

# PROCESS THEODICY AND THE LIFE AFTER DEATH: A POSSIBILITY OR A NECESSITY?

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**Abstract:** In this paper I argue for the necessity of eschatology for process thought, and against the idea that the belief in a life after death is not an essential element for this theodicy. Without reference to an eschatological dimension, a process theodicy is led to admit a consequentialist conception of divine love and goodness that is inconsistent with its notion of a responsive and participative God who loves each creature. In the world many creatures suffer atrocious evils, which destroy the value of their lives, but the process God does not redeem these sufferings in a personal *post-mortem* life in which the sufferers participate and can find meaning for their individual evils.

In order to support my thesis, I intend to examine some difficulties in process theodicy, especially in Charles Hartshorne's position, showing how his doctrine of objective immortality is unsatisfactory. My starting point will be some criticisms advanced by John Hick against Hartshorne and the replies made by the process philosopher David R. Griffin.

I conclude by contending that process theodicy, at least in its Hartshornean version, in denying the necessity of a personal afterlife, does not provide a satisfying answer to the soteriological-individual aspect of the problem of evil, namely the problem of the individual salvation in which the individual person can find redemption and meaning for the sufferings undergone or inflicted. In the process perspective the divine love is conceived in consequentialist terms and evils suffered by the individual are merely considered a by-product or the negative side of the divine creation out of chaos.

**KEY WORDS:** process theodicy; problem of evil; salvation; life after death; eschatology; soteriology; suffering; consequentialism; God's love and goodness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Process theodicy is a very fascinating and distinctive approach to the problem of evil, coming from the philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. It proposes an innovative point of view from which to conceive the traditional divine attributes and the relationship between God and the world. Since process thought is very dynamic and complex it is not possible to give an exact definition of process philosophy and theology. Moreover, within the process movement itself, there are many dissimilar perspectives on the problem of evil and on the need for an eschatology (for example, David Griffin's position is very different from Schubert Ogden's). Hence, in this paper I shall focus my attention on one of the most important process philosophers, Charles Hartshorne, with the aim to critically analyze his standpoint on evil, God and the eschatological dimension.

One of the most interesting aspects of Hartshorne's perspective lies in its denial of the necessity of eschatology in order to solve the problem of evil. According to this view, the reference to a life after death is not essential nor necessary (even if some process thinkers – like David Griffin<sup>1</sup> – although maintaining that it is unnecessary for process theodicy to work, recognize that its presence makes a theodicy more adequate and have added this eschatological element to their positions).

Against this viewpoint I argue that process Hartshornean theodicy *cannot* work without an eschatological conception which admits a personal existence after death where the individual can find redemption and a meaning for evils suffered or committed. In other words, I contend that Hartshorne's view is inadequate since is unable to solve an essential aspect of the problem of evil, namely the soteriological-individual problem of evil. With this concept I means the problem of the individual salvation in face of the sufferings undergone or inflicted. Indeed, what is expected of a satisfying theodicy is not only to answer to the question "why is there evil in the world?", but also to offer a sense, a meaning to the atrocious evils endured or perpetrated by the individual person. A satisfying

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<sup>1</sup> Griffin maintains the possibility of life after death and, above all, the importance of this belief to make theodicy more adequate, even if he does not affirm the necessity of this notion. According to him, process theodicy works even without the belief in a post-mortem life. See David Ray Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2004, pp.311-313 and *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, New York: Cornell University Press 2000, pp. 204-246. See also of the same author *Evil Revisited, Responses and Reconsiderations*, Albany: State University Press 1991, pp. 34-40 and *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*, Albany: State University of New York 1989, pp. 83-108). Against Griffin I argue that process theodicy cannot work without an eschatological perspective which admits a personal life after death.

theodicy should provide a soteriological and eschatological conception in which the sufferer can find redemption.

However, in process Hartshornean theodicy evils suffered by the individual remain unredeemed at the level of her personal life, since there is not an eschatological dimension where she can overcome or amend them. For this reason, I maintain that this kind of eschatology should be introduced as a necessary element in Hartshorne's view and in process theodicy, otherwise the process response to the problem of evil remains partial and limited.

My starting point will be some criticisms advanced by John Hick against Hartshorne and the replies made by the process philosopher David Griffin. But before deepening these aspects, it is necessary to sketch out the main features of the process view.

## 2. PROCESS VIEW: MAIN FEATURES

### *REALITY IS A PROCESS*

According to the process philosophy, everything that is actual is a process<sup>2</sup>, so the reality is considered as a dynamic system containing transformations, modifications and changes. The process philosophy aims at highlighting that the actualities which compose the world are in process, so «to be actual is to be a process»<sup>3</sup>.

Actualities are the fundamental elements of reality, the ultimate ontological entities which the world is composed of, they are not things in the common sense – namely objects of our sensitive experience – but temporary events that occur, happen and then perish, leaving room for further events. These realities do not endure through time, once they have arisen and have reached completion, they simply cease to exist as actual beings, becoming past events. The world as we know it, namely a cosmos containing things like human souls, dogs, electrons or molecules that endure through time for a shorter or a longer period, is the result of the combination of a series of interrelated individual actualities. In other words, we can consider things as 'societies' of actualities.

The element that characterizes an actuality is the enjoyment. An actual entity is defined as 'an occasion of experience': the term 'actual' refers to its temporary nature, since it is a moment existing in act, while the word 'experience' means it is able to enjoy, to have experience. The notion of experience implies the ability both to actualize oneself and to interact with others and the environment. According to process philosophy every actuality is an experiencing reality: «Every unit of the process, whether at the level of human or of electronic events, has enjoyment»<sup>4</sup>, therefore «To be actual is to be an occasion of experience and hence an occasion of enjoyment»<sup>5</sup>.

This position entails two relevant implications. First, there is not an ontological difference between human beings and other creatures in the world, they all share the capacity to enjoy. Process view clearly rejects the Cartesian dualistic distinction between subjects and non-experiencing objects, embracing a dynamic perspective, which considers enjoyment the distinctive feature of the reality as it is. Beings are different for the quality and type of enjoyment. For example, the experience of a dog is considered qualitatively – not ontologically – different in comparison to the human one. In other words, the difference does not concern the substantial nature of the thing involved, but the qualitative degree or dimension of its experience.

Second, as Whitehead said, experience does not presuppose consciousness, while consciousness presupposes experience, so there is experience even at an unconscious level, like such as atoms and cells.

### *CREATION OUT OF CHAOS*

Process philosophy rejects the Jew-Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in favor of the notion of creation out of chaos. God brought the world out of an initial chaotic state, he 'shaped' the cosmos according to some eternal metaphysical principles and ideals, with the aim to prompt it towards the

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<sup>2</sup> For the notion of process see: Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, David Griffin, Donald Sherburne ed., New York: The Free Press 1978, pp. 208-214.

<sup>3</sup> John Cobb, David Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi.*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi.*, p. 17.

highest level of beauty, harmony and complexity. Creation is an activity which gradually brings order in the primordial chaos, from the simplest forms of life to the most complex ones, in order to make the enjoyment of ever more rich and intense experiences possible.

The original stuff which composes the world is not a static and passive raw material in God's hands, like the clay for the potter, but it embeds creativity. Each thing in the world, from electrons to human beings, is an embodiment of creativity, an exemplification of creative activity. Therefore, every being has power. This concept of creativity or creative power is twofold: it is the power of self-determination (or final causation) and to determine others (or efficient causation)<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, according to process view, each being has both the freedom to determine itself as a subject and the ability to determine others.

It is important to highlight that creativity is not *a* being or *a* power in the universe coexisting with the divine power, rather creativity is *the* primordial power that is embodied by all actualities, God included, and cannot exist apart from these concrete embodiments.

However, there is a relevant difference between the divine embodiment and that of creatures: God – since he is the eternal, perfect loving and all-inclusive being – embeds creativity in a way qualitatively and categorically different from that of worldly entities, which are finite and limited.

### *GOD IS NOT OMNIPOTENT (AS HE IS UNDERSTOOD IN THE TRADITIONAL MEANING)*

According to process philosophy, creativity is an ultimate metaphysical principle inherent to the nature of things, it is a necessary aspect of cosmos. In other words, creativity does not depend on God, it is beyond the divine will. The ultimate nature of creativity means God cannot totally determine a creature because it has both the power to freely determine itself and to be influenced by others.

Thus, process God is not omnipotent in the traditional sense, he does not possess a coercive power to bring about any logically possible situation or state of affairs, rather he has got a persuasive power, defined as the capacity to prompt beings towards their best possibilities.

This divine act of persuasion is expressed in the initial aim that a creature receives from God, it is an initial urge luring the creature to its best opportunities, given its own life-context. But the creature is not obliged to follow the divine initial aim, it can choose alternatives other than those provided by God – its “subjective aim” – due to its inherent power of self-determination.

The hypothesis of creation out of chaos and the redefinition of the divine omnipotence mark the first difference between the traditional concept of God and the process notion: while the traditional God of theism, if he wanted, could intervene in the world exercising a coercive all-determining power, revoking the creatureal freedom, process deity cannot do this, because the freedom of creatures does not depend on his will. The power of self-determination and others-determination is not a divine gift, rather it is an essential element inherent to the very nature of things, beyond God's evocative power.

### *THE DIPOLAR THEISM*

According to Hartshorne, God has a double nature: an abstract or absolute dimension and a relative dimension. The divine perfection consists of these two aspects that make God superior to all other beings, but also superior to himself, self-surpassing.

Hartshorne called this position “dipolar theism” because it contends the presence of two different but strictly linked poles in the divine nature<sup>7</sup>.

On the one hand, process deity is absolute: he is superior to creatures in all aspects and possesses an abstract character that reveals itself in the divine omniscience and righteousness. God establishes a fixed and unchanging relationship with the world, he always responds with love, care, power (intended as a persuasive power) and wisdom, regardless from the concrete contents to be responded. His attitude towards worldly entities is always an attitude of perfect knowledge, love, care and justice. God in his abstract nature is the agent who envisages the best possibilities to be realised in the world, he is the mediating activity working between the sphere of the possible and the realm of the actual, from the possibility to its concrete actualisation. Without the divine intervention, new forms and novel actualities could not be realised.

This pole is the eternal, unchanging, independent essence of God.

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<sup>6</sup> See D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., p. 277. See also J. Cobb, D. Griffin, *Process Theology*, op. cit., pp. 14-16.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, Glencoe (Illinois): The Free Press 1953, pp. 110-125.

On the other hand, God is considered self-surpassing by Hartshorne. His perfection is not unchangeable, unincreaseable, totally independent and indifferent to others, rather process deity is deeply related with the world, he sympathetically feels our joys and sufferings and integrates them in his own experience. According to this view, every moment God acquires new experiences and feelings. Thus, he surpasses himself thanks to his ability toprehend everything that occurs in the world. The divine work of prehension is not meant in the barely sense of knowing without participation, from an external point of view, but in the sense of feeling, participating in the experiences of creatures. This divine relativity or mutability implies that God can constantly add new elements to his own experience (without losing the past ones), increasing in happiness:

«In ethical quality and in wisdom and power, religion conceives God as already as perfect as anything could be. But does religion assure us that God is equally incapable of improvement in happiness? How can this be if God loves us, and through love shares in our sorrows, and is grieved by our misfortunes and errors? But even here we may call God perfect, if we mean by this that he is not to be surpassed in happiness by any being other than himself. To say God can increase in happiness (and if he cannot, then there is no service we can render him) is not to say that any other individual is or could be happier than he, but only to say that he himself could be happier.»<sup>8</sup>

The divine ability to increase in joy depends on the ability to feel the feelings of others and, consequently, to receive their positive experiences as well as those negative. From this point of view, God depends upon creatures, since with our positive experiences we contribute to increase his happiness. The relationship depicted here is circular, not unilateral: God takes care of us and does good things for us, but we can do good things for him too, we can help him to improve in joy and experience.

Hence, thanks to this process of constant acquisition, his nature is continuously increased and he surpasses himself at the level of the richness and variety of his personal life.

However, these modifications and prehensions do not corrupt or belittle God's happiness. The presence of negative elements such as sadness, desperation, sinfulness, sorrows or wretchedness in the divine experience does not diminish his perfect condition. The divine joy is not degenerated or destroyed by them, because God is able to harmoniously integrate these negative feelings in a broader perspective, without eliminating their negative character, but also without losing anything positive.

In addition, even if our joys and sorrows are relevant for God's happiness, they cannot corrupt or destroy his abstract nature: the absolute aspects of his essence – such as power, love and wisdom – belong to his Primordial Nature and cannot be modified, whatever thing we do.

Finally, according to Hartshorne, the deep meaning of our lives is in our contribution to God's joy in terms of adding new positive feelings to his life. Employing Hartshorne's words «we are co-workers with God»<sup>9</sup>: the more we have good, harmonious and complex experiences, the more we positively contribute to divine life, adding good and positive remembrances to God's memory.

## *PANENTHEISM*

Process view embraces a panentheistic position, according to which God includes in himself the world, but the world is not identical with God. Employing a Hartshorne's metaphor<sup>10</sup>, we can say that God is the soul of the world and the world is his body: in the same way as we directly feel our body and flourish if our body flourishes and suffer if our body suffers, God participates in every single experience that occurs, he is enriched by the enjoyment of positive values as well as undergoes the negative ones. All members are internal to God and in interaction with him.

## *DIVINE LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE*

The divine love is defined in terms of sympathetic participation in one's own experience and feelings. Process God shares joys and sufferings with his creatures, he feels the feelings of others and receives their positive experiences as well as those negative. Hartshorne wrote that «[...] to love is to

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<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> *Ivi*, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p. 141.

find joy in the joys of others, and sorrow in the sorrows of others, and thus to depend partly upon them for one's joy and sorrow»<sup>11</sup>.

But if God's happiness changes with the changes in the joys of his creatures, does this involve God is not perfectly knowing? Should he not be able to know in advance anything that will happen (joys included)?

According to Hartshorne, to foresee the future is an implausible concept, because the very nature of future events lies in their indefinability, since they exist as mere possibilities which are unsettled and whose particulars are not defined or decided. A future event – literally – does not exist before its occurrence, therefore it cannot be known in advance. Thus, God does not foresee every single event that will occur, rather his knowledge of the future is nebulous, vague, not precise in details. However, once an event happened, God is able to know and retain it in each aspect, without any lack or loss.

In other words, the divine omniscience is not defined by process theology as the capacity of knowing in advance all details of future situations, but as a perfectly adequate knowledge of the past and present things, while the future ones are known in an imprecise, not totally defined way, accordingly to their essence of unsettled and undecided events.

Hence, God's knowledge of the future is a sort of probabilistic anticipation, he anticipates not *that* single event which will occur, but:

«the range of possible things among which what happens will be a selection. And he will see that a higher percentage of some kinds of things will happen than others, that is, he will see in terms of probabilities.»<sup>12</sup>

A further aspect of the divine nature lies in its adventurous character<sup>13</sup>: God takes risks in creating the world, since he cannot predict the results of his creative act. Moreover, as the beings in the world possess an inner power of self-determination and others-determination, process deity cannot precisely know in advance how they will respond to his promptings. Therefore, in bringing the cosmos out of chaos, he risks the occurrence of evil.

According to this view, the divine life in itself is an adventure: God perfectly feels and participates in the feelings of others, so he takes on his shoulders the risk of suffering the sufferings and pains of the world. God is not an external spectator, rather his own life is involved in this adventurous process. This aspect is relevant for the problem of evil, since God has judged that the process of creation is worth the risk of evils that could occur and he is ready to directly experience them.

### 3. METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR CORRELATIONS

According to process philosophy, reality is to be interpreted in terms of dynamic processes. However, there are also metaphysical principles and abstract forms that are unchanging.

These principles are eternal and necessary, so they do not depend on God's decision and cannot be otherwise. Indeed, the rejection of the doctrine of creation out of nothingness implies there has always been a world containing free beings, therefore, if worldly entities are not created *ex nihilo* by God, then there must be some fixed metaphysical laws at the basis of their mutual interactions. These laws belong to the inner essence of things and define the way in which beings interact each other and with God, providing a set of metaphysical correlations.

Griffin summarizes these correlations occurring among five variables<sup>14</sup>:

1. The capacity for intrinsic goodness (the capacity for experiencing enjoyment).
2. The capacity for intrinsic evil (disharmony and triviality).
3. The power of self-determination (freedom).
4. The capacity for instrumental goodness (the capacity for influencing others for the good)
5. The capacity for instrumental evil (the capacity for influencing others for the evil).

<sup>11</sup> C. Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism*, Hamden (Connecticut): Archon Books 1964, p. 158

<sup>12</sup> C. Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, cit., pp. 161-162.

<sup>13</sup> See J. Cobb, D. Griffin, *Process Theology*, op. cit., pp. 57-61; See also D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., pp. 308-310 and *Evil Revisited*, cit., p. 204.

<sup>14</sup> See D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., pp. 291-297 and *Evil Revisited*, cit., pp. 26-31.

The first necessary correlation involves 1. and 3.: there is a correspondence between the capacity for experiencing enjoyment and the power of self-determination. An increment in the former implies an increment in the latter: to enjoy ever more intense feelings requires the ability to integrate ever more complex and different data in one's own experience, namely it requires freedom. This first correlation explains why creatures with a high level of freedom exist in the world. Indeed, God decided to bring forth beings with a great amount of freedom in order to improve the possibility for a greater enjoyment.

The second correlation concerns 1. and 2.: a great capacity for intrinsic goodness involves the possibility to suffer intrinsic evil, that is discord or disharmony. For example, a complex nervous system like ours allows us to enjoy marvelous feelings, but also terrible pains and horrible mental sufferings. Griffin writes that: «The same conditions that allow us to enjoy those experience which we value most highly and would not want to live without are the conditions that lead us to suffer so intensely»<sup>15</sup>.

It is important to highlight that process philosophy does not contend that all sufferings occurring in the world are necessary – they could be lesser in degree and quantity if beings decided to actualise themselves differently – rather, it holds that the possibility of good requires the possibility of evil. Thus, the real problem does not regard the necessity of the actual amount of sufferings in the world, but if the positive values enjoyed by creatures justify the possible occurrence of evils.

Another relevant correlation is between 1. and 4./5.: the capacity for intrinsic goodness and the capacity for instrumental goodness/evil, namely the ability to influence others for the good or for the bad. A complex actuality, able to enjoy harmonious and intense experiences, has a great power to positively or negatively influence other actualities. Therefore, an improvement in its capacity for enjoyment entails an increase in its influencing power.

#### **4. THE AIM OF THE DIVINE CREATION AND THE DEFINITION OF EVIL(S)**

According to process philosophy, an experience is intrinsically good – good in itself regardless from its usefulness – if it is characterised by beauty<sup>16</sup>. Beauty is the union of harmony and intensity of experience: the more an experience is harmonious and intense, the more it is good. An experience is harmonious when the component parts are integrated in a balanced way, in order to limit or undo the contrasting feelings without diminishing their complexity and mutual interactions. Intensity can be defined as the absence of banal, trivial, not exciting experiences.

At the opposite side of intrinsic goodness, there is intrinsic evil, namely disharmony and triviality. The former concept refers to an experience in which two or more elements are in mutual contrast, producing conflict and pain, like in the case of mental sufferings – for example, horror or desperation – or in the case of physical pain.

The latter notion can be defined in terms of boredom, banality, lack of novelty and excitement.

Triviality is a relative evil. This means that an experience is genuinely evil only if is more banal than it has to be: the experience of an animal is not evil just because is less intense and complex in comparison with the human one, but a human experience is evil if it degenerates to an animal level<sup>17</sup>. In other words, according to process philosophy, an experience is not trivial in itself, but only compared to the possibilities and abilities of the being involved.

After these clarifications, the reason why God brought a cosmos out of the primordial chaos is evident: he wanted to overcome the presence of triviality which characterised it, in order to bring beauty in the world. Indeed, in this chaotic state there was no a stable order and actualities occurred at random, having very banal experiences.

In summary, the introduction of order was necessary both to overcome the state of triviality and to allow the emergence of complexity and harmony. Without an ordered universe, it would be impossible for an actuality to organise its own experiences in a harmonious way, making them ever more intense and complex.

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<sup>15</sup> D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., p. 294.

<sup>16</sup> See D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., pp. 282-285.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 284.

The definition of triviality as evil marks another important difference between the process view and the traditional approach to the problem of evil. The latter focuses on disharmony, on the problem of the presence of mental and physical pains in the world and the reason of their existence. Instead, process theodicy is concerned with both disharmony and triviality.

According to the process perspective, the problem of evil does not exclusively concern the presence of disharmony and triviality, because they can be overcome by the joys of life; nor is death considered the real problem, since it cannot eliminate the value of existence. The greatest evil is temporality, or, in Whiteheadian terms, the “perpetual perishing”, that is the loss of memories of positive and valuable experiences by means of which evil is overcome:

«The deepest problem is not finally injustice, physical suffering, or mental anguish. That they are pervasive of the world is beyond question, but in spite of them there is an enjoyment of life such that we can find meaning in caring about all things, and such that for the sake of life we can try to mitigate injustice and to reduce suffering and anguish[...] What destroys in our maturity the zest of our youth is not so much the discovery that injustice, suffering, and anguish are a part of all life; it is the realization that the moments of joy in which these evils are overcome fade into dim memories and are finally lost altogether. The conviction that success does not ultimately succeed undercuts our zest more radically than do many failures. If this perpetual perishing of everything that we value is the whole story, then life is ultimately meaningless.»<sup>18</sup>

## 5. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Why is there evil in the world? And why does God not intervene to prevent it?

Let's examine the answers provided by process theodicy.

Firstly – due to the necessary metaphysical correlations among creatures – the possibility of evil is unavoidable, since the capacity for intrinsic goodness is strictly linked with the capacity for both intrinsic and instrumental evil. As we have seen above, a complex creature risks suffering intense pain as well as it is able to willingly cause sufferings to others.

Secondly, God cannot intervene to prevent the occurrence of evil events in the world because he is not omnipotent (in the traditional meaning of being capable of unilaterally bringing about any state of affairs) and the constitutive freedom possessed by worldly beings gives them the ability to perform bad deeds, diverging from the divine initial aim. Therefore, God does not coerce any creature, not because he wants to respect their freedom, rather because he cannot do this, due to the fact that beings in the world possess an inherent power of self-determination and others-determination.

In other words, evil arises from creatures' freedom and God cannot avoid this possibility.

Thirdly, God, in order to avoid the evil of disharmony, couldn't leave the world in its original state – a mere chaos with very basic actualities and characterized by the evil of triviality.

As David Griffin wrote in *God, Power and Evil*<sup>19</sup> the unnecessary triviality is a genuine evil and it:

«cannot be avoided by leaving the world in chaos, or by calling off at some stage the quest for the higher perfections. In fact, to do so would be to guarantee the existence of genuine evil (since all experience which is more trivial than it need be is evil by comparison with what it could be).»<sup>20</sup>

Since triviality is considered an evil, process God must overcome it by prompting novelty in the world, urging it towards the highest forms of complexity and harmony, with the consequent risk of the occurrence of sufferings and pains.

In summary, the existence of metaphysical principles influencing the relationships among creatures and the creative power to self-determination and to others-determination at the basis of the creatureal condition make evil a concrete possibility. In the process view, the presence of evil is not a necessity; it does not serve any divine purpose nor is it a means for promoting our moral and spiritual development. In other terms, the world could contain a lesser amount of sufferings, if creatures made different choices.

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<sup>18</sup> J. Cobb, D. Griffin, *Process theology*, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., pp. 308-309.

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, p.308.

According to the process thought, this perspective contends the presence of genuine evil, without denying the goodness of God. Indeed, on the one hand, process theodicy defines evil as a possibility not a necessity, hence the concrete evils that occur in the world are considered genuine evils, without which the world would have been better. They are not *prima facie* evils that seem evils from our limited human point of view, but actually contribute to a divine aim. On the other hand, process position can maintain the goodness of God in spite of the presence of evils since – given the freedom of creatures and the metaphysical correlations – he cannot intervene to prevent any negative event in the world. God does his best to avoid sufferings and to promote beauty in the world; he constantly fights against evil providing fresh and new ideal aims to the cosmos, but the divine efforts cannot guarantee the absence of evil in the world, much depends on creatures and on their choices.

However, one last problem still remains: the problem of temporality or perpetual perishing, the loss of all positive experiences that gave meaning to our existence in the abyss of time. How can process God defeat the perpetual perishing?

To answer the question, we shall deepen the notions of divine memory and objective immortality.

## 6. THE OVERCOMING OF EVIL AND THE NOTION OF OBJECTIVE IMMORTALITY

Divine love, that keeps in itself all moments of our life, is able to defeat the final evil of temporality, giving meaning to our life. This meaning is that:

«both in our own enjoyment and through our adding to the enjoyment of others we contribute everlastingly to the joy of God. That meaning is simultaneously that we are safe with God.»<sup>21</sup>

In Hartshorne's opinion, God is able to retain all events fully and vividly in memory thanks to his omniscience. As we have seen above, this conception means perfect adequacy to the thing known. God knows each current and past event in every detail, quality and aspect.

Divine omniscience has important implications. First, it explains the perfect goodness and love of God: the ability to be sympathetic and responsive to creatures is linked with the possibility to perfectly know and hold every detail of the world; there is a strict correlation between being all-loving and being all-knowing. In fact, God enjoys our joys and suffers with our sufferings because he can feel them, he can know them. God's experience is an all-embracing experience<sup>22</sup>.

Second, the process deity is not only all-knowing, but "all-retaining"; he stores and eternally holds any and all experiences in his memory, nothing is lost. Therefore, our immortality lies in God's capability of keeping all of the details of our life in mind:

«Each of us is, in his very being, his very life just as lived on earth, a contribution to the experience of God. This experience is indestructible; for in order to take on new content God has not need to forget the old.»<sup>23</sup>

However, we are not a mere record in the divine memory, rather God participates in and responds to our life experiences, creating a synthesis or unity which is partially determined by our decisions and choices taken during life, and partially by the divine response to them.

According to process theology, this work of overcoming occurs not only in God's personal life, but in the divine act of providing ideal aims to the next stages of the world:

«For an evil fact to be overcome by good in God means for it to be transformed into an ideal aim which can serve to overcome evil in the world.»<sup>24</sup>

The divine response to evil consists in the promotion of novelty and new purposes to be realized in the world, in order to surpass the evil occurred and restore good.

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<sup>21</sup> J. Cobb, D. Griffin, *Process Theology*, cit., p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> C. Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, cit., pp. 129-144.

<sup>23</sup> C. Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, cit., p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., p. 304.

The overcoming of evil is possible thanks to this work of “elaboration” or “transmutation”: God does not limit himself to passively receiving negative experiences. Rather, he actively prehends and transforms them into new future possibilities for the world. His act of transformation does not undo the evil character of a fact. Rather, it integrates negative values into a wider perspective – the divine one – transmuting evil into goodness. Due to this transforming process, God’s joy is always casted by a dark shadow but it cannot be corrupted or destroyed by the prehension of bad feelings; indeed, God feels an immediate enjoyment in anticipating the future positive contribution that his influence will have on the world<sup>25</sup>.

Finally, God’s perfect omniscience has important consequences for eschatology.

Since the divine memory retains everything without lack or loss, our lives are an eternal and imperishable contribution to the divine life. Our immortality does not consist in an everlasting personal life after death, but in the permanent and incorruptible value that our lives acquire in God’s life. Using a Hartshorne’s metaphor, we are an indelible note in the divine symphony.

Hartshorne, following Whitehead, defines this eternal life in God “objective immortality”<sup>26</sup>: our lives, in all their aspects and dimensions, are eternally retained by divine memory. God is considered as a great “store” of memories.

At this point a question might arise: in Hartshorne’s theology is there a conception of life after death, in the sense of a prolongation of personal life?

Hartshorne is vague on this issue<sup>27</sup>, even if he states that «death is the last page of the last chapter of the book of one’s life»<sup>28</sup> and contends that death marks the end of any experience, decision, feeling<sup>29</sup>. What is firmly denied by him is the idea that there will not be an end at all, that the book of life will be infinite, containing infinite chapters.

This consideration is determined by the recognition of our finitude: if we could eternally add new contents to our experience and, at the same time, remain ourselves, without losing our past and identity, then we would be identical with the divine reality; in fact only God, thanks to his perfect omniscience, is able to integrate in himself more and more new elements, without losing his personal continuity.

Therefore, Hartshorne’s view excludes the possibility of new personal experiences or a punishment/reward for our actions after death.

## 7. HICK AGAINST HARTSHORNE’S OBJECTIVE IMMORTALITY

According to the philosopher John Hick, Hartshorne’s notion of objective immortality is problematic<sup>30</sup> since it identifies immortality with a mere record:

«On Hartshorne’s view there is no human *life* [Hick’s emphasis] after death, no continued consciousness, no continued interaction with other people and with an environment What continues to exist is not you or me, or anything that is in any way different from and yet continuous with our present earthly existence, but simply someone else’s memory of our lives – that someone else being God. But to be alive in any ordinary sense of the world is not only to be remembered, but also to be capable of remembering, and of creating fresh and different material for memory»<sup>31</sup>.

This existence in God is not a real personal existence, because it does not imply the presence of a conscious ego or “I” which endures and is capable of enjoying new experiences; it is a weakened form of life, deprived of the essential elements of consciousness and ability to have experiences. In this sort of *post-mortem* life there is not the possibility to improve or grow or amend our mistakes.

Another difficulty is in the fact that this approach does not offer a resolution to the problem of evil. Divine memory retains positive experiences as well as those negative ones and it does not seem

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<sup>25</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 306-307.

<sup>26</sup> See C. Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, cit., pp. 143-144 and 211-212; see also *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics*, LaSalle (Illinois): Open Court Publishing Company 1962, pp.245-262

<sup>27</sup> See for example C. Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection*, cit., pp.245-262.

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, p. 250.

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, see for example pp. 250-251 and pp. 253-254.

<sup>30</sup> John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, pp. 217-221.

<sup>31</sup> *Ivi*, p. 219.

to provide a way to solve the problem, because evil is not overcome in a final good, but simply eternally remembered by God.

These two objections can be summarized in the following sentences:

I) The concept of objective immortality identifies the notion of immortality with a memory in God's mind. It is an existence in which there is not a conscious ego with the ability to have experiences.

II) The concept of objective immortality is unable to offer a perspective in which evil is overcome in a final good. Evil eternally persists in God's memory.

Starting from these objections, I shall develop below some critical observations:

I)

The most difficult aspect in the doctrine of objective immortality lies in its tension with a fundamental idea of the process position, the notion that the human aim is to contribute to divine experience in the best possible way. Hartshorne's view, according to which there is no longer a possibility to make decisions or have fresh experiences in a future life, seems to complicate the issue. The deep meaning of our lives is in the receptive divine memory and in our contribution to God's joy; the more we have good, harmonious and complex experiences, the more we positively contribute to divine life, adding good and positive remembrances to God's memory.

If the value and meaning of human life depends on this contribution, why should we not have the possibility to improve ourselves, to experience redemption after death? This is of crucial importance, especially for all those people who live in hard and terrible conditions which do not allow them to have positive experiences. The concept of objective immortality implies that their existences are simply recorded in God's mind, excluding the possibility for the sufferers to enjoy new and good values in a *post-mortem* existence; it follows that these lives represent a negative contribution to divine happiness because God feels all our feelings and a life dominated by pains and hardships adds suffering to divine experience. In this perspective the sufferer lives an existence devoid of significance and meaning, due to the fact that she cannot provide any positive values to the divine experience (or can provide a very low level of positive values in respect with those that are negative). She not only is condemned to live a painful life but cannot even have the hope to find salvation.

II)

Against the objection that the concept of objective immortality is unable to offer a perspective in which evil is overcome in a final good, because it eternally persists in God's mind someone could reply recalling Hartshorne's idea that the meaning of life lies not simply in God's memory, but in the act of divine synthesis that represents his response to our life. We are not a mere record in the divine memory, rather God participates in and responds to our life experiences, creating a synthesis or unity which is partially determined by our decisions and choices taken during life, and partially by the divine response to them.

Even this answer does not resolve the problem. Evils committed and bad deeds eternally persist as an open wound in God, and we will never have the possibility to sew it up. A process theologian could object that this overcoming occurs in the divine experience: God receives evil and inserts it in a broader context. Moreover, the perfection of the divine happiness can never be destroyed by evil since God enjoys a perfect joy clouded by some sufferings. The problem is – again – that this is exclusively a divine experience, this eschatological conception is characterized by the absence of the subject as conscious ego: she cannot participate in the victory on evil nor can contribute in any way to its defeat. The overrun of evil only occurs in God's life. We are excluded, we have to resign ourselves to undergo a life of unjust suffering. There is no salvation, God do not save us, his action is limited to retain our lives in his memory.

The reference to the defeat of evil in the world does not seem satisfying, either. According to process theology, this work of overcoming occurs not only in God's personal life, but in the divine act of providing ideal aims to the next stages of the world in order to surpass the evil occurred and restore good.

But even if the work of transformation could surpass evils that occurred in the world, this does not necessarily imply an overcoming into the personal life of the sufferer. Rather, its aim is to improve the global situation of the world, to lure beings towards new opportunities in order to transmute evil into goodness. Let's think of a little child who spends her life in poverty, solitude and great hardships: one day she is brutally raped and killed by a man. The process God is able to transform this horrible event into an ideal aim, for example by luring that man to repent and to devote all his life to help others. But the little child is dead; her sufferings cannot be restored at the level of her personal life. She will rest as an eternal memory in God but she will not have justice for wrongs undergone nor the possibility to forgive her torturer or to find a meaning for her existence, characterized by terrible pains. The defeat of evil allegedly exclusively happens in God's life and in the world, but in this view there is no room for an overcoming in the personal existence of the sufferer.

Finally, there is the question of the personal experience of evils as broken relationships with one's own fellows and with God. It is the ways in which *that specific* person lives, suffers and reacts to her own evils, that are inextricably correlated with her existence as subject in relation with others. How could God overcome the subjective dimension of sufferings, excluding the subject who lived them? To deny the presence of the sufferer to the redemption of her sufferings is to separate these sufferings from the person who has undergone them. It is true that God retains the life of the individual as a whole, feeling her feelings and experiences, but this makes even more problematic the question: how can the process deity transmute the individual way to suffer, the negative feelings into good without the participation of the sufferer who felt them?

In addition, according to process Hartshornean perspective there is not a subjective life of individuals that exist eternally in God. The only kind of immortality we can attain is the objective immortality, an eternal presence as a record in the divine memory, while our existence as conscious subjects ends with our death. The point is that what needs to be redeemed is not only a crystalized existence, devoid of subjectivity, rather the subject in itself; God can take my life and integrate it in himself, allegedly restoring my evils, but my personal painful experience in the form of broken/perverted relationships will remain unredeemed forever. Redemption does not mean only the overturning of evil into goodness, it also implies the restoration of wrong relationships with God and with others. Without my enduring as a subject, I do not see how all this becomes possible, since the very meaning of the term "relation" entails the presence of two or more subjects in mutual relationship.

God has the alleged ability to overcome evil by synthetizing my feelings in his own feelings, but even if so, this work of synthesis does not involve myself as participating subject. It concerns only the divine experience. If my existence as subject ends with death and I cannot know any subjective redemption as such, then the soteriological-individual problem of evil will be undefeated. In other words, to overcome evil it is necessary the participation of the sufferer who experiences the redemptive reparation of her relations, otherwise the defeat of evil will be only partial and limited.

## 8. THE METAPHYSICAL CONFUSION

According to Hartshorne, to ask for new experiences and possibilities after death is to confuse "my good" with "the good"<sup>32</sup>. Many persons selfishly desire what is unattainable for them, but they should accept the fact that their death has marked the end of new possibilities for them. Others will enjoy positive experiences, others will amend mistakes. This desire to enjoy more values is based on a metaphysical confusion according to which:

«A good is not good unless they enjoy it themselves[...]Such persons do not quite understand and take to heart the truth that the closing of their lives is not the closing of life, the ending of their youth the ending of youth, and that the secret of living consists in the service of life and good as life and as good rather than as essentially my life and my good»<sup>33</sup>.

In other words, asking for a personal *post-mortem* existence, in which the individual sufferings are surpassed and the sufferer can participate, is a morally repugnant request coming from an egocentric attitude: we want to live eternally, we cannot accept the idea of the definitive end of our life, marking

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<sup>32</sup> C. Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection*, cit., pp.259-260.

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, p.257.

the conclusion of any further development, opportunity or enjoyment. But the notion of a rewarding Paradise and the idea of Hell as a punishing place, are unacceptable at an ethical level, because they express a selfish and childish desire based on the need to be rewarded for the sufferings undergone or to obtain from satisfaction for the wrongs suffered. This perspective is the result of a negotiating theology that reduces the relationship with God to a mere commercial exchange in which to each evil endured corresponds to a prize and each bad deed committed corresponds to a punishment. Therefore, the idea that a perfect loving God should ensure a personal afterlife where a reward is granted to all suffering persons and a penalty to all wicked ones lies upon a morally wrong premise. On the contrary, the process view does not embrace this kind of position; it contends that to contribute with our positive experiences to the divine happiness and to cooperate for the goodness of others is a reward in itself. Being a means for the enjoyment of our fellows is self-rewarding, we should not ask for more. So, the problem of personal redemption is a false problem for process theodicy, as it is considered based on selfish expectations.

I would like to reply to this objection, firstly, underlining that the soteriological and eschatological claim is not a hedonistic request for more values to be enjoyed or an egocentric demand for a “prize”. We can agree on the need to purify the soteriological yearning from any selfish temptations, but to reduce this query to a personal desire is an oversimplification that does not correspond to the true essence of this questioning. To search for salvation, for a meaning in the face of evil, is not only an inescapable human necessity, but it is essential as a founding element of moral action. Behind any ethical deed there is a faith, a hope that the Good exists despite horrendous evils. Without this fiduciary attitude, ethics would be deprived of its ultimate meaning and human beings would find themselves unable to operate in a world that is absurd, meaningless. It is in facing atrocious pains and sufferings that are ineradicable by human *bona voluntas*<sup>34</sup> – namely those evils that do not depend on us and our ethical choices, against which human good will cannot do anything – that the human being asks for meaning, for a principle able to support her moral action in the world, despite all invincible (by means of sole human forces) evil. The soteriological request contains an ethical core: to help others I need to know that my help is not in vain, that it is not part of a cosmos ruled by absurdity and absence of value. The eschatological claim is cry for justice and meaning in face of unfair and destructive evils, which leave human beings deprived of any dignity. This is exactly an ethical demand to find a sense for sufferings, a harmony which rebuilds the broken relationship between the evildoer and the victim.

Secondly, the problem here is that we are not asking for a longer earthly life, more youth or a younger wife, etc. We are asking for the possibility to contribute to the divine life in a positive way, especially because the significance of our existence depends on the contribution we provide to God. This is not a selfish longing to enjoy all possible goods, instead it is a claim for meaning and sense, for the possibility to redeem personal mistakes and sufferings, in order to give God a positive addition. What about lives dominated by atrocious pains? What kind of positive improvement could they donate to the divine experience? The question at stake is not the morally repugnant request for rewards or punishments in a life after death, nor death or pain in themselves. Rather, it regards the claim for justice and redemption.

Furthermore, to experience ourselves as means for the happiness of other people is surely a source of great moral and existential satisfaction. But what is the condition of those people whose lives, dominated by horrendous pains, do not contribute to the joy of anybody? What about the sufferings of seriously mentally handicapped children, devoid of self-consciousness and therefore unable to conceive themselves as means for others? Where could they find a sense for their existence?

Finally, for the indulgent middle-class western person – who lives a comfortable, rich existence, with no deprivations and who does not risk her own life every day – it easy to judge the salvific

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<sup>34</sup> With this concept of ineradicable evil, I mean evil that cannot be defeated by the sole human good will, that evil beyond our ability to overcome it. This is different from the concrete single evils which are defeatable with our ethical commitment, since it is rooted in the universe as ontological-structural evil corrupting the world and against which we are not able to do anything in order to eradicate it. An Italian philosopher made important reflections on this issue, see: Alberto Caracciolo, *Nulla religioso ed imperativo dell'eterno. Studi di etica e di poetica*, Genova, Italy: Il Melangolo 2010 (1990<sup>1</sup>); see also of the same author: *La religione come struttura e come modo autonomo della coscienza*, Genova, Italy: il Melangolo 2000 (1965<sup>1</sup>); *Nichilismo ed etica*, Genova, Italy: il Melangolo 2002 (1983<sup>1</sup>).

request as a moral repugnant question. But could a poor, pitiful human being, whose existence is under terrible conditions with the constant danger of being killed or starving to death, consider the soteriological yearning just as an ethically wrong demand? We should also reckon with persons who spend their lives in hardships and desperation, whose only support is the hope in a better and fairer future existence.

In conclusion, I do not find morally wrong the soteriological request of a *post-mortem* life. It is based on the ethical claim to harmoniously rebuild one's own perverted relationships at the ground of personal evils. If the process God is the only being in which perfectly many become one, in which there is a perfect integration of all individualities, why is my subjectivity to be excluded?

## 9. THE CHARGE OF ELITISM

A position which denies any personal existence after death (conceived as the possibility to make new experiences, decisions, etc.) could be charged with elitism: only a few fortunate people will positively add value to the divine life, but this possibility will be precluded to the majority of human beings, forced to live in inhuman conditions. The process God – as conceived by Hartshorne – does not seem concerned with this aspect; he seems more interested in luring creatures towards their best opportunities, in order to improve high level experiences and complexity in the world.

John Hick's criticism of elitism is based on a similar line of reasoning; his charge against the humanist position is quite famous, but he advanced this criticism also against process theodicy<sup>35</sup>. Hick argues that the process God is the God of the elite: all sufferings in the world are justified because they are part of the process of the universe which has made possible not only pains and evils, but also the emergence of the cream of humanity. From God's point of view, the good which occurs in the world is worth all of the evils since they are overbalanced by the joys of fortunate people. However, difficultly the sufferers who undergo terrible evils will share the divine perspective and will agree with the process God.

Griffin replies to Hick's critique in his book *Evil Revisited*<sup>36</sup>. On the one hand, he agrees with Hick<sup>37</sup> about that the doctrine of objective immortality is problematic because it does not seem to provide an ultimate meaning to our lives, denying the possibility for further and more positive contributions to God after death. On the other hand, Griffin charges Hick with committing a mistake, that is to presuppose his own position in examining the process view: if process theodicy wants to be acceptable, it has to solve the principal problem created by Hick's theodicy itself, namely the question of dysteleological evil, intended as the excessive, purpose-less and destructive suffering, that does not contribute to the human moral and spiritual development in any way. According to Hick's theodicy<sup>38</sup>, God created a cosmos containing evils to be faced by humans in order to promote their moral and spiritual growth. Thus, evils are obstacles to fight against for growing at ethical and spiritual level. However, dysteleological evils often occur in the world; they do not contribute in any way to the human development, causing excessive and atrocious sufferings to human beings.

Therefore, in Hick's view God is ontologically responsible for creating a world containing dysteleological evils and can maintain his moral perfection only ensuring apocatastasis, namely the universal human salvation in the eschatological realm, where all human souls will be redeemed and dysteleological evils will be ultimately defeated.

According to Griffin, Hick judges the process God elitist because he does not guarantee the apocatastasis, but the problem is that this view is presupposed by Hick's theodicy, not by process

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<sup>35</sup> See J. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall 1983, 3rd ed., pp. 54-56.

<sup>36</sup> D. Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, cit., pp.159-173.

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, see pp. 36-37.

<sup>38</sup> For deepening this issue, see J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, UK: Palgrave MacMillan 2010 (1° ed. 1966). For a critical analysis of Hick's theodicy in English see: AA.VV., *Encountering Evil. Live Options in Theodicy*, S. T. Davis ed., Louisville (Kentucky): Westminster John Knox Press, 2001; Douglas Geivett, *A Critical Evaluation of John Hick's Theodicy*, University Microfilms International, 1985 and *Evil and the Evidence for God. The Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1993; Robert Mesle, *John Hick's Theodicy: a Process Humanist Critique*, Macmillan, Londra 1991; Stanley G. Kane "The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 1975 and "Soul-making Theodicy and Eschatology", *Sophia* 14, n. 2, 1975. In Italian see Sofia Vescovelli, *La teodicea di John Hick. Un'analisi critica*, Brescia: Morcelliana 2019.

theodicy. Griffin notes that Hick has misinterpreted the point, the real questions to be answered are: without the belief in a life after death, is the process theodicy adequate? If an unlimited good cannot be guaranteed, is God justified in creating human beings? Given the fact that few persons have a chance to enjoy a plentiful and realized life, should God not have created persons at all?

In order to reply to Griffin's questions, I intend to divide my argument in two key points: the first regarding the reference to the presence of necessary metaphysical principles in the world; the second concerning the theme of divine happiness and the gap between God's point of view and the human point of view.

### 9.1 THE REFERENCE TO THE PRESENCE OF NECESSARY METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES IN THE WORLD

The process God must comply with some metaphysical necessary principles; according to these principles the possibility of enjoying positive values implies the possibility of suffering negative ones, therefore the conditions which enable us to enjoy complex, intense and harmonious experiences are the same that enable us to undergo great pains. This is a fundamental point in process theodicy, because it underlines that all sufferings in the world are not necessary, rather it is necessary their possibility. If worldly creatures decided to determine themselves in a different way, following the divine initial aim, there would be less evil. Anyways:

«The *possibility* [Griffin's emphasis] of all this evil is necessary *if* [Griffin's emphasis] there was to be the possibility of all the good that has occurred and may occur in the future.»<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, since each creature possesses freedom, namely the inherent power to self-determination and to influence others, conflicts among divergent freedoms which give rise to evil can happen.

The process deity – due to metaphysical necessities and the inner freedom of creatures – has got a persuasive power, he cannot do anything to restore evils occurred other than trying to get the highest possible good from them, promoting new ideal aims for the next stages of the world and luring the sufferer towards her best opportunities, on the basis of her own concrete situation.

Once more time the problem here is that the reference to metaphysical necessities does not resolve the question of the soteriological-individual evil. The fact that these metaphysical principles and their correlations cannot be otherwise does not offer any meaning or sense to atrocious evils suffered by the individual; it simply invites her to accept this state of affair, to cooperate with God in order to improve this condition.

Given that evil is a possibility, that God is doing his best to overcome it, that many human beings suffered and are suffering, the problem of evil concerns also giving a meaning to these atrocious sufferings. Even if we accepted the principle according to which the risk of the emergence of evil in the world is necessarily a possibility, the problem of the sense of it still would remain. The single human being is asking God: "Why me? How could I find a sense in my destructive pains?" and God's answers is: "There was the risk of this possibility. I'm sorry that this happened to you. I suffer with you. But the risk is worth taking". For whom is the risk worth taking? For God and others who enjoy high and complex experiences, despite the sufferings of the less fortunate.

Indeed, according to process view evils in the world are counterbalanced by the presence of intense, harmonious and complex experiences, that is to say that the positive values are worth the risk of the negative ones. Therefore, God is justified in bringing a cosmos out of the primordial chaos, since with his creative act he promoted the enjoyment of ever more complex and positive experiences. In other words, process view claims that, although there are beings suffering horrible pains, the presence of creatures in the world having good and valuable experiences justifies God's creative act in face of all evils occurred.

I do not find this line of reasoning satisfying because it leaves aside the soteriological-individual problem of evil, that remains unredeemed at the level of the personal life of the sufferer.

The problem of the soteriological-individual evil arises from the human experience of absurd pains and injustice, from the need to find a sense for them. This need does not derive from some premises

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<sup>39</sup> D. Griffin, *God, Power and Evil*, cit., p. 294.

inherent to a particular philosophical position or theodicy – which holds a traditional conception of divine omnipotence as unilateral, absolute power to bring about any logically possible state of affair in the world– rather it is embedded in us: we are structurally teleological beings, seeking meaning and value in our life. It is mainly in face of unjust and horrendous evil that this need becomes more pressing and urgent, but a claim to necessary metaphysical principles, to which God must adapt, does not provide a sense for the sufferings undergone by the individual. According to this perspective, she would be merely the other side of the coin, the negative aspect or the side-effect of the creative process. The value of the individual person and the question of her salvation is overshadowed by this metaphysical frame.

## 9.2 DIVINE HAPPINESS AND THE GAP BETWEEN GOD’S POINT OF VIEW AND HUMAN POINT OF VIEW

According to the process position, God judged that the process of creation is worth the risk of all evils that can occur in the world and he is ready to take this risk on his shoulders, but honestly it does not seem to me a great risk to take for him: both in the case of a great amount of positive experiences and in the case of a great amount of sufferings God will be happy.

Indeed, as we have seen above, the divine perfection is not diminished by human evils. Despite all pains and sufferings felt by God, he remains “perfect” in happiness: nobody can be happier than him, there are no evils which can destroy the divine joy, at most they can cast a shadow of tragic sadness on it. Furthermore, God enjoys all the beauty, the harmony and intensity coming from creatures’ positive experiences.

At this point a question arises: even if from the aesthetic divine point of view the creation is worth all evils, could it be said the same for the individual who suffers horrible evils? She cannot share the omniscient divine worldview nor his happiness, she knows only injustice, destructive pain and misery. Probably, from *her* perspective the risk is not worth taking, seeing *her personal* condition and the fact that there is no redemption or salvation; probably many persons would agree with her.

In process Hartshornean theodicy the less fortunate are those who have the misfortune to experience “the dark side of the moon”, they represent an unintentional – although necessarily possible – effect of creation; there is no salvation or a redemptive perspective for them, but simply an invitation to get the best from each situation, no matter how horrible it could be.

Griffin, in his reply to Hick, maintains that God is justified in creating the world in the absence of any eschatological perspective. God could not leave the world in its original state, a mere chaos with very basic and simple actualities, since his purpose is to prompt the creation towards the highest level of beauty, avoiding the genuine evil of triviality and fostering novelty, complexity and intensity. Furthermore, for God would have been impossible to prevent the possibility of the emergence of terrible experiences and wicked human beings (such as Holocaust and Hitler), without preventing at the same time the possibility of the emergence of positive values and marvelous persons, both well and not known (Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi etc.).

This reasoning can be accepted *on the condition that* is admitted a life after death where the individual (especially who has undergone horrible evils) endures as a conscious, active subject and can receive a meaning for her misery, having the opportunity to make positive experiences as well as to find redemption. Given that God cannot exercise a unilateral, absolute power on creatures and that he cannot redeem all the horrendous sufferings endorsed by the individual in this life, a personal existence after death, in which the subject can overcome her own evils, becomes necessary. In this way the pains of the individual person can be redeemed and she can find a sense for her atrocious and unjust life.

In the absence of this kind of eschatological perspective the process Hartshornean view implies the denial of the value and importance of the human individual dignity: what is the destiny of people whose lives are permeated by pains and hardships? Are their sufferings worth the possibility of positive values and marvelous persons? The divine choice to bring about the world can be challenged: God should not have done it, because he knew that there was the possibility of unjust sufferings – which could not be redeemed in a personal afterlife – and this should have refrained him from creating the cosmos. Triviality is a great evil, but probably innocent non-redeemable suffering is the worst evil, even if on the other side there is the enjoyment of great positive values. The simple possibility

of the atrocious suffering of an innocent child seems to be a good reason for not bringing about the world; if there is no redemption at personal level (at least in a *post-mortem* life), there are not positive experiences, beauty, harmony or complexity which can justify evils undergone by this child.

## 10. THE PROBLEM OF GOD'S GOODNESS AND LOVE AND THE CHARGE OF CONSEQUENTIALISM

Against my argument a process theologian could reply that morality is not the chief purpose of God (even if it is very important), as his main aim is to lead the world towards the highest level of beauty. A response to this starts from the process idea that morality is an essential element within the divine goal: there is not beauty without morality, intended as our actualization in such a way to increase the enjoyment of other creatures. The highest contribution which we, as moral beings, can give to God is to take care of others, to develop ourselves in order to maximize their own enjoyment.

At this point a question might arise: when this condition is not satisfied, when the sufferer cannot be moral (in process meaning) because she is annihilated by horrible evils, what kind of contribution can she give to God? What is the meaning of her existence? Let's think of an infant who starves to death among terrible agonies or a person who suffers so atrocious pains to desire only death.

On the other hand, if we shift the focus to God's moral goodness and love, we can ask: what kind of deity is a God whose purpose is not primarily moral? Is he worthy of worship? If in this world the possibility of evil is necessary and the most of human beings actually suffer horrible evils, why does a perfectly moral and loving God not give them the opportunity to redeem their painful lives, at least in a future life? How can this deity be perfectly good and loving if does not guarantee redemption? An all-loving and moral God should be interested in saving every creature, especially those whose life is characterized by atrocious evils.

Nancy Frankenberry charges the process God of not being perfectly good, because he promotes primarily aesthetic value (complexity, intensity and harmony of experience). In her article *Some Problems in Process Theodicy*<sup>40</sup> she argues that the divine aesthetic criteria imply the promotion of a certain amount of discord and conflict to reach novelty; this aesthetic order appears to be indifferent or malevolent towards human good.

Griffin<sup>41</sup> replies to Frankenberry's criticism that process theodicy is non-anthropocentric, non-dualistic and evolutionary therefore it rejects the idea that the world has been designed for human beings. Things do not always work for human good.

In this reply Griffin seems to confirm my criticism against process theodicy: the problem lies exactly in the fact that not all works for human good! I do not mean that humans must be considered those beings who have exclusive value in the world and on whose wellness the world must be organized. The structure of the world is based on aesthetic criteria which not only do not promote human good, but very often are against it; we are at the presence of a God who orders the creation according to aesthetic aims, in which humans are only an element of the composition. The question is that the shadows and the darkness in this picture cannot be modified in an eschatological dimension where the individual endures as a conscious, active subject. God is more interested in promoting beauty in the world, from a general perspective, than in saving creatures: the most important thing for him is to foster the creation towards the most intense, complex and harmonious experiences, no matter if this cause unredeemable pains (at level of the personal experience of the subject) to some creatures.

Process Hartshornean theodicy could ensure God's moral goodness and love if it embraced an eschatological perspective in which individuals have the possibility to redeem themselves and find salvation. Otherwise process theologians should admit that the moral divine goodness and love are consequentialist: God loves his creatures in general, not as individuals, and aims at a global improvement of the beauty in the world, but he cannot do anything for the sufferings of the individual being. On the basis of consequentialism, according to which a deed is right if it produces the best possible result for the largest number of beings, the divine choice of creating a cosmos is justified by its resulting effects – namely the presence in the world of beauty, harmony and the possibility to enjoy

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<sup>40</sup> Nancy Frankenberry, "Some Problems in Process Theodicy", *Religious Studies* 17/2 (June 1981), p. 188.

<sup>41</sup> D. Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, cit., p.203.

positive values – even if, among many enjoying good experiences, there is someone who is horribly hurt by the negative consequences of this decision.

In other words, God's aesthetic aims and his inability to provide the sufferer with an afterlife where she can participate in, make the process deity a deity who works for maximizing the possibility of positive enjoyment for the majority of creatures, while the less fortunate among them are left to their destiny.

Furthermore, Hartshorne defines God's love as sympathetic and responsive: God not only takes care of his creatures, prompting them towards their best opportunities of enjoyment, but he is also able to feel their own feelings. I wonder if this notion is enough to define God and his love as perfect: a relevant aspect of the divine loving attitude should be the soteriological ability to restore the good, to ultimately free us from evil. Indeed, a God that loves each creature should be interested in their personal salvation or, in other terms, if God loved every being in the world, he would be concerned with saving the individual from the evil which hurts her.

But, if God has not the capacity of overcoming evil at the level of the personal existence of the sufferer, could he be named "divine"? How could we define perfect a God unable to save? And, above all, why should the sufferer worship a God who lacks the ability to restore her personal pains?

An adequate theodicy, justifying God in the face of evil, should also give a sense to pointless suffering. Given the presupposition that there is no personal salvation, no *post-mortem* life in which evils can be restored, to state – as Griffin does – that process theodicy is not anthropocentric and does not work for human good is equal to say that individual pains are simply by-products of a certain process and that God has not the power to redeem them within an eschatological perspective. A non-anthropocentric theodicy is however a theodicy, which not only should explain why human beings suffer, but should give them a sense for their sufferings, at least in an eschatological realm in which a personal *post-mortem* life is admitted.

Could we accept the idea that an all-loving God considers the sufferings undergone by the individual a side effect, caused by a world-structure shaped by aesthetic criteria?

## 11. CONCLUSIONS AND POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS

Hartshorne's theodicy is unable to provide an ultimate meaning for the soteriological-individual evil because its main interest is directed towards the overcoming of temporality in the divine memory and of triviality and disharmony in the world.

Indeed, God's creation is conceived in consequentialist terms: despite all evils that the divine creative process caused and will cause to innocent creatures, God is justified for creating a world since he overcame the evil of triviality that characterized the original chaos, bringing beauty and aesthetic values in the universe. Moreover, all pains suffered by the individual simply represent the negative side of the creative process and are counter-balanced by the great joys enjoyed by others. The deity depicted by process theodicy is a God interested in maximizing the good for the majority of beings, while the rest of them, who live in terrible life-conditions, have to accept their destiny as part of the risk of creation.

Thus, process theodicy justifies God in the face of evils at the high price of leaving the soteriological-individual problem of evil unresolved; it gives an explanation for the general presence of evil in the cosmos, but its deity is unable to save his creatures.

Process Hartshornean view does not donate meaning to the personal pains, rather it recognizes the possibility of evil as a metaphysical necessity and explains the reasons why it exists, but this position is unable to indicate a way to solve the question regarding the redemption of evils in an afterlife in which the sufferer can participate as conscious, active subject. In other words, process theodicy does not provide an eschatological basis on which human beings can, at least, found the hope in a better future, where they will have more opportunity to redeem themselves, to contribute to the divine joy in a positive way, finding a sense for their lives.

On the other hand, process theodicy would be more satisfying if it introduced an eschatological personal dimension in its system: it could offer a perspective from which to solve the soteriological-individual problem of evil, finding also a justification for the divine choice to bring about a world despite all evils occurred. A soteriology which includes a personal eschatology is able to justify the divine creative act since evils emerged from this decision can be redeemed in a personal *post-mortem*

existence; the individual with her sufferings is no longer considered just a by-product of the creative process, a side effect that will not have redemption, on the contrary the value and dignity of the life of the sufferer is fully recognized and God is able to provide her an afterlife where find salvation as conscious subject. Furthermore, the presence of an eschatology, containing the endurance of the subject as a conscious ego, avoids a consequentialistic drift and allows process theology to contend the perfection of the divine love. God is able not only to take care of creatures here on earth, but also to save them in an afterlife, donating sense and meaning to their existences; his love is really perfect because shows a threefold aspect: a cherishing care for everything, an everlasting memory that retains anything, a salvific power to overcome evil in the world and in God's experience as well as in the subjective life of the sufferer.

In conclusion I would like to examine some possible criticisms to my position.

- *My argument is circular:*

According to this objection my reasoning is circular. It presupposes a traditional view of the divine omnipotence that entails there are no metaphysical limits to God's power, but only logical limitations (God cannot do squared circles). I charge process God to not be perfectly good and loving because he cannot ensure an afterlife, but this view is presupposed by the traditional position, not by process standpoint. Therefore, I cannot criticize process God for something that, given the process metaphysical framework, is impossible for him to do. Instead, what it is possible to do is to show that the belief in the *possibility* of an existence after death belongs to the core of Whiteheadian-Hartshornean thought<sup>42</sup>, hence a *post-mortem* life is not metaphysically impossible as Hartshorne wrongly assumes.

This criticism is based on a misunderstanding of my argument. I do not contend that, since it is a good thing for humans to have a life after death, then God has to redeem human sufferings in an eschatological dimension, otherwise he would not be perfectly good and loving. Instead I sustain that, given the process idea that there are metaphysical limitations to God, process deity cannot be defined a perfect loving deity since he lacks an essential feature of the religious meaning of the divine love, namely the soteriological ability to save.

Firstly, as I tried to explain in the paragraph devoted to metaphysical confusion, the soteriological request for an afterlife is not a hedonistic or egocentric desire; it cannot be considered identical with a childish whim, according to which if I think that an afterlife life is a good and nice thing, then God must give me what I want. Rather the need for an existence beyond this one is a moral demand for meaning and justice in face of atrocious evils.

Secondly, what I argue is that the absence of a life after death is in contrast with the process definition of God as a deity that perfectly loves and takes care of each single creatures. One of the main traits of the divine love is the soteriological ability to save us: God's love is not limited to taking care of us and feeling our feelings, but it is a redemptive and salvific love, which restores our personal evils. If this soteriological ability is denied, it is not possible to affirm that process God loves each single being in the world in a religious consistent way; the divine love would be more similar to the affection of a friend or fellow with whom we share our emotions and thoughts. Except for the ability to feel and remember all our sensations, there is no difference between the divine love and the human one; I do not find this deity worth of religious worship, at best he deserves our friendship. What makes a big difference between our fondness and God's one is the soteriological ability, since the salvific divine love is the only kind of love that is able to overcome all individual evils. Therefore, I find an inconsistency in the process idea of a perfect loving deity unable to save his creatures. Process God, to deserve the name "God", should be able to save us from evil, if not in this life, at least in a *post-mortem* existence.

In the third place, if we renounce conceiving God's love in soteriological terms, we renounce the essential core of religion, especially according to the Christian view. Christian God's perfect love expresses itself in the person of Christ and in his extreme salvific sacrifice for humanity. Many process theologians admit to be very influenced by Christianity and also that process main conceptions are Christological in their essence. For example, one of the most famous books written by the process thinker John Cobb develops a Christian natural theology on the basis of Whitehead's

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<sup>42</sup> This is what Griffin did in his book *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, cit.

philosophy<sup>43</sup>; moreover Cobb and Griffin, in their book *Process Theology. An Introductory Exposition*, devote one chapter to Jesus Christ and another to the Church<sup>44</sup>; they write:

“[...] Christ has permeated the preceding chapters. What has been said about God is already Christological in two ways. First, as Whitehead recognized, his understanding of God is indebted to the life and insights of Jesus. Second, the creative love of God, insofar as it is incarnate, is [Cobb and Griffin’s emphasis] Christ. What has been said about the world, and especially about human beings, has been said in the light of that Christological doctrine of God.”<sup>45</sup>

In conclusion, God knew he would not have been able to restore individual sufferings but, despite this, he decided to bring about a cosmos. It means God considers sufferings undergone by his creatures merely as a by-product or a side effect of the process of the world. But an all-loving deity who cares each single being should be interested in redeeming their individual evils. The fact that process God is not able to save us in a personal eschatological dimension does not justify him for having chosen to create the world, there are no aesthetic enjoyments that can overbalance the value and the dignity of the individual, especially of those innocents whose lives are destroyed by atrocious pains.

- *The concept of the divine love is misunderstood:*

Someone could argue that my critique is based on a misunderstanding of the concept of the divine love, since I interpret it in Christian terms, as a salvific love which aim is the final salvation of the individual and the ultimate overcoming of evil in the Kingdom of God. This is a mistake, because process theodicy conceives the divine love in a different way, according to which God’s love depends on his omniscience: God possesses a perfect knowledge or “adequacy” to the object known, he knows and retains in his memory each single moment, feeling or aspect of the life of a person; this kind of omniscience makes God able to share and participate in the individual joys and sufferings of every beings. Given this concept of the divine love I cannot charge process God with not being perfectly all-loving since he is unable to save us and to finally defeat evil, simply because the process notion of God’s love does not imply a soteriological and eschatological personal dimension. I confuse two different meanings of “love”, interpreting the process concept of love in terms of the Christian love, therefore the charge of consequentialism cannot be advanced. Moreover, according to the process view correctly understood, God perfectly loves each creature: he shares and responds to their joys and pains, he seeks to foster them towards their best possibilities, he ensures them an objective immortality in his memory, what could he do more?

My reply lies precisely in the observation that the divine love cannot do more: a good father who loves his children does not limit himself to suffer with them, but he does his best to help them to overcome their sufferings. Now the question is: is process God doing his best to help his creatures? If the answer is “Yes”, then we have a God whose power and love is limited within the realm of earthly world, a realm clearly characterized by injustice; a God unable to resolve the problem of the soteriological-individual evil due to the lack of an eschatological and soteriological personal dimension. If God cannot save us from evil, is this deity worth of worship? How could we worship a God unable to ultimately defeat evil? And, above all, if God knew that he would have been unable to redeem personal sufferings, why, despite this, has he decided to create a world? The fact that, according to the process concept of divine love, God is all-loving does not eliminate the problem of the presence of unredeemable injustice in the world. God can do nothing to ultimately defeat personal evils other than retaining them in his memory. As discussed above the notion of an objective immortality in God’s memory does not solve the question, given the process idea that the sense and significance of our life depend on our contribution to divine experience. Furthermore, the reference to the divine overcoming of triviality – defined as an intrinsic evil – does not justify God’s creative act, since the sufferings that emerged from this choice cannot be finally redeemed in a personal afterlife.

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<sup>43</sup> John Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1966.

<sup>44</sup> See J. Cobb and D. Griffin *Process Theodicy. An Introductory exposition*, op. cit., ch. 6 “Jesus Christ” pp. 95-110, and ch. 8 “The Church in Creative Trasformation”, pp. 128-142.

<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, p. 95.

- *The reference to an eschatological dimension is a too vague and relativistic notion:*

My position could be charged with vagueness and relativism: what do I exactly mean with the reference to an eschatological dimension in which sufferings are redeemed and the individual can find a meaning for her life? It is too vague simply pointing out the need for an eschatological end.

I would reply observing that, firstly, the intention of my criticism is not to found an eschatology, but more modestly to show the tension between some concepts in process view that can be solved with the reference to a personal life after death. Secondly, when we deal with eschatology, we are faced with a mystery that leaves room only for speculations. Secondly, when I refer to an eschatological dimension, I mean a state in which the individual has the possibility to amend her mistake and have positive experiences, in order to contribute positively to God's life, finding a meaning for her life. In this eschatological condition evils unjustly suffered are overcome by the infinite good of the final redemption.