

SAGGIO

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CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS OF HORRENDOUS EVIL

A study of the origins of modern atheism often leads to the religious and theological situation in the seventeenth century. Atheists found the arguments for their disbelief in various religious, theological, and philosophical theories which their defenders used against each other.¹ A similar situation, which is not favorable to theism, exists nowadays in the debates regarding the problem of evil. The rationalistic, objective, or global approaches to the problem of evil in the analytical tradition are under attack from other schools and traditions, such as existential philosophy or apophatic as opposed to cataphatic theology.

The existence of evil has always raised serious doubts regarding the belief that the world was created by an almighty, omniscient, and benevolent God who is good to us (loves us). In the analytical philosophy of religion in the 1950s and 1980s, these doubts received a form of logical and evidential argument from evil. The responses were usually based on the instrumental necessity of evils for overall higher goods. Logically, there is no contradiction between a morally perfect God and the existence of evils if God has good reasons for creating the world with such evils. A response to the evidential arguments from evil, which usually have inductive or probabilistic form, is that our knowledge is insufficient for saying that there exist instances of suffering which an omni-perfect being could prevent without, thereby, losing some greater good. All these responses are rationalistic and instrumentalist in their nature, and they presuppose a higher good which somehow justifies the existence of evil and suffering. In addition, they assume that God is a rational, responsible, and morally perfect person.

¹ Cf. M. J. Buckley, *At the Origins of modern Atheism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1987, pp. 38-39.

A more radical criticism arrives from outside. Dewi Z. Phillips argued that the existence of horrendous evil proves that the instrumentalist's solutions are not acceptable, and the concept of a divine moral agent who allows such evils is absurd.² Marilyn M. Adams agrees with Phillips's critique, and she modifies the concept of divine goodness so that it matches higher moral standards regarding the divine action. Dennis Earl argues that Adams's solution is not successful,³ Andrew Gleeson shows that it is not coherent with her criticism of the theoretical theodicies,⁴ and William Placher, who appreciates that Adams is sensitive and «rarely if ever puts a foot wrong» expresses two «worries» regarding her solution.⁵ It appears that Adams's solution is still instrumentalist or theoretical in its essence, and it does not give a satisfactory solution. Some of the recently published papers (by Joshua M. Brown or Sami Pihlström)⁶ are even more critical with respect to the instrumentalist solutions of the problem of evil and to the essentialist concept of an omni-perfect God. Therefore, the difficulty of the most recent propositions is not only to find a coherent solution to the problem of evil but also to defend their own rationalistic base or foundation.

The goal of this paper is to give support to the view that a coherent, rationalistic, or instrumentalist solution is important for solving the problem of evil in general and the problem of horrendous evil in particular. First, we need a brief summary of the debate on the logical and evidential arguments from evil. Then, we will extend it to the argument from horrendous evil. A sketch of a traditional instrumentalist theodicy based on human

² Cf. D. Z. Phillips, *The problem of evil and the problem of God*, SCM Press, London 2014. D. Z. Phillips, *William Hasker's avoidance of the problem of evil and God (or: looking outside the igloo)*, in «International Journal for Philosophy of Religion», n. 62, 2007, p. 34 (33-42).

³ D. Earl, *Divine intimacy and the problem of horrendous evil*, in «International Journal for Philosophy of Religion», 2011, pp. 17–28.

⁴ A. Gleeson, *On Letting Go of Theodicy: Marilyn McCord Adams on God and Evil*, in «Sophia», n. 54, 2015, pp. 1-12.

⁵ W. C. Placher, *An engagement with Marilyn McCord Adams's Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, in «Scottish Journal of Theology», n. 55, 2002 (4), p. 462 (461-467).

⁶ Recently a series of papers have been published on the problem of evil in the «International Journal of Philosophy and Theology», n. 78, 2017 (4-5), and two collections of papers edited by C. Meister and P. K. Moser (*The Cambridge Companion to The Problem of Evil*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017) and C. Meister and J. K. Dew Jr. (*God and the Problem of Evil. Five Views*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove (IL) 2017).

free will and personal development will introduce basic principles and terminology. The division of logical and evidential arguments and arguments from horrendous evil is quite ambiguous because all of them can be stated in terms of a logical formula.⁷ It will be helpful, however, to pass from simple ideas to more complex terminology. An evaluation of Adams's solution and some of the recent criticisms will be helpful in understanding contemporary debates. Overall, it appears that more attention should be paid to completion of a comprehensive theistic account of evil than to use partial solutions against each other.

1. Traditional Problems and Responses

The traditional logical argument from evil can be stated quite simply: If there is evil in the world (which can be hardly doubted), then God is not omnipotent (because he was not able to create a better world), or omniscient (because he did not know how to create a world in a better way), or he is not morally perfect (he did not want to create a better world). A denial or weakening of any of these essential attributes of God implies that there is no such God.⁸ This presupposes a traditional (biblical) Christian concept of God as a personal and necessarily omni-perfect agent (with knowledge, will, and responsibility), which is also a majoritarian concept in the analytical philosophy of religion. God is a personal cause of the universe causally related to the world so that the events of this world somehow affect him, and he can intervene in worldly affairs. In some extreme situations, God can make a miracle. The term «evil» designates the causes of

⁷ A full set of the logical arguments from evil built on various modifications of the premises describes G. Oppy, «Logical Arguments from Evil and Free-Will Defenses» in *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, pp. 45-59 (45-64).

⁸ The classical papers regarding the logical argument from evil: J. L. Mackie, *Evil and Omnipotence* in «Mind», n. 64, 1955, pp. 200-212. Reprint: B. Davies, *Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, pp. 581-591. N. Pike, *Hume on Evil*, in «The Philosophical Review», n. 72, 1963, pp. 180-197. Reprint: M. M. Adams – R. M. Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, p. 38-52.

physical and psychological pain and suffering, and it is, therefore, somehow related to human and animal beings. A brain cancer causing pain and premature death and a decision to rape a woman are examples of evil. Evil is the opposite of the causes of physical and psychological goods, such as the satisfaction of basic biological needs and desires. The reality of evil in this sense is known to every person and its denial, whatever its theoretical justification might be, would not be considered human.

Traditional theodicies emphasize that suffering caused by physical evil often inspires moral goods such as compassion, benevolence, willingness to help, and, sometimes, heroic deeds. More generally, medical or technological progress in the society. Moral goods have a tendency to strengthen the physical goods and diminish the physical evils. Normally, we tend to eliminate the causes of the pain of sentient beings, and, in so doing, not only diminish the natural evils but also make our character morally better. We become better persons. One cannot say, however, that natural evils are not really evil because they can inspire morally good actions.⁹ The natural evil has to be confronted as evil and undesirable in order to fulfill its role. Natural evil has no meaning in itself, but it can be given a positive meaning. An earthquake is a natural event (not good or evil) which becomes evil if it causes suffering and death, and it can achieve a new positive meaning if confronted with humanitarian help and compassion.

The moral evils (such as cruelty, selfishness, and cowardice) become problematic because they can strengthen natural evils. A higher good which explains the existence of moral evils is human free will. In order to be free and virtuous, one needs to have a true opportunity to perform morally bad actions. Human freedom requires the possibility of causing pain and suffering. Since human cognitive abilities are limited (we are not omniscient), even if a person were (subjectively) morally perfect and had the best intentions and strong reasons for doing good actions, it is possible that this person's

⁹ Sami Pihlström accuses theodicies, saying they «fail to adequately recognize the *meaninglessness* of suffering and hence treat suffering human beings (or, by extension, nonhuman sufferers) as mere means to some alleged overall good». S. Pihlström, *Why there should be no argument from evil: remarks on recognition, antitheodicy, and impossible forgiveness*, in «International Journal of Philosophy and Theology», n. 78, 2017 (4-5), pp. 525-526.

actions become causes of pain. Furthermore, even if somebody made morally good decisions, he may not be able to reach the desired results (because he is not omnipotent), and, thus, could still cause (natural) pain to others. There are limits to what we can know and what we can do and, therefore, some evil and suffering are inevitable. We can learn how to overcome our limitations, which is a good thing to be able to do. Some instances of suffering can fail to inspire human free decisions and actions, especially when the subject is not reactive or does not know what to do. We live in a dynamic world which is in constant development and requires our constant attention, learning, and adjustments. Consequently, there always will be some instances of evil around us. The world's dynamic evolution necessarily implies the existence of natural evils and mistaken decisions from which we can learn. God can have good reasons for creating such a dynamic universe with free human individuals. Such a reason is because a dynamic universe is more valuable than a static universe.

In addition, free human beings can intentionally become causes of suffering. The traditional merit-based view of morally relevant freedom implies such a possibility. It is important to emphasize that such human freedom is not only freedom of choosing a course of action, but also the freedom to choose what kind of person one wants to be. Personality is formed over time and needs to be confronted with the presence of actual physical and moral evils to develop moral character. God might theoretically create a free and ethically perfect person who never does something morally wrong, or God might intervene if he is going to choose to do something wrong. However, this freedom would then have another meaning. Self-determination without divine coercion is a crucial element of human development and self-creation. It is one of the basic values which make life worth living. This sort of creative freedom is also crucial for human interpersonal relations and for a personal relationship with God. If a free person could never really decide against God, because a refusal of God and his commandments is morally wrong, a friendly and loving relationship with God would also be impossible. Put simply,

autonomous personal development in a dynamic, evolutionary universe necessitates the existence of physical and moral evils, and a certain hiddenness of God, in order to have and develop a personal life and relationships with other people and with God.¹⁰ This sort of free will theodicy and soul-making theodicy is used as a response to the logical argument from evil.¹¹

There is a practical, psychological, and religious dimension usually added to this kind of rationalistic theodicy. A suffering person needs a practical solution and psychological support before he or she tries to understand what happened and why God allowed it. In psychology, religion and religious practices are usually very helpful in the healing process following the experience of so-called stressors which contribute to depression, anxiety, insomnia, and cardiovascular diseases. Even though the main focus is on resilience where people learn how to overcome the bad consequences of stressors, there also are some possible benefits brought about by extreme stress related to post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth is defined as a «positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances»¹². Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun emphasize that from the paradoxical element of loss a significant psychological change can emerge: «The individual has not only survived, but has experienced changes that are viewed as important, and that go beyond what was the previous status quo. Post-traumatic growth is not simply a return to base line – it is an experience of improvement that for some persons is deeply

¹⁰ Peter van Inwagen emphasized the importance of divine hiddenness in his eighth lecture: P. van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil. The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St Andrews in 2003*. Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 135-151. Robert Oakes explains that there are also stronger reasons for the hiddenness of God emerging from consideration of life and death questions. Inspired by Moses's dialogue with God (Ex 33,18), he thinks that we might not survive full divine manifestation in this life. R. Oakes, *Life, death, and the hiddenness of God*, in «International Journal for Philosophy of Religion», n. 64, 2008, pp. 155-160.

¹¹ G. Oppy agrees that Mackie's logical argument is «killed» by free-will theodicy, but there are still others which need to be taken into consideration. (Cf. G. Oppy, «Logical Arguments from Evil and Free-Will Defenses» in *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, p. 45).

¹² R. G. Tedeschi – L. G. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence*, in «Psychological Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory», n. 15, 2004 (1), p. 1 (1-18).

profound.»¹³ A struggle with grief can radically restructure one's entire perspective on human life and help in making difficult decisions. According to Jonathan Haidt, religion can contribute to life-optimism by providing inspirational stories and positive interpretations of loss and crisis while providing social support through religious communities and relationship with God.¹⁴ In the context of great suffering and great losses, attention to possible growth should not be at the expense of a primary empathy for people in pain. The causes of suffering and suffering itself did not become good.

To summarize, a response to the problem of evil has two qualitatively different aspects: a theoretical theodicy and a more immediate help, consisting of practical, psychological, and religious aids in dealing with painful consequences of evil. The best theoretical theodicy seems to be a free will developmental and personality-making theodicy which removes the contradiction between a perfect God and the existence of evil and thus solves the problem of the traditional logical argument from evil.¹⁵ A theoretical theodicy does not deny that evil exists or that moral evil is justified by the existence of a free will.¹⁶

Evidential Problem of Evil

¹³ R. G. Tedeschi – L. G. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence*, in «Psychological Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory», n. 15, 2004 (1), p. 4.

¹⁴ J. Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. Basic Books, New York 2006, p. 149. See also J.F. O'Rourke, B. A. Tallman, E. M. Altmaier, *Measuring posttraumatic changes in spirituality/religiosity*, in «Mental Health, Religion, and Culture», n. 11, 2008 (7), pp. 719-728.

¹⁵ An overall summary of the recent theodicies inspired by A. Plantinga: M. Spišiaková, *Zlo v Božom stvorení: Riešenie problému zla v analytickej filozofii náboženstva*, Rhetos, Warszawa 2012. About the importance of freedom in the evolutionary context: R. Kišoňová, «K porozumeniu slobody v evolučnej ontológii», in *Porozumenie slobody*. Filozofická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity, Trnava 2010, pp. 85-105.

¹⁶ Some authors instead of an explanation of the existence of evil talk about its justification which does not seem to be the same. (Cf. A. AGUTI, *Animal suffering as a challenge to theistic theodicy*, in: «International Journal of Philosophy and Theology», n. 78, 2017 (4-5), p. 498.)

The evidential arguments from evil, such as those proposed by William Rowe,¹⁷ start with the premise that there are instances of apparently gratuitous or useless suffering which an omni-perfect God could have prevented. Particularly, intense pain of animals, which do not have a free will, seems to have no purpose in nature. Since we have a good grasp of the world-order, and we do not see any purpose for some painful instances, it is highly probable that there are instances of genuine evil and, therefore, no omni-perfect God.

Responses usually undermine the various aspects of these premises. For instance, (1) the pain of an animal is not so intense as human suffering because they do not have conscious self-awareness. They do not really suffer. (2) Our knowledge is not sufficient for saying whether there are instances of the genuine evil of this kind.¹⁸ (3) Animal pain is important for the natural order and evolution in nature, and it is also important for human society and individuals when we try to diminish their pain. Andrea Aguti briefly summarizes some well-known responses: The «argument, supported by P. van Inwagen and R. Swinburne, considers animal suffering as an inevitable outcome of the regularity of physical laws that allow the emergence of life in the world and some goods related to life itself, and indeed as aimed at the development of the latter»¹⁹. The life of animals depends on the natural laws, and animal's feeling of pain and pleasure is an indispensable component of the evolutionary process. This is due to the biological connections which exist between the neurochemical pathways and the perception of pain and pleasure. Swinburne emphasizes that animal pain enables them to know the world better and provides an opportunity for compassion.²⁰ Without animal suffering some important

¹⁷ William Rowe developed a variety of evidential arguments from evil: W. Rowe, *The problem of Evil and Varieties of Atheism*, in «American Philosophical Quarterly», n. 16, 1979, p. 335-341. Reprint: M. M. Adams – R. M. Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, p. 126-137.

¹⁸ Cf. W. P. Alston, *The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition*, in «Philosophical Perspectives», n. 5, «Philosophy of Religion», 1991, p. 30 (29-67).

¹⁹ A. Aguti, *Animal suffering as a challenge to theistic theodicy*, in «International Journal of Philosophy and Theology», n. 78, 2017 (4-5), p. 501 (498-510).

²⁰ Cf. R. Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Oxford 1998, p. 190, 217.

goods in animal and human life would not be possible. Nevertheless, Aguti is not convinced because

there is no contradiction in thinking that a good and omnipotent God could create a world in which the presence of higher-level sentient creatures does not imply the existence of natural evils; indeed, it is even more rational to think so. The story of Genesis and the Augustinian doctrine of original sin explicitly suggests the possibility of such a world that must not be confused with the best possible world. The notion of the world without any kind of suffering makes sense, whereas the notion of the best possible world is meaningless.²¹

He concludes, «it seems to me, the assumption that an omnipotent and perfectly good God has the power and the will to create a world where there is no shadow of evil cannot easily be removed from theistic theodicy»²². So natural evil could be absent in divine creation. He continues, «It is also true that the existence of certain good depends on that of certain evils, but it is not always true, because if it were, we should get to the questionable conclusion that the existence of the good depends necessarily on evil»²³. The skeptical response (by W. Rowe) that we do not know if genuine evil exists is not acceptable for Aguti because it presupposes that God has some unknowable reasons for allowing some evils which can compromise responses to other important issues.

Aguti seems to be right in denying the existence of unknowable reasons and in affirming conceivability of a world without pain which is different from the concept of the best possible world. The problem of his position is that it is reasonable to think that the evolution of animals within a set of fixed laws requires natural evils (together with a feeling of pleasure and pain). It seems inconceivable that there is a world in development with sentient creatures and without pain. The book of *Genesis* does not give a description of an evolutionary world with human beings who gradually emerge after millions of years

²¹ A. Aguti, *Animal suffering as a challenge to theistic theodicy*, p. 505-506.

²² A. Aguti, *Animal suffering as a challenge to theistic theodicy*, p. 506.

²³ A. Aguti, *Animal suffering as a challenge to theistic theodicy*, p. 506.

of evolution and learn how the universe works. It does not mean that all goods require some evil, but some evils are necessary for higher goods. It is impossible to determine the right amount of pain and pleasure because the increase of the intensity and quantity of pain accelerates the evolutionary processes, and we have no scale to measure it.

Joshua M. Brown suggests that the best response to the evidentialist argument is a return to negative (apophatic) theology.²⁴ We should abandon the concept of an omni-perfect God and accept divine simplicity and unknowability. If the essence of God is unknown to us, the evidential argument loses its strength. From his perspective, the evidentialist argument is an argument against the concept of an omni-perfect God and not against the existence of God. Brown believes that the classical arguments for the existence of God support his conception.

It is true that the traditional arguments, such as Thomas's five ways, aimed at such a mysterious concept of God. Each one of the five ways concludes with «what we, or Christians in general, call or understand being» God. The problem is that negative theology takes us back to the criticism raised by David Hume and Immanuel Kant against such arguments and especially against the classical concept of God. The contemporary arguments which respond to their criticisms, such as the arguments of the best explanation or the modal arguments, do not support negative (apophatic) theology, but rather the concept of an omni-perfect God which Brown refuses. It should also be noted that the essentialist account of divine properties, which Brown refuses, does not give us a complete account of what divine properties are. For instance, the meaning of divine knowledge of the future and the meaning of divine moral perfection is still discussed. Instead of refusing entire theodicy (and philosophical theology), it might be better to try to solve this particular difficulty and to contribute to the discussion. An apophatic theology has to face the fact that the unknowability of God cannot be proven, only assumed. This assumption seems to be wrong because it stops (for no good reason)

²⁴ J. M. Brown, *An apophatic response to the evidential argument from evil*, in «International Journal of Philosophy and Theology», n. 78, 2017 (4-5), p. 487 (485-497).

searching for an explanation of the nature of God, instead of trying to achieve new developments in knowing God.

To conclude, a synthesis of the free will and soul-making theodicy with emphasis on the dynamic development (evolution) of the world and the moral development of human individuals and human society as a whole, provide a reasonable explanation as to why an omni-perfect God allows physical and moral evils. The psychological and religious investigation gives us a practical and emotional guide on how to deal with human pain and suffering in everyday, ordinary life. The psychological and pastoral (theological) ways of dealing with evil and its consequences are in continuous development and, they are included in the traditional theodicy.

There are two presuppositions in this instrumentalist theodicy which can become problematic. First, it presupposes human free will. Evolutionary and neuroscientific theories tend to eliminate the traditional concept of libertarian freedom and merit-based responsibility. Yet, the process of self-creation, moral development, and human dignity are still some of the most important values in human life, upon which traditional theodicy is based. Second, some theodicies tend to ascribe all responsibility for human destiny to human free decisions and actions so that God appears to be out of the picture when talking about the causes of pain and suffering. In the traditional free will theodicy, God is taking responsibility for the existence of the universe, which is in constant development, and for the fact that human persons have free will. Evil and suffering are inserted into a framework of human life which, overall, is good, and people are able to cope with the evil and suffering which they encounter. The problem is that the actual suffering can be so severe, and human development so far behind, that evil can cause a complete destruction of the human capacities needed to overcome evil and of all hopes of living a meaningful life. Such radical evils are called horrendous evils or horrors.

2. The Defeat of the Horrendous Evil

Contemporary debates on the argument from horrendous evil employ a more specific terminology in which two concepts are crucial: The concept of *horrendous* evil and the concept of a *defeat* of horrendous evil. The defeat means that an evil state is not only balanced off by the good of the whole (by human effort or by God), but one may be thankful for the very existence of that evil.²⁵ Horrendous evil is more radical than ordinary evils. Adams defines horrendous evils as «evils the participation (the doing or suffering) of which constitute *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) have positive meaning for him/her on the whole.»²⁶ Horrors are *prima facie* life-ruinous evils. The value of an individual as a person is degraded to a subhuman value so that not only the overall meaning appears to be lost, but also the person's meaning-making capacities are not able to give any meaning to this life. The victim of horrendous evil perceives this evil as infeasible.

The new terminology brings together a theoretical explanation and the psychological states of thankfulness and hopelessness. Adams explains, «the evil can be defeated if it can be included in some good-enough whole to which it bears a relation of organic (rather than merely additive) unity.»²⁷ She also adds that a defeated evil state of affairs is, in the end, considered a valuable (good) state of affairs. Usually, it is presupposed that horrendous evil cannot be defeated by natural means because there is no state of affairs in the world which would turn a destroyed human life into something good so that we would be thankful for the destruction. Natural and moral goods are not

²⁵ The concept of defeat introduced Roderick M. Chisholm (1916 – 1999): «It is one thing to say that the goodness – the intrinsic goodness – of a certain situation is balanced off by means of some other situation; and it is quite another thing to say that the goodness of a certain situation is defeated by means of some other situation.» R. M. Chisholm, «The Defeat of Good and Evil», in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, n. 42, 1968-1969, p. 21 (21-38). The defeat means that evil is not only balanced off by the good of the whole, but «we may well be thankful for the every presence of the part that is bad». R. M. Chisholm, «The Defeat of Good and Evil», p. 31.

²⁶ M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors. The Coherence of Christology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 32. The same definition in M. M. Adams, *Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God*, Cornell University Press, London 1999, p. 26.

²⁷ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God*, Cornell University Press, London 1999, p. 28.

enough. If God is perfectly good and the omnipotent creator of the world, he would be a natural defeater of these kinds of evil.

The problem of evil becomes more subjective and conditioned by free will because one might refute the overall good state and refuse to be thankful. In order to know that the value of a state of affairs is indefeasible, one needs to know that there is no other state of affairs which would defeat it. The victim of horrendous evil believes that there is no overall good state which would defeat the terrible state in which he or she is.

In the free will theodicy, it is a good thing and a moral obligation to provide practical, psychological, and religious help to heal the terrible physical and psychological consequences of horrendous evil inasmuch as we can. The victim might be grateful for the help and perhaps be able to give new meaning to his life but might not be grateful for the horrible experience. According to free will theodicy, this means that we need to do everything to avoid similar situations in order to create a safe society, and we need to increase our effort to better understand human psychology and develop new methods of helping the victims. Similarly, as we learn how to deal with natural disasters, we learn how to deal with always more complex practical and psychological problems. We do our best to prevent and «balance off» horrendous evil.

The question is how God defeats horrors, and why God allows such experiences in the first place. The expected explanation should be theological, and it should be an extension of the previous metaphysical and psychological responses to physical and moral evil. We have several counter arguments against such a project that accuse an omnipotent God of indecency and question the divine moral perfection which permits such a destructive evil.

William Placher, for instance, raises two objections to rationalistic theodicies. First, «they [many Anglo-American philosophers of religion] often defend an abstract philosophical theism which I think has quite different implication from Christianity or

[...] from any other major world religion»²⁸. Second, against Richard Swinburne he says the following:

When Richard Swinburne, for instance, says that the cries of a person screaming in pain may provide the occasion for someone who comes to his or her aid to manifest generosity and compassion, he makes a valid enough point. But when he adds that, besides, the person's pain may not be 'nearly as great' as the scream 'might suggest' [...], I guess he is right, but it seems somehow an indecent thing to say.²⁹

Placher's point is that a theoretical explanation, even though it might be coherent and meaningful, is not enough. Swinburne fails to recognize the gravity of the situation (suffering). Placher is right that usually something more than an explanation is necessary. If a child is burning, for instance, an immediate action is necessary. Then, psychological aid follows which presupposes love and empathy with the victim. Premature explanation without due empathy and help would be indecent. A theory which explains how one should approach a victim of horrendous evil, and why God would allow such a horrific event is being discussed later.

Dewi Z. Phillips is more radical in his critique. He argues that horrors reduce the idea that God had instrumental reasons for allowing horrors (he did «what he had to do») to absurdity. He protests against two ideas. The first idea is that the end justifies the means: «'Morally, means and ends are answerable to the demands of decency' and 'not simply assessed in terms of their efficacy in attaining the ends'»³⁰ It is morally indecent for an agent to choose horror as a means, even though it may theoretically make sense.³¹ Second, Phillips also thinks that it is a conceptual mistake to understand God as an agent

²⁸ W. C. Placher, *An engagement with Marilyn McCord Adams's Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, in «Scottish Journal of Theology», n. 55, 2002 (4), p. 461 (461-467).

²⁹ W. C. Placher, *An engagement with Marilyn McCord Adams's Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, in «Scottish Journal of Theology», n. 55, 2002 (4), p. 461.

³⁰ D. Z. Phillips, *The problem of evil and the problem of God*, SCM Press, London 2014, p. 44–46. Cf. M. M. Adams, *Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation, and the Problem of Evil*, in «Sophia», n. 52, 2013 (1), p. 14 (7-26).

³¹ D. Z. Phillips, *William Hasker's avoidance of the problem of evil and God (or: looking outside the igloo)*, in «International Journal for Philosophy of Religion», n. 62, 2007, p. 38.

who can act in our world. God is love which does not intervene in the world. According to him, some theodicies of the analytical philosophy of religion show how ridiculous it is to suppose that any such personal divine agent exists.³²

Phillips's emphasis on love does not seem to contradict the previous theodicy. A loving relationship between omni-perfect God and a victim of evil can be a final solution to the problem of horrendous evil, and it can be a goal of human life in general. In Phillips's theory, however, it is not clear what kind of love it is which allows such devastating evils. What is stopping God's love from acting, and how does divine love defeat evils? We are left with a mystery. But how can we prove that the reference to a mystery is the best solution? What if there is a comprehensive solution? In the instrumentalist theodicy, we can see some reasons for allowing evil, which might not be sufficient, but it does not mean that they are not true or indecent. Indecency would mean that these reasons are said to a suffering person without love and/or empathy and psychologically at a wrong time (in the time of suffering).

Adams's Theological Solution

Marilyn M. Adams says that the traditional solutions, which she calls generic or global, could explain the existence of evils only «by applying their general reasons-why to particular cases of horrendous suffering»³³. Nevertheless, knowledge of the reasons fails to make the life of victims worthwhile again.³⁴ She explains:

Suppose for the sake of argument that horrendous evil could be included in maximally perfect world orders; its being partially constitutive of such an order would assign it that generic and global

³² D. Z. Phillips, *William Hasker's avoidance of the problem of evil and God*, p. 35.

³³ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, in «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society. Supplemental Volume», n. 63, 1989, p. 302 (297-310).

³⁴ Adams thinks that instrumental explanations make it even worse, since if we allow that God «visits» perpetrators with horrendous evils because they deserve them, she asks, would not this thought «provide one more reason to expect human life to

positive meaning. But would knowledge of such a fact, defeat for a mother the *prima facie* reason provided by her cannibalism of her own infant, to wish that she had never been born?³⁵

In other words «Would the fact that God permitted horrors because they were constitutive means to His and of global perfection [...] make the participant's life more tolerable, more worth living for him/her?»³⁶ Instead of reasons, love and intimacy with a loving person should be the right solution:

The two-year old heart patient is convinced of its mother's love, not by her cognitively inaccessible reasons, but by her intimate care and presence through its painful experience. The story of Job suggest something similar [...]: God does not give Job His reasons-why, and implies that Job isn't smart enough to grasp them; rather Job is lectured on the extent of Divine power, and sees God's goodness face to face!³⁷

Knowledge of the reasons for allowing evils is not as important as God's close presence. Adams says that «Standard generic and global solutions have for the most part tried to operate within the territory common to believer and unbeliever, within the confines of religion-neutral value theory»³⁸. For Christians, it is necessary to use the concept of God, especially of his divine goodness in terms of a value theory, in order to reach a more personal solution of the problem of horrendous evil. Instrumentalist theodicies imply a sort of utilitarian ethics or quasi-juridical ethics of right or justified actions in which it is not even clear whether God is good to us or evil (cruel). Adams suggests virtue ethics as a better candidate for understanding divine goodness. The crucial difference is that God *is* good, not that he acts for a good reason. God has no obligation to act based on reason. The biblical religions teach that God will be good to us; he is «for

be a nightmare?»(M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, p. 303.) If God used horrendous evils as a means to something good, nobody would willingly enter a human life «from behind the veil of ignorance» (without knowing which position they would occupy). (M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, p. 304.)

³⁵ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, p. 302.

³⁶ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, p. 303.

³⁷ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, pp. 305-306.

³⁸ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, p. 309.

us». Christ preached about divine intention and the willingness to heal suffering people (not about metaphysical or ethical necessities). Divine goodness in relation to suffering persons follows the «logic of compensation» which means that all horrors will be defeated later by a divine compensation.

God could defeat horrors within the framework of the universe as a whole and also within the context of the horror participant's own life.³⁹ It could happen in three stages: (1) «Establishing a relation of organic unity between the person's horror-participation and his/her intimate, personal, and overall beatific relationship with God», (2) «healing and otherwise enabling the horror-participant's meaning-making capacities so that s/he can recognize and appropriate some of the positive significance laid down in Stage I», (3) «recreating our relation to the material world so that we are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors»⁴⁰. Intimacy with God in the first stage requires a divine vulnerability to horrors and solidarity with humans who participate in horror.⁴¹ A victim can establish an intimate relationship with Christ because he lived in our human conditions and was a horror participant. Christ was betrayed, denied, degraded, and socially uprooted by his crucifixion.⁴² It was not in his human power to take his life back again. The second and third stage, for most human horror participants, will occur *post-mortem*.⁴³

Adams is even more specific by showing us three ways that horrors could be integrated into a personal relationship with God, and how God could inject positive value into a horror participant's life. First, it can be done through sympathetic or mystical identification with Christ. In the sympathetic identification, the victim experiences similar

³⁹ M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors. The Coherence of Christology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 66.

⁴⁰ ADAMS, M. M., *Christ and Horrors*, p. 66.

⁴¹ Intimacy with God presupposes divine protection and triple existential miraculous transformation: «The defeat of horrors requires of God multiple exercise of supernatural power: at Stage I, the miracle of Incarnation; at Stage II, the miracles of life after death and of psycho-spiritual healing; at Stage III, the miracle of environmental transformation, and of rendering our bodies invulnerable to disease, atrophy, and decay.» M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, p. 77.

⁴² M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, pp. 68-69.

⁴³ M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, p. 72.

pains as Christ («similarity enables each to know what it is like for the other»⁴⁴.) In the mystical identification, the participants share Christ's own pain. Second, God will express his divine thanks to each victim of horrendous evil saying: «Thank you for all your suffering.»⁴⁵ This will bring full and unending joy to the victims which is incommensurable with the evil of their past life. Third, horrendous evil mediates a vision into the inner life of God: «perhaps our deepest suffering as much as our highest joys may themselves be direct visions into the inner life of God, imperfect but somehow less obscure in proportion to their intensity.»⁴⁶ From the *post-mortem* perspective (face to face with God), one would not wish away this horrendous experience, and the reasons why it happened will not be necessary.

Adams takes a more controversial step when she defends a universal salvation under which the perpetrators of evils will also be saved. Again, it could happen in three steps:

First, God must identify with their participation in horrors and thereby catch up their horror participation into the fabric of their relationship with God. Second, God will have to heal and teach them how to appropriate some of the positive meanings such divine identification affords. Third, for them to be finally free, God will have to permanently replace them in an environment where they are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors.⁴⁷

Whether one is a horror perpetrator or victim will make a big difference to the rehabilitation and to the new positive meaning. The goal is not retributive but curative.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, p. 307.

⁴⁵ M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, p. 308.

⁴⁶ M. M. Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, p. 308.

⁴⁷ M. M. Adams, *Horrors in theological context*, in «Scottish Journal of Theology», n. 55, 2002 (4), p. 476 (468-479).

⁴⁸ «Since the cure for horrors is the making of positive meaning, and the restoration to the horror participant of the capacity to make positive meanings; and since the process of letting go of the old and groping towards the new is and can be painful process, all horror participants can expect to undergo painful rehabilitation. But whether one is a horror perpetrator or victim will make a

Even though Adams explicitly refuses the traditional rationalistic approach, her solution supplements the free will theodicy quite well. An omni-perfect God has the most perfect conceivable properties (based on the theology of the most perfect being), and his moral perfection should also be conceived according to the highest standard that we know. We only need to change Adams's words like «instead of reasons» and use «in addition to reasons». Believers trust God not only because they love him and God loves them, but also because they understand that God knows what happened and why some things had to happen. God is not a reckless agent who would do unsound things. An irrational agent cannot be trusted, even if we loved that agent. Children and/or adults would never trust their parents if they knew they acted without good reasons. This is why abandoning the instrumentalist theodicy does not seem a good idea. We just need to open it to interpersonal notions like trust, love, and intimacy and explain these notions better in relation to divine moral perfection.

Adams's theory is not without difficulties. Dennis Earl argues that Adams's conception of the intimacy with God fails to solve the problem of the victims of the horrendous evil.⁴⁹ First, it is not clear how one can identify oneself with Christ if horrendous evils are so different from crucifixion. «The cases simply are not similar, except insofar as they both involve tremendous suffering, and they both arguably are cases of horrendous evil.»⁵⁰ Second, Adams's suggestion that God's special gratitude can help us gain a new understanding that this suffering had a special place in fulfilling global goods, is not, according to Earl, sufficient for defeating horrendous evils. Third, Adams's suggestion that a participant in horrendous evil gains a new look into the inner being of God is not enough to produce a defeat of horrendous evil.

big difference to the concrete steps and stages of rehabilitation, as well as to particular shape of the positive meaning that can be made.» M. M. Adams, *Horrors in theological context*, p. 476.

⁴⁹ D. Earl, *Divine intimacy and the problem of horrendous evil*, in «International Journal for Philosophy of Religion», n. 69, 2011 (1), pp. 17.28.

⁵⁰ D. Earl, *Divine intimacy and the problem of horrendous evil*, p. 19.

If there is any solution to the problem of horrendous evil, it can only be through intimacy with God, which brings healing, new knowledge, and a new vision to each victim. All three of these preceding qualities seem essential for giving a new meaning to the life of a victim. Adams's intuition might just need a further elaboration. Adams is aware of a «conceptual under-development» of her theory and acknowledges that «the contention that God suffered in Christ or that one person can experience another's pain requires detailed analysis and articulation in metaphysics and philosophy of mind.»⁵¹

Earl points to a further difficulty regarding the perpetrators of evil which will require not only an elaboration, but also some adjustments. First, in Adams's theodicy all participants (victims and perpetrators) in horrendous evils will receive the same quality intimacy with God: «[...] if all of us receive the same incommensurate good, it appears that all of our lives are equally worth living, and they are all lives that are good – the divine intimacy outweighs everything else, whether good or bad.»⁵² Second, the lives of people who did not participate in the horrors would be worse than the lives of the perpetrators of the horrors:

For the intimacy in question either is granted to everyone, in which case the intimacy is nothing unique by way of being the source of a possible answer to the problem, or it is granted only to the participants in horrendous evils, in which case the rest of us wind up with lives worse than a moral monster, and also worse than a sufferer of horrendous evils. Neither option solves the problem plausibly.⁵³

The perpetrators of evil will experience the initial intimacy with God through divine forgiveness and the victims through divine gratitude; the final state of both will be in the end the same. Ordinary people will never get such intimate divine forgiveness and gratitude. The horrors might become, therefore, desirable in order to reach a better *post-mortem* state. William C. Placher, who agrees with Adams in regard to a grand

⁵¹ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous evils and the goodness of God*, p. 310.

⁵² D. Earl, *Divine intimacy and the problem of horrendous evil*, p. 27.

⁵³ D. Earl, *Divine intimacy and the problem of horrendous evil*, p. 27.

reconciliation of all, also points out the same problem with the victims and perpetrators: «I worry that Adams goes too far here in the direction of seeing everyone as a victim»⁵⁴. The victims might not be interested in such reconciliation (as illustrated by Ivan in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*). Put simply, more justice is expected in God's defeat of all evils. Adams's response is that the perpetrators will suffer much more in the initial process of healing and restructuring the meaning of their lives, but the final state is not a matter of their choice.

The question is how to come to a better explanation of the *post-mortem* state. What is the role of human free will and rationality (or objectivity), which is usually associated with justice? God can restore or heal the victim's meaning-making abilities without the participant's approval or a free assent. We do something similar when we try to save somebody's life without his or her approval. The question is whether the healed persons will want to give new meanings to their lives if they see that they have the same intimate relationship with God as the perpetrators of horrors. All participants are already able to recognize and appropriate the new meaning which would defeat the evils they encountered in their personal lives. According to Adams, the individuals involved must recognize and appropriate at least some of the positive meanings,⁵⁵ as a consequence of which, everybody will be saved by God.

At this point, the free will theodicy might be helpful. After being healed by God, everybody somehow chooses his own destiny and his own relationship with God. The degree of a later *post-mortem* intimacy and happiness with God will reflect personal choices in the previous life and overall personal growth. The healed perpetrators objectively understand their past life, and they accordingly choose a different relationship with God than the victims. The victims of horrendous evils will have a more intimate and happy relationship with God, which will also be compensatory, because their pain

⁵⁴ PLACHER, William C., An engagement with Marilyn McCord Adams's *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. In *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 55, 2002, 4, p. 466 (461–467).

⁵⁵ M. M. Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, Ithaca (N.Y.), Cornell University Press, London 1999, s. 81.

brought them closer to the suffering of the mediator of the healing (Christ). The victims of evils will remain in a much closer relationship with Christ than the perpetrators of evils.

Such an extended free will approach is open to the existence of a «mild» hell as one of the ways God respects human free agency. The hell is «mild» because it is preferable to non-existence. Adams is right that taking horrendous vengeance for the horrendous crimes would multiply the victory of evil. But the different degrees in the relationship with God is a question of fairness and objectivity, not vengeance. Some victims or perpetrators might refuse to give a positive overall meaning to their personal lives. The question is why somebody would (after being healed and after reaching a new understanding) refute God's overall solution for humanity. Even the perpetrators would understand the basic value of their life, so they would reasonably choose their existence, even though it could be in isolation and in an unhappy state of mind. If God respects human freedom so much that he allows horrendous evils to happen to his beloved creatures, it seems also possible that he will respect human will, as well, after we die.

Thomas Jay Oord sheds some light on why God would respect human freedom to such a degree. Oord suggests that «God necessarily gives freedom, agency, and law-like regularities to creation. The result is the bold but helpful claim that God *cannot* unilaterally prevent genuine evil»⁵⁶. Oord interprets *kenosis* (Greek), or self-giving, as an essential property of God. God retains control over the world, but his love, with which he created the world, restricts his powers in other respects. If somebody says that God could intervene in the times of horrors against the will of their perpetrators, he is affirming the logical priority of the divine will over God's self-giving love. Such a unilateral action would contradict God's essential self-giving love without conditions. God, in this model, can inspire people with his love, and he can occasionally perform a miracle. Biblical miracles do not seem to happen unilaterally against somebody's will. Even though this theory requires a further elaboration, it illustrates well how strong God's love is towards

⁵⁶ T. J. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove (IL) 2015, p. 89.

his creation, especially towards free human beings; it could be an additional element to the traditional free will theodicy.

Sami Pihlström suggested recently that all this theodicy/antitheodicy debate should be abandoned «in order to appropriately acknowledge the real evil and suffering people have to experience in their lives»⁵⁷. He emphasizes forgiveness which «is needed and indeed possible only when there is no excuse available and the offense or misdeed cannot be forgotten, either»⁵⁸. As soon as reasons are given as to why we should forgive, the forgiveness collapses into excusing, clemency, or reconciliation, and the process of healing might be stopped.

Pihlström's requirement of a transcendental and completely unreasonable forgiveness does not seem right. Why wouldn't a loving intimacy, a new understanding, and reconciliation be enough for healing? It is true that forgiveness in a deeper sense cannot be forced, or ordered, or reasoned out. But a voluntary reconciliation does not seem to diminish «the [previous] wickedness of the wicked person» or imply that «intellectual comprehension takes the place of forgiveness and renders forgiveness useless»⁵⁹. It is true that if there wasn't traditional free will, morally bad decisions might be explained by «mechanism, motives, previous histories, and influences»⁶⁰. Free will theodicy, however, does not have such a strongly deterministic conception of freedom. Morally wrong decisions are excused neither by explaining the mechanisms of the mind, nor by the divine creative act (his love for free persons), nor divine love without conditions.

The radical divisions between various theodicies or defenses of theism do not seem so radical as to abandon the traditional rationalistic and objective explanation of the existence of evil. We have a coherent explanation of why evil exists, and we have

⁵⁷ S. Pihlström, *Why there should be no argument from evil: remarks on recognition, antitheodicy, and impossible forgiveness*, in «International Journal of Philosophy and Theology», n. 78, 2017 (4-5), p. 525 (523-536).

⁵⁸ S. Pihlström, *Why there should be no argument from evil*, p. 529.

⁵⁹ S. Pihlström, *Why there should be no argument from evil*, p. 530.

⁶⁰ Cf. S. Pihlström, *Why there should be no argument from evil*, p. 530.

developed relatively good existential (practical, psychological, religious) approaches which are very helpful in dealing with many everyday evils. The fact that these theories and practices are not complete and can be still improved, especially in regard to horrendous evils, is one of the things that make human life worthy of living.

Conclusion

The traditional philosophical solutions of the problem of natural and moral evil in the context of the analytical philosophy of religion of the last few decades show that in principle there is no contradiction between the existence of natural and moral evils and the existence of a morally perfect creator. In the theistic conception, the world is a place for overcoming natural and moral evils; a place in which evil inspires and motivates the dynamic development of human society and of each individual. Psychological research confirms this traditional insight. God sometimes wants us to make more radical changes so that a new meaning of life and a new lifestyle can emerge. In many traumatic situations, it is possible, with a sufficient level of interpretative optimism and openness to new things and with the empathy and assistance of others, to transform the state of traumatic experience into post-traumatic growth. The evidential problem of evil raises the question of the quantity and intensity of evil in the world. It appears that God might achieve similar goals with less pain. The problem is that we do not know the world and the intentions of the creator well enough to determine if there is evil enough for the dynamic development of the world and humanity. Usually, more painful and traumatic situations tend to accelerate development and force us to take immediate actions. This is how the world is designed and created.

The possibility of extreme horrendous evils raises new concerns because they can destroy basic human values and the meaning-making capacities of their victims. There is *prima facie* no possible world in which this evil can be humanly defeated. Marilyn M.

Adams refuses rationalistic or global accounts of evil and describes how the defeat of such evils is possible through a *post-mortem* intimacy with God. The main difficulty of her explanation is that all participants – victims and perpetrators – will be in the same final state of general salvation. It is true that love, forgiveness, and gratitude are aids (and justification) in the process of healing, but it cannot be true that God is essentially such a pure love that he ceases to be a personal and reasonable agent. Such a love would not be trustworthy.