the being is universality, not the actuality of the esse. For this reason, the unintelligible corresponds to the potential; hence, as the most potential thing is matter, that is why human intellect must abstract from the material to be able to know, resulting then the universal in prædicando. Then, the reason of intelligibility is not in the universality but in the immateriality proper to the actual:

> The universal [Canals (1987, p. 573) states], precisely because it is what can be said regarding many subjects, and for that reason something that in itself, in its direct intelligibility, does not properly exist nor is apt to exist, is not intelligible because of its universality, but only because of its immateriality.

Ergo, it should not be said that something is unintelligible due to its singularity, but as it has been stated, due to its materiality. Notice this important thesis regarding the reason of the intelligibility of the being in the following two remarkable texts from Aquinas (1996, q.un., a.2 ad 5; 1889, I, q.56, a.1 ad 2):

> *The first text:* The human soul is a certain individuated form; and equally its potency, which we call possible intellect, and the forms understood in act; for something is understood in act because it is immaterial, and not because it is universal; but rather the universal has to be intelligible because it is abstracted from the individuating material principles. However, it is evident that separate substances are intelligible in act, and yet are certain individuals.

> *And the second text:* Of the singulars that exist in bodily things, there is no intellection in us, not because of singularity, but because of matter, which is the principle of their individuation. Therefore, if there are some singular subsistents without matter, such as angels, nothing prevents them from being intelligible in act.

4. The Analogical Ascent to God, Highest Truth

In consonance with the previous two texts, "the separated substances are intelligible in act, and yet are certain individuals", and "as far as singular subsistents without matter

is concerned, such as angels, nothing prevents them from being intelligible in act". These statements lead us to the central point of this thesis.

According to the conclusion we have reached regarding the reason of intelligibility, we can state that angels are intelligible in act because of the actuality of their esse, excluding all potential materiality. Thus, it is because of this immateriality that they can return to their own essence and know themselves in the actuality of their singular esse (Echavarría 2013). Aquinas (2000, q.un., a.1 ad 12) says, with remarkable audacity:

> If an ark could be subsistent by itself without matter, it would understand itself, because the immunity from matter is the essential reason of intellectuality.

In a sense, this singular can be said to be universal, but in causando, not in prædicando, inasmuch as a being is more universal in its causality as it is more of an act (Aquinas 1971, pr.): "The separated substances are universal and the first causes of esse." That is why God, Pure Act, is the universal uncaused Cause.

However, this intelligibility must also be said of human intellect, given its immateriality, although it is less than that of angels and much less than that of God. Therefore, St. Aquinas (1889, I, q.86, a.1 ad 3) states, "if there be an immaterial singular such as the intellect, there is no reason why it should not be intelligible." Of course, the corporeal condition of the human person implies that his intellect is in potency to know—and to know itself—having to pass to the act of understanding through the abstraction carried out by the active intellect, which is nothing but the same intelligible light of the subsistent soul itself. Canals (1987, p. 575) explains this in the following manner:

> If intelligibility is constituted by immateriality and not by universality, that is, the universal is intelligible because it is immaterial, it is understood that St. Thomas can attribute the character of intelligibility to the spiritual and existing singular, despite the contingency, facticity and temporality, which characterizes all spiritual realities, as it is immediately experienced by human consciousness.

Therefore, if we propose a proportional gradation of intelligible realities, we must say that the most intelligible is the most actual and immaterial, namely the singular intellectual subsistent. Below this, and because of the dependence of matter, the intelligible is in a situation of potentiality; it only becomes intelligible in act in the same knowing of the intelligent precisely thanks to the actuality of its esse. In fact, there is no truth if there is no intellect. Referring this to God, Aquinas (1889, I, q.16, a.7 in c.) states: "If there were no eternal intellect, there would be no eternal truth either".

Now, every intellectual subsistent that knows and loves itself in its own esse and makes the intelligible in act has received since ancient times a name of singular dignity, which is that of "person". Aquinas (1889, I, q.29, a.1 in c.) says:

> Particular and individual find themselves in a much more specific and perfect way in rational substances, which dominate their acts, being not only moved, like others, but also acting by themselves. Actions are in singulars. Thus, among all substances, singular substances of a rational nature have a special name. This name is *person*.

Thus, it must be recognized that the person is a good beloved in himself with a love of friendship. Indeed, humankind is not loved; rather, Peter or John are. Therefore, the personal being occupies the primacy in the analogical scale of the good.

In addition, the person is intelligible to himself by the subsistent actuality of his esse, on which it depends that the intelligible in potency is made intelligible in act. Then, the intellectual subsistent also possesses primacy in the analogical scale of what is true:

> This thesis [concludes Canals (1987, p. 576)] leads us to conceive the truth, the immaterial perfectivity of the being, as an *esse* in act, a perfection and ontological plenitude, of which immaterial subsistents or personal beings fully participate. Personal beings possess the truth in a different and more perfect way than that in which beings that are outside the order of the immaterial and intellectual, of the

> intelligible order, possess it, and are only intelligible in potency by extrinsic and objective intelligibility.
>
> However, God is called "person" in the highest degree (Aquinas 1889, q.29, a.3 in c.):
>
> Person means what is most perfect in all nature, that is, the subsistent in rational nature. Therefore, since everything than belong to perfection must be attributed to God, because his essence contains in itself all perfection, it is fitting that God should be given the name person. However, not in the same sense in which it is given to creatures, but in a more sublime way.

Furthermore, this must be affirmed in the natural light of reason by means of analogical ascent (Roszak 2017). Even assuming that God reveals himself; therefore, revelation is a rational operation. For this reason, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1889, I, q.2, a.3 s.c.) refers to the person of God—ex persona Dei—when he deals with the revelation of the divine name at Sinai: "Against this is what is said in Exodus 3:14 of the person of God: *I am who I am*" (Roszak 2015).

To sum up, the intelligibility for itself, proper to the intellectual subsistent, must be said eminently to refer to the personal God, who is therefore the supreme intelligible truth to himself.

5. The Communication of Personal Truth

Let us conclude with a corollary. We must recognize in the actuality of the esse an inclination to communicate its own perfection (Aquinas 1965, q.2, a.1 in c.): "The nature of any act consists of communicating itself as much as possible. From which it derives that each agent acts insofar as it is in act". Therefore, it is inferred that the personal being, aware of itself by the actuality of its subsistent esse, tends to be communicative and manifestative of what it is; and the means for doing so is no other than the true word that says what is known (Martínez 2013).

Moreover, only the personal being is likewise the recipient of that true word, the one to whom another can speak:

> Only the person is capable [Canals (1987, p. 576) states] not merely of language about what it is, but also of being the one *to whom* one can say what the spirit is originally and constitutively capable of saying. All language with intelligible meaning, all vital communication at the level of personal spirit, in the line of knowledge of reality as such, and in the line of moral action, or interpersonal social coexistence, as well as in the line of rational efficiency or technical performance is, of itself, exclusively destined to be received, consciously and intelligibly, by personal beings. We only talk to persons, in the theoretical or moral order, in the normative order of political life, in the regulative or evaluative order of a rational efficiency.

This way, and in the face of the disintegrating post-truth of human life, we need to state that the perfective dynamism of the human person occurs in the communication of truth through word. Moreover, it is thanks to this that friendship is possible; indeed, the affective union between friends is only understood in the light of a real union, rooted in the communicative word of one's own personal life (Cortés 2016; Martínez 2012). Referring to truth as the foundations of such a recognition of the dignity of the personal being, Jaime Bofill (1950, p. 165) states:

> Therefore, loneliness is definitively overcome, as our aspirations to be understood, appreciated, loved, as well as those of an opposite direction, are equally satisfied, to pour into others the fullness of our heart in peaceful confidence. Through them, Man is situated in his true environment, namely the family and society, and occupies his place in the Universe. The measure of this perfection and of the corresponding joy will become visible for us by the consideration of what it means: the enrichment of a Person through what is most valuable in the entire Universe, namely another Person, to surrender oneself not in some of its aspects

> or goods, more or less external, but by introducing us into the intimacy of his life and being.

Beforehand, it has been stated that divine revelation is an operation proper to a personal Being (Roszak 2016). Therefore, since the fullness of revelation is given in the Incarnation of the divine Word, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1972, c.15, lect.3; Martínez 2015) explains that friendship with Christ consists in entering into communion through the communication of Truth, which is his own Person:

> Here he places the true sign of friendship on his part, which is *what I heard from my Father, I let you know*. Indeed, the true sign of friendship is that a friend reveals the secrets of the heart to his friend. Indeed, because the hearts of friends are one single heart and one single soul, it does not seem that a friend places outside of his heart what he reveals to his friend (...) For God, making us sharers of his wisdom, reveals to us his secrets: *communicating to the holy souls through the nations constituted friends of God and prophets*.

Accordingly, we can quote here what Pope Benedict XVI (2009, p. 642) concisely expressed at the beginning of his encyclical Caritas in veritate: "In Christ, *charity in truth* becomes the Face of his Person, a vocation to love our brothers in the truth of his plan. Indeed, he himself is the Truth".

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Comment

Tutuism and the Moral Universe. Comment on Gasser (2021). Animal Suffering, God and Lessons from the Book of Job. *Religions* 12: 1047

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Abstract: Georg Gasser has recently attempted a new explanation to the problem of animal suffering, i.e., how can a morally perfect, omniscient, and omnipotent God allow the gratuitous suffering of animals? His argument can be interpreted in two ways: (i) creation is amoral and therefore there is no problem of animal suffering; (ii) God's morality is beyond us and not responsive to humans. In both cases, the problem of animal suffering is, according to Gasser, explained. Grounded on the thought of Desmond Tutu, I contend, however, that both (i) and (ii) imply that God would be immoral, which is an unacceptable implication for Christians. Therefore, Gasser's explanation fails to solve the problem of suffering. Further, I uphold that if God exists He is necessarily a moral agent and if one wishes to give up such property, then also needs to give up His omnipotence. On top of this, I challenge the idea that there is a naturalistic fallacy in holding a Tutuist conception of God.

Keywords: the problem of evil; African Philosophy of Religion; Desmond Tutu; animal suffering; naturalistic fallacy; amorality; concepts of God; Georg Gasser; gratuitous evil; moral status

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1. Introduction

In a recent article in *Religions*, Georg Gasser (Gasser 2021) attempts a new explanation of the problem of animal suffering: how can a morally perfect, omniscient, and omnipotent God allow the gratuitous suffering of animals? This is a challenge to God's existence because a God with such characteristics would presumably not allow such gratuitous suffering. Gasser's answer is slightly ambiguous, and it can have two possible interpretations: (i) animal suffering does not challenge the existence of God because creation is amoral and He does not rule the universe according to moral laws; alternatively, Gasser may be arguing that (ii) the moral laws of God are non-humancentric and thereby not only are not responsive to humans but also beyond human understanding. Hence, animal suffering does have a moral justification but just not one that humans expect or can understand. I believe that Gasser argues for (i), but because there are elements in his text that suggest (ii), I will address both in this comment to his article. Inspired by the thought of Desmond Tutu, I contend that both (i) and (ii) would imply that God is immoral rather than amoral. More precisely, God's failure to stop evil He is able to stop at a low cost is immoral because it violates social harmony and, thereby, neglects the moral status of some of His creation. Additionally, I contend that Gasser's argument removes the possibility of attributing moral blame or praise to human action, which is not only a questionable moral implication but also an idea at odds with Christian values. As this is an unacceptable implication for Christians, I argue that Gasser's theory fails to solve the problem of animal suffering. Further, I contend that these criticisms I raise do not fall in the naturalistic fallacy.

As a starting point, I treat the problem of evil as fundamentally a moral question (Sterba 2019); further, I share the intuition of philosophers like Eleonor Stump and Marilyn McCord Adams, that to be sound, a theodicy needs to be grounded in Christian values (Adams 2000; Stump 1985). Note also that my goal is not to challenge the existence of God

as I do not carry out an extensive analysis of different theodicies, but simply to challenge Gasser's argument.

2. Creation as Amoral

The first possible interpretation of Gasser's argument is that animal suffering can be explained if God is conceived of in less personalistic terms. Gasser suggests a God inspired by Classical Theism, where God is a non-personal being. Thus, God is primarily the creator and sustainer of everything. So, for Gasser, God is not a guarantor of moral rules and there are no moral principles in creation. In Gasser's words: 'God directly [is] a sublime power in nature who does not rule the world in accordance with a moral order.' (Gasser 2021, p. 10). Thus, if creation is amoral because God is not concerned about morality, then animal suffering is to be understood as a mere fact of creation without needing further moral explanations for why it occurs. Gasser thereby concludes that 'the idea is that creation is not ordered according to any principles of justice and therefore it makes no sense to demand them' (Gasser 2021, p. 11).

Inspired by the thought of Tutu, I wish to show that Gasser's argument would lead to an implication that Gasser and most Christians are not willing to accept; that is, if it is true that evil occurs gratuitously and God is able to stop it, but because He does nothing, God is not simply amoral as Gasser suggests. Instead, if this were the case, God would be *immoral*. To understand this, it is important to start by pointing out that for Tutu, we live in a moral universe with a personalistic God. Indeed, he states that 'This is a moral universe (. . .) God is a God who cares about right and wrong. God cares about justice and injustice' (Tutu 2011, pp. 2–3).

During Apartheid, Tutu wrote to P. W. Botha (who was President of South Africa at the time) telling him that the anti-Apartheid activists have already won because they were on the side of justice and God will ultimately bring fairness to the world (Tutu 1988). Underlying this idea that the world is moral is also a Tutuist moral theory. From a Tutuist perspective, the highest good is the promotion of social harmony: 'Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the summum bonum—the greatest good'(Tutu 2000, p. 35). This is an endorsement of the Afro-communitarian idea of Ubuntu, a concept that means 'I am because you are and prescribes engaging in socially harmonious/positive communal relationships'.

Tutu's quote is often interpreted as implying the idea that individuals ought to act in ways that promote the goods of others and, particularly, their welfare and virtue (Metz 2007). The prescription implies some duties. Individuals are under a duty to promote the welfare and virtue of others, to the extent that it is reasonable, and it does not bring them great cost. Moreover, if one is somehow responsible for other individuals' goodness, refraining from aiding others may be a violation of the prescribed ethic (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2021). For example, if I have a duty to take care of my children, refraining from promoting their welfare and virtue means that I fail to fulfill my duties. Let us say that I refrain from taking my children to school, then I am violating a duty to promote their well-being. In the African philosophical context, this duty to promote everyone's well-being and virtue is something that all individuals are understood to have; but this universal rule does not have to be accepted for the purpose of this comment. Instead, it is sufficient to accept that individuals have *special duties towards significant others* (Molefe 2016). Parents, in particular, are in a unique relationship with their children and thereby may be the only ones realistically in a position to promote their welfare and virtue.

Why do we have duties towards some beings? Tutu's own work has little to offer about normative ethics. He routinely uses the concept of 'human dignity' to explain what is morally wrong with the Apartheid and racism (Tutu 2000, 2011; Tutu and Allen 2011; Allen 2012). Nonetheless, he not only never defines the concept, but the question at stake here is regarding non-human animal suffering, a topic which Tutu himself does not address. Fortunately, several Tutuists have developed a Tutuist-inspired concept of moral status that can bring light to this question. Grounded on Tutu's idea that social harmony is the highest

good, some Tutuist philosophers have argued that what makes beings morally worthy is the fact that they can either be the object or subject of communion. That is, their capacity to either engage in social harmony or be a recipient of social harmony is what makes individuals deserve moral consideration (Metz 2012; Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Ewuoso 2021). Taking this on board, the most fundamental moral wrong involved in neglecting the welfare and virtue of animals is to fail to provide them what they are entitled to in virtue of their moral status (Metz 2017). A violation of dignity (human or not) is precisely a failure to treat individuals as they deserve (Metz 2010).[1]

According to this Tutuist understanding of the world, if Gasser were right that God does not rule the world according to moral rules, then God is not simply being amoral, He is being immoral. For if the ethic prescribes that we are duty-bound to promote the welfare and virtue of others (especially significant others) when it is reasonable to do so, then a God who watches His creation suffer gratuitously without doing anything is like a father who neglects to take care of the welfare of his children. In virtue of their moral status, animals are at the very minimum entitled to not be placed in situations where they suffer gratuitously. For example, imagine an animal unknowingly drinks a poison I placed in front of him, and I happen to have the antidote in my pocket. I can easily stop him from taking it or give him the antidote, but I just stand still watching the animal slowly dying. My action is wrong in at least two ways. I am guilty of misplacing the poison and should take responsibility; even if I were not guilty of it, it would be easy for me to stop it and I did not. In both cases, it is clearly wrong for me to neglect the welfare of the animal. The most fundamental reason underlying it is that in both cases I neglect that the animal has sufficient moral value to require any intervention and, thereby, neglect my duty towards the animal. God, in the face of a situation which is not costly for Him and that He created, is duty-bound to address that evil, otherwise He is immoral. Just like I could have avoided the suffering of the animal, so can God avoid gratuitous suffering and, to the extent that He does not, then He is being immoral. The question becomes more pressing if I have special duties towards the suffering being. Note that God as the creator is also the father of all existing beings and therefore has stronger duties towards them. In other words, if God just watches an animal (which is His creation) suffering gratuitously when He could avoid it at a low cost, then He is disrespecting the moral status of this animal; God owes respect to the animal due to the animal's moral status and has a special duty to honor this mora status because He is the father.

Gasser could object that this Tutuist theory does not have universal appeal and I need to make a stronger point with an example that is convincing not just to Tutuists but also other ethicists. Hence, to understand the generally shared moral intuition underlying my argument, take another thought experiment which I contend to have wide appeal to individuals who hold different ethical views. Peter Singer imagined a situation where a child has fallen into a pond and is drowning. Someone passes by and sees that it would be fairly easy to pull the child out and the only cost to this person would be turning up late to work. In such a situation, most would agree that there is an obligation to rescue the child because it is relatively easy to do this at a low cost without a significant burden (Singer 2015). Singer is a utilitarian, and he uses this argument to ground some utilitarian arguments about aid. Nonetheless, the core point of Singer by formulating this thought experiment is not to show that utilitarianism is true. Instead, his goal is to show that there is something *most of us* immediately recognize as morally wrong when confronted with this example. Not aiding the child when the cost is so low is intuitively morally wrong, independently of one being a deontologist or a utilitarian. The point I wish to make therefore is independent of what moral theory one prefers: without regard to whether one holds Tutuist ethics or a consequentialist perspective like Singer, one recognizes that the action is morally wrong.

In Gasser's theory, God's actions are analogous to the one of the person who lets the child die. Given that God is omnipotent, it does not seem that God would endure great costs in avoiding animal suffering and it is Gasser's burden to prove otherwise. Note that

the point here is not that the existence of animal suffering in itself poses a challenge to God's existence. The problem is that Gasser accepts it as *gratuitous*. In other theodicies and defenses where animal suffering is explained as not gratuitous, but rather as instrumental for a greater good, this problem is not posed (although other complications may come up) (Murray 2008; Swinburne 1998; Dougherty 2014). Gasser may object that this problem does not apply to his theory because he is referring only to the natural (animal) world and to natural evil. Nonetheless, if this is the case, his account cannot explain why some animals suffer at the hands of humans and animals who are capable of moral agency (e.g., great apes).

Gasser could object to my argument that I missed the most fundamental point that he is making; namely, he could be contending that what he has demonstrated is that addressing the problem of evil using moral tools falls in the naturalistic fallacy. The term 'naturalistic fallacy' was coined by George Edward Moore, but most scholars track the problem back to David Hume (Frankena 1939; Ridge 2019). The supposed fallacy is to mistakenly infer a moral proposition from a proposition about nature. An example of such a fallacy could be if someone contends that smoking is unhealthy and from this premise concludes that one ought not to smoke.[2] However, the premise about the natural fact of health is insufficient to conclude how one ought to act. In fact, there are many things which are unhealthy, but that does not imply they are immoral (like eating white bread). As Moore pointed out, conclusions about value require at least one evaluative premise rather than factual premises regarding the naturalistic features of things. Put differently, moral claims can only be inferred from moral premises or a combination of moral premises with other premises. A syllogism that contains only premises about nature and not morality cannot validly lead to a moral claim (Moore 2012). Moore's thesis, if true, does, indeed, pose a problem to Christian ethics because Christian ethics is routinely grounded on metaphysical questions. If the theory were true, then what God is like, how God is related to the world, what He did, what Jesus was like, and so forth seems to entail nothing regarding morality. According to the naturalistic fallacy argument, there is no single value judgement entailed by these (Miller 2018; Stearns 1972).

Nonetheless, I reject that this objection can challenge my argument. As W.K. Frankena and Bernard Williams pointed out, even if one assumes that there is some kind of fallacy in the kind of reasoning that Moore is criticizing, it seems that Moore is being uncharitable towards most of his opponents (Frankena 1939; Williams 2011). The principle of charity requires that one's statements are understood in the most reasonable or rational way possible (Blackburn 2008; Quine 2013). Hence, when someone is stating, say, 'X is pleasant, therefore X is good' the most charitable interpretation of this is that this is an enthymeme where there is a suppressed premise 'whatever is pleasant is good' (Ridge 2019). Moore is guilty of uncharitably neglecting that there is a hidden premise (Frankena 1939; Williams 2011). To show that I do not fall into a naturalistic fallacy, I wish to make explicit the chain of reasoning that led to my criticism. The detailed reasoning of the current criticism is as follows:

Syllogism 1

- Social harmony is the highest moral good. (p)
- Moral status is given in virtue of the capacity for engaging in social harmony either as a subject or an object. (p)
- Morality prescribes (especially towards significant others) that one acts according to moral goods and that being's moral status is respected. (p)
- Therefore, morality prescribes one acts in socially harmonious ways and respects beings' moral status (especially that of significant others). (c)

Syllogism 2

- To respect a being's moral status means to treat them with social harmony. (p)
- Social Harmony is defined as the combination of solidarity and identification. (p)
- Solidarity requires one to avoid evil and aid others when this is not unreasonably costly to do so. (p)

- Therefore, one ought to avoid evil and aid others when this is not unreasonably costly. (c)

Syllogism 3

- God does not avoid evils or aid others that He can reasonably avoid or aid those He can easily aid. (p)
- Those who allow evils that can be reasonably avoided or who do not aid those they can easily aid are acting immorally. (p)
- God is acting immorally. (c)

None of the premises above derives a moral proposition or a moral property from a natural proposition. Instead, it looks at the situation and infers that there is an immoral act. The inference from a specific situation is not a 'naturalistic fallacy'. The naturalistic fallacy is not that one cannot apply ethical principles to real circumstances (Feldman 2018). Instead, it is that conclusions about value are inferred from premises about nature (rather than value statements).

Gasser could further challenge my contention on two grounds. Firstly, Gasser could object that I am assuming God is a moral agent when the question being discussed is whether He really is a moral agent or not. In other words, I am committing a *petitio principii* fallacy as I am assuming to be true without warrant what is to be proved, i.e., that God is a moral agent. Secondly, Gasser can challenge my argument by contending that moral realism is false, and it is not verifiable. Following an Ayerian line of thought, Gasser can uphold that there is nothing out there like 'moral facts' which can be observed. According to this view, only those things that are empirically verifiable can be proved to be true. Nevertheless, there is no such thing in the world that corresponds to a 'moral fact' (Ayer and Rogers 2001). Given that my theory seems to assume that there are moral facts out there, then my theory is false. Having into consideration that this moral view of the world is incoherent, then the best alternative would be to uphold an amoral perspective of nature as Gasser does.)

To answer the first objection, it is important to clarify what to be a moral agent means. To be a moral agent is to *have the capacity* to discern right from wrong and thereby to be held accountable for one's actions (Haksar 2016). Is God a moral agent? He is *necessarily* so. If He is omnipotent, He must be a moral agent as if he were not, this would imply that he is not capable of understanding right and wrong and this is a contradiction in terms. Put differently, the concept of 'omnipotence' necessarily entails that one *is capable of exercising moral agency*. The same cannot be affirmed for immorality and amorality. These refer to the *absence of a capability* to be moral or to a situation where morality is not a relevant factor (e.g., whether to drink jasmin or green tea) (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2021). Thus, unless Gasser is willing to give up omnipotence, he cannot contend that God is not a moral agent.

Regarding the second objection, the first reply is that if this strong verificationist theory were true, this would render most universal propositions false. For example, this would mean that propositions such as 'all flamingos are pink' or 'all men are mortal' are false because there is no possible way to verify all the cases. Due to the fact that this theory is too demanding, generally speaking, philosophers consider today that it should be abandoned (Swinburne 2016). Instead, a better approach is to find theories that have a strong explanatory power. Moreover, the fact that we have imperfect knowledge of moral facts does not stand as an argument against moral realism. Natural sciences also revise their arguments and have imperfect knowledge and routinely revise their theories according to new paradigms (Kuhn 2012). We do not conclude from this that there are no natural facts and there is no reason to infer differently regarding moral facts.

3. Non-Anthropocentric Moral Principles

A second possible interpretation of Gasser's argument is that it is not that the world is amoral but that divine and human moral principles are distinct. This interpretation is suggested in the following passages:

> If God is in no way dependent on the world and cannot be influenced by it, the moral standards obvious to us are hardly applicable to God. Since the problem of evil lives from these standards, evils in the world no longer count as direct counter-evidence to God's existence as it might be the case that our moral concerns are in no way God's concerns. (Gasser 2021, p. 7)

And:

> God is responsive to values, but these values may not make an exclusive reference to us. (Gasser 2021, p. 12)

According to this view, creation is moral but not human-driven. So, according to this interpretation, it is not that God is amoral like in the previous case. Instead, His moral code is different and not responsive to humans; thereby He cannot be judged by such standards. In this second interpretation, Gasser is not concerned about the naturalistic fallacy given that he himself seems to admit that God is the ultimate source of morality, which is precisely the kind of problem that proponents of the naturalistic fallacy are at odds with.

The first problem with this view is that it collapses into one of the interpretations of the Book of Job that Gasser finds incomplete and unconvincing. If the view that moral standards do not apply to God is true, in the face of such horrendous injustices as Job seems to suffer, we can only conclude that God's moral rules are beyond human understanding and that Job should simply accept his destiny and humbly submit to God in the face of His greatness. But if there is an inscrutable moral code for humans, then this has several negative implications which seem not only to be at odds with Christian morality but also to be morally questionable more generally. If this theory were true, this would mean that humans can never be held accountable for moral wrongs. Just like a baby who cannot understand what is right and wrong and should not be held morally responsible for her actions, humans likewise should not, in this view, be held responsible for not following a rule which is impossible to understand: their relationship to God's moral code is analogous to the one of babies vis à vis the moral code of adults.

Gasser may reply that there is a human moral code given by God which humans should humbly follow, and therefore they should be held accountable for not following it even if they do not understand it. Nonetheless, the existence of a general moral code which is simply repeated rather than understood brings further problems. No general moral code can be of any use for particular situations unless it is understood and, thereby, applied in particular cases. In fact, a salient Christian idea is that the Bible needs to be understood as a whole so that its values are honoured. According to this view, without such understanding, it is not possible to find moral guidance in the Bible (Augustine 2008).

Furthermore, it seems that a necessary requirement for one to be a moral person is that one understands and, thereby, can reasonably predict the consequences of one's actions. Without knowing these, one's actions are simply random acts or repeated meaningless forms of behaviour (Swinburne 1998). There is little or nothing praiseworthy about a robot mechanically repeating an action (e.g., a traffic sign changing colours to regulate the traffic). What is praiseworthy is that a certain person knows she is doing something that can achieve a greater good or that honours a certain value. Even if there is some value in repeating a morally right action, it is surely better to do something understanding it is morally right than to simply blindly and mechanically do it. Again, this coheres with the salient Augustinian Christian tradition of thought where moral actions are better if they are understood (Augustine 2012).

More intriguingly, if God does not provide an understandable moral code for humans, then He would be acting immorally. As explained in the previous section, under Tutuist ethics, everyone (including God) is duty-bound to help individuals acquire virtue. But an omnipotent being not creating an understandable moral code means basically to create/allow unnecessary confusion amongst humans who will misunderstand His moral code and, thereby, cause evil. If this were true, then God would be responsible for the moral evils in the world because He had provided misleading guidance to humans. For example,

in a war situation, a general may be responsible for a war crime committed by her soldiers if she has deliberately misled them to believe, say, that innocent civilians were soldiers and this led her soldiers to kill innocents. To put it in a syllogism:

- Social harmony requires one to help others to act morally if costs to oneself are not unreasonable. (p)
- When one fails to aid others to be morally better or causes others to be worse, one is acting immorally. (p)
- There are occasions where God both fails to aid individuals and leads individuals to act immorally. (p)
- Therefore, God is immoral. (c)

Note that the point is not that God should reveal Himself. As Swinburne suggests, there may be plausible reasons for God to not be obviously present as a stimulation for humans to do good (Swinburne 1998, 2016). Instead, the point is that if it is impossible for humans to know God, then Him not revealing moral norms cannot be explained as a method for stimulating humans to do good, but as undermining the possibility of doing good.

4. Conclusions

In this piece, I evaluated Gasser's argument for the problem of animal suffering considering Tutu's thought. I argued that Gasser's view has unacceptable implications for Christian doctrine, i.e., that God is immoral. Hence, Gasser's theory, if one starts from a Christian viewpoint, cannot be true. Moreover, I argued that Gasser's views also imply that humans can neither be praised nor blamed for their moral choices and actions. Finally, I contended that holding this moral perspective about God does not imply the naturalistic fallacy. Nonetheless, this does not disprove the existence of God because not only are there other theodicies which do not face the same problem, but also there are other concepts of God outside Christianity that do not understand God as morally perfect. Further research should explore a Tutuist explanation of the problem of animal suffering.

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Notes

[1] Note that neither Tutu nor Metz seem to attribute dignity to humans. Hence, using the concept of moral status is much more helpful and consensual when referring to normative questions about animals.

[2] There are at least two more interpretations of the naturalistic fallacy, but I do not address them here as they are irrelevantr for the current discussion. See Feldman (2018).

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Reply

Reply to Cordeiro-Rodrigues (2022). Tutuism and the Moral Universe. Comment on "Gasser (2021). Animal Suffering, God and Lessons from the Book of Job. *Religions* 12: 1047"

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Abstract: In this reply, I aim to clarify my ideas presented in a recent paper and to address criticisms that have been raised by Luis Cordeiro-Rodrigues regarding my interpretation of (animal) suffering and God.

Keywords: Book of Job; God and the moral order; human suffering; the problem of evil

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1. Introduction

Critical objections are a welcome means of removing ambiguities or clarifying implicit assumptions. For this reason, I am very grateful that Luis Cordeiro-Rodrigues has written a reply to my paper "Animal Suffering, God and Lessons from the Book of Job" (Gasser 2021). This gives me the opportunity to rethink this topic again and try to present it in a more precise manner. First, I present a brief sketch of my account. Then I address two points of criticism that seem to be based on misunderstandings.

2. The Account Proposed

Central to the problem of evil is the presupposition that God is a morally perfect being. The core of the discussion works with the following principles:

(a) A morally perfect being eliminates evil as far as it is possible.
(b) Within the realm of logical possibilities, an omnipotent being has no limits of agency.

With these two principles at hand, one can argue that we should expect that a morally perfect and omnipotent being will eliminate all evils unless it is impossible to do so. Since there are many evils in the world that we are certain it is logically possible to avoid or eliminate, we have very strong evidence that such a being does not exist.

Advocates of theism have mainly responded to this challenge by pointing out that there might exist possible higher goods (e.g., freedom of will, character building, union with God, etc.), which can only be achieved by allowing evils in the world. As a consequence, God is morally justified in permitting these evils as they are necessary and indispensable instruments for bringing about higher goods. Once this instrumental relation between evils and higher goods is not exclusively reserved for human beings but applied to creation in general, then also the suffering of animals can be explained in a similar fashion. Trent Dougherty, for example, develops an expanded soul-making theodicy for animals: Accordingly, God, by being in a caring and loving relationship with all of creation, will enfold the suffering of any creature in a greater good that organically defeats this evil. The most likely way to do this is through some future process of soul-making which requires animal resurrection and deification in the eschaton (Dougherty 2014, pp. 145–46).

In a recent paper (Gasser 2021), I argue that this understanding of God is couched in overly personalistic terms. God is imagined similar to a human person and judged accordingly with the moral standards appropriate for human agents. Without doubt, there is this tradition of a personal conception of God; however, it should not be ignored that

there is also another powerful tradition, namely that of so-called classical theism, in which personal attributes of God are of secondary importance. This is so because God as creator is not a part of the created world, and therefore God cannot belong to the moral community as humans do. A main problem of the problem of evil is the anthropomorphic understanding that the human–human relationship is the template for all kinds of relationships, including the divine–human one.

Once this view is rejected, the problem of evil changes as the central moral assumptions regarding God ought to be revised. We cannot apply our moral categories to God as these categories belong to the created but not to the transcendent order of being. The idea I am proposing is that God is interested in its creation, but the essential values that shape the divine view are to be explicated less in terms of moral categories than in terms of non-moral goods such as complexity, fecundity, creativity, adaptability, or the will to live. To put it more pointedly, humans might be less central to God's overall creational purposes than personalistic interpretations of a theistic God generally presuppose. Such a view may seem odd at first glance, but—according to my argumentation, which draws also upon exegetical interpretations such as those of Carol A. Newsom (Newsom 2003) and Steven Chase (Chase 2013)—the divine speeches in the Book of Job can be understood in precisely this way: God teaches Job to expand his focus by opening up the narrow circle of human-oriented moral questions toward the astonishing and mysterious sublimity of natural and cosmic processes where moral categories are non-applicable.

3. Two Perspectives

At this point, it is important to emphasize that I do not defend an ananthropocentric view, that is, the view that humans are completely irrelevant to the divine purpose and do not matter to God at all (Mulgan 2019). Rather, humans are one aspect of God's perspective on creation among those others. We are one but not the only essential part of the creational picture. Accordingly, the divine perspective is related to creation in a twofold way: One perspective understands the human being as a part of the larger universe in which moral categories have no direct point of reference. The other perspective, however, is related to the individual human being as a direct addressee of God as the divine speeches in the book of Job illustrate and, thus, also involves the moral order intrinsically connected to the human life-form.

Both perspectives are separated by the moral sphere as it distinguishes the human and the non-human realm: Responsibility, justice, empathy, or orientation toward moral values are essential coordinates of the human world. These features constitute the human life-form in the first place. When it comes to the world of other living beings or the non-living dimensions of creation, however, these features have no essential role to play. Most scientists consider animals to be a-moral because they lack the cognitive capacities required for (full) moral agency (see, for instance, Tomasello 2019). Accordingly, we do not blame a predator for killing a pray because hunting and killing animals is a central feature of a predator's life-form, but moral understanding is not.

In the light of this understanding, the divine speeches in the Book of Job highlight both perspectives and the tension that comes with them. Newsom writes: "What Job has just heard in the divine speeches, however, is a devastating undermining of his understanding of the unproblematic moral continuity between himself, the world, and God. It is a profound loss of unity, a recognition of the deeply fractured nature of reality" (Newsom 2003, p. 253).

There is not one perspective from which the world is grasped as unified and well-ordered but a holistic and an individual perspective, each of which is shaped by different normative schemes. To a structurally similar conclusion comes philosopher Wes Morriston: "The Hassidic teacher, Rabbi Bunam, said that 'A man should carry two stones in his pocket. On one should be inscribed, "I am just dust and ashes". On the other, "For my sake was the world created". And he should use each stone as he needs it.' The experience of the whirlwind has taught Job to use the first stone. But what we need, and what the

book of Job tries, with only partial success, to teach us, is how to use them both together" (Morriston 1996, p. 356).

Both Newsom and Morriston point out that the tension in such an understanding of the God–world relationship cannot be brought to a higher synthesis; rather, it is our lot to endure it. In his encounter with the divine, Job realizes this essential feature of the world and our tragic place in it. If this assessment of the human condition is correct, then it also helps to understand the criticisms that have been raised in Cordeiro-Rodrigues's reply.

4. Two Criticisms

I briefly address two points of criticism that seem to me particularly worthy of consideration: The first criticism says that the God I am proposing is immoral because God apparently accepts gratuitous (animal) suffering. However, "God as creator is also the father of all existing beings and therefore has stronger duties towards them" (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2022, p. 3) than parents have toward their children. The second criticism says that if God as a transcendent being is not subject to moral rules, then either no objective moral standards exist or they are inscrutable for us. In either way, our moral order would be permanently undermined because divine morality does not correspond to ours, and, as a consequence, humans would easily get into situations where they would make the wrong decision and thus be responsible for moral evils (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2022, p. 6).

The first criticism presupposes that God ought to be thought of as strictly personal and therefore as a moral subject observing those moral rules that are also applicable to us. Cordeiro-Rodrigues refers to Desmond Tutu's work for making the point that God cares about right and wrong and, thus, about a moral universe. In analogy to the obvious moral principle that letting someone suffer is only permissible in the light of a higher good attained through it, God has to respect this principle as well.

This interpretation is undoubtedly widespread in current accounts of theodicy. Take, for instance, Eleonore Stump's remarkable reading of the book of Job in her seminal study *Wandering in Darkness* (Stump 2010). She interprets the divine speeches as expression of God's providential care which is directed toward intimate second-personal closeness to God. Stump concludes: "Focusing on the second-person account of the divine speeches and the second-person experience of God that Job has while God is speaking to him shows us that there is for Job a second-personal explanation of his suffering [. . .]" (Stump 2010, p. 225).

One has to notice, however, that this line of interpretation faces serious challenges. In her specific account, Stump has to radically reinterpret the many passages of the divine speeches where a wild and untamable nature is presented, which renews itself through the cycle of eating and being eaten. Here the experience of a second-personal and caring relationship of God to creation finds hardly any point of connection.

In more general terms, the question arises to what extent higher-good theodicies can convincingly explain that all the suffering in the world is a necessary and indispensable means for achieving these goods. Stump, for instance, explicitly wants to limit her account to adult and mentally functional humans as she does not know whether it is applicable to the nature of suffering of animals, infants, or cognitively disabled individuals and the possibility of their personal growth of the relationship with God (Stump 2010, p. 4; similarly McCord-Adams 1999, p. 28). A positive evaluation might suggest that there are possibilities of adapting the proposed solution. However, a negative evaluation will interpret this delimitation as a kind of capitulation in front of particularly challenging instances of suffering.

I think we have a strong intuition to assume that if suffering is necessary at all, then less terrible instances of it would do it as well. Daniel Howard-Snyder expresses this idea as follows: "Suppose God had simply prevented us from ever having genocidal thoughts. Would we then have been unable to perceive the hideousness of living unto ourselves? Would we have lacked the requisite incentive to turn to God? [. . .] We each need to answer this question for ourselves, but for my own part, on careful reflection I can't see how [. . .]

God would be justified in permitting so much horrific evil and suffering rather than a lot less" (Howard-Snyder 2008, p. 340).

In other words, the effort to understand God as a moral being can lead to the idea that this conception must be abandoned, and God ought to be disqualified as immoral. To show that God can have good reasons for allowing terrible suffering does not yet imply that God also has good reasons for permitting any kind of suffering, no matter how horrific. It is precisely the existence of such evils that makes it so difficult to maintain a comprehensive moral order in which God functions as the source and universal guarantor of it. This difficulty is also evident in animal theodicies when additional assumptions about possible future developmental scenarios of animals in the eschaton are proposed for avoiding the impression of gratuitous animal suffering. Thus, the focus on a Tutuist framework for tackling the problem of evil constraints the conceptual resources of the debate considerably because moral standards for human–human relationships are elevated to the general standard for any relationship, including the one between God and humans. The assumption of such a comprehensive moral order of reality entails a considerable argumentative burden, which is often seen as doomed to failure. It seems to me that Cordeiro-Rodrigues did not adequately grasp this point or he considers it to be as too easily solvable.

The image of God outlined in the Book of Job (and what I have sympathies for) places God beyond such a moral order. This does not mean that God has no interest in human beings and their well-being; rather, it says that God wants to liberate human beings from the misleading assumption that the entire cosmos is governed according to a moral order, which guarantees an adequate compensation for all instances of suffering. Such a moral order, to put it bluntly, is an important and worthwhile ideal of human life but, apparently, not of divine creation. With such an understanding of the God–world relationship, the unity of a moral order encompassing God and creation is no longer available. By letting the idea of morality as a leading category for our overall understanding of reality go, the human view is able to open up into a profoundly tragic dimension of our existence. Thus, Newsom draws the following conclusion of her interpretation of the Book of Job: "Like the ostrich, Job, too, brings his children into a dangerous world, where they may well be crushed and trampled. Unlike the ostrich, however, which forgets the dangers to its offspring, it is unlikely that Job can be said to forget their vulnerability" (Newsom 2003, p. 258).

This brings me to the second criticism, which says that if "there is an inscrutable moral code for humans, then [. . .] this would mean that humans can never be held accountable for moral wrongs" (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2022, p. 3). Even if there were a divine moral code that is beyond human comprehension, this would not imply that we are bereft of any insight into valid moral principles. Since one can only use what they have got, in such a scenario, we would have to adhere to the moral principles accessible to us thanks to our reason. Take the moral insight that suffering may only be imposed on others if this is the only way to achieve a higher good. This insight is not simply given to us, but we can justify it and argue that it is reasonable. If, therefore, a hidden divine moral code completely different from our moral principles were to exist, then this matter of fact would not further affect us, since any access to this divine order is denied to us.

Note that the view I am proposing is not making any claims in this direction. Rather, the idea is that there are non-moral values such as continuous creativity, remarkable adaptability, prolific life-circles, amazing bio-diversity, etc., whose axiological weight we are able to grasp. If God were to appreciate these values, then we were able to grasp at least certain aspects of this holistic divine perspective on the world.

5. Is This Still a Christian God?

A final point: Is this concept of God proposed still a Christian God? This question shapes the criticisms put forward. I believe this concept of God belongs to the rich biblical tradition which emphasizes that the world as we know it is dangerous. After all, a single misstep in paradise brought humanity into the world as we know it. Against this

background, the crucial question is: Can it ever be reasonable for participants in terrible sufferings like Job to stop seeing this suffering as an obstacle to trusting that God is interested in our well-being and in a relationship with us?

Here is a proposed answer: Those involved in suffering will stop blaming God for it when they accept their lives as they are—even with all the suffering. This, according to the interpretation I follow, is the lesson that the story of Job wants to teach us. We come to accept our lives not when we give up all hope but when we reach a point where participation in terrible situations of suffering no longer threatens the integrity of an individual's personality. Acceptance does not mean letting go of the conviction that suffering was prima facie ruinous to one's life, but it does mean letting go of the demand that things should have gone differently. Acceptance does not mean that the painful, wrong, and prima facie ruinous events count for nothing or that we should no longer care about them. Rather, these events are no longer capable of destroying our integrity as a human person because we have reached a state where we no longer have to struggle with what has happened and where we no longer try to find a hidden meaning or divine plan where there is none. The aim is to come to a stable understanding of our place in the cosmos that is able to integrate what has happened into a meaningful context.

From a Christian perspective, one can add that the firm trust that God is our secure fundament finds personal involvement in suffering terrifying (think of Jesus in Gethsemane) but achievable as it involves the hope that the creator of this world can at the same time be the re-creator of a better world. Such a view of hope for the next life does neither explain suffering away nor dispose of a grand theory of suffering, but it makes it, at best, bearable.

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