Enhanced Agency Theodicy: An Eschatological Solution to the Problem of Evil

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Declaration: I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

Enhanced agency theodicy is a new afterlife-centred solution to the problem of evil that is developed using philosophical resources and which is potentially compatible with Muslim theism. The research focuses on four main difficulties for *eschatological theodicies*, those solutions which explain worldly evils as part of the means by which greater goods in an afterlife are realised. *The normatively relativised logical argument from evil* challenges whether a heavenly union with God can be perfectly loving when the same God contrives and sustains the conditions of our earthly suffering so that we may be rescued from these conditions by means of and for the sake of personal relationship with God. *Problems of heavenly freedom* target whether appeals to the supreme value of a heaven with no freedom to make good and evil choices can be made consistent with the claim that having such freedom is of such great value that it justifies the creation of a world with moral evil. *Problems of hell and post-mortem suffering* focus on whether belief in a perfectly good God is consistent with the continuation of suffering in forms of afterlife outside of heaven. *The fate of creatures without free will* concerns the post-mortem existence of children, the severely cognitively disabled and animals in theodicies that make free will central to achieving a good afterlife.

The study examines responses to these challenges by two key competitors of enhanced agency theodicy, the *soul-making* and *redemptive suffering* theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump. These proposals are rejected ultimately due to difficulties arising from their reliance on key features of a Christian worldview: a focus on a relational notion of love as a divine attribute and motive, the creation of human beings with a fallen nature, and our ultimate redemption in everlasting union with God. Consequently, the study constructs a theodicy outside of this framework of ideas. Central to this solution is a good-maximising view of an omniperfect God and an analysis of the kind of ideal world such a God might be expected to create: a *realm of enhanced agency* that fully realises the scope for agency of self-aware embodied beings with freedom and goodness of will. The theodicy draws out the implications of this good-maximising view to explain why the creation of a world like ours is necessary to bring about this ultimate good. God's goodness is defined in terms of the attribute of divine benevolence rather than love, and human beings are understood to be innately good yet potentially bad depending on how we use free will in a concept of human nature that combines dualistic holism with a neuro-physical account of libertarian freedom proposed by Robert Kane. I argue that these features, a good-maximising God, a realm of enhanced agency, and the innate goodness of human nature, provide for an eschatological solution to the problem of evil that has greater explanatory power than the theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump.

This study endorses Graham Oppy's proposal to address the debate on God and evil within an inference to the best explanation comparison of naturalism and theism as rival worldviews. To prepare future work in this area I propose amending Oppy's methodology with critical realist assumptions to minimise epistemic bias when evaluating different worldviews. A theodicy's candidacy for such an evaluation as part of a wider formulation of theism depends on its correlation with an actual theistic tradition. Therefore, given their potential compatibility, further research is needed to investigate enhanced agency theodicy's correlation with normative understandings of divinity, human nature and the afterlife in Muslim theism.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

EAT   Enhanced Agency Theodicy

IBE   Inference to the Best Explanation

GEL   Gratuitous Earthly Life

NRLAFE   Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil

REA   Realm of Enhanced Agency

ROA   Realm of Ordinary Agency

RRA   Realm of Restricted Agency

RST   Redemptive Suffering Theodicy

SME   Systemic Moral Evil

SMT   Soul-Making Theodicy

Introduction

Both sides of the debate on the problem of God and evil increasingly recognise that a successful solution is likely to involve the appeal to an afterlife.[1] Specifically, an *eschatological theodicy* is needed, an explanation that supposes the world, with the evil and suffering it contains, constitutes the means by which some great good in an afterlife is realised.[2] Yet the role of the afterlife in such theodicies has raised a number of philosophical difficulties in the literature. These problems include *the normatively relativised logical argument from evil,* which challenges whether a heavenly union with God can be perfectly loving when the same God contrives and sustains the conditions of our earthly suffering so that we may be saved by and for the sake of personal relationship with God (Bishop and Perszyk, 2011). *Problems of heavenly freedom* target whether appeals to the supreme value of a heaven with no freedom to make good and evil choices can be made consistent with the claim that having such freedom is of such great value that it justifies the creation of a world with moral evil (Nagasawa, Oppy and Trakakis, 2004; Kittle, 2018, 2020). *Problems of hell and post-mortem suffering* focus on whether belief in a perfectly good God is consistent with the continuation of suffering in forms of afterlife outside of heaven (Adams, 1993b; Kvanvig, 1993; Buckareff and Plug, 2005, 2013, 2015). *The fate of creatures without free will* concerns the post-mortem existence of children, the severely cognitively disabled and animals in theodicies that make free will central to achieving a good afterlife (Chignell, 1998; Dougherty, 2014; Timpe, 2015a; Williams, 2018).

However, discussion of these problems has tended to overlook the extent to which they may stem from a Christian framework of ideas which philosophers of religion have typically worked with when appealing to an afterlife to explain evil. This framework includes the central importance of love as a divine attribute and motive with respect to God's desire for personal relationship with humanity, the creation of fallen human beings with defective wills that naturally resist loving God, and our ultimate redemption from this condition in heavenly union with God. While these ideas typically structure the world of such theodicies with a particular scale of value and set of initial conditions and means by which divine purposes are achieved, little attention has been given to how

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[1] This point has been recognised by Hick (1966, 1981), Swinburne (1998), Adams (1999), Trakakis (2007), Peterson (2008) and Stump (2010, 2018a) among others.

[2] The term *eschatological* here includes both philosophical and religious approaches to the afterlife in theodicy, not only those theodicies which draw explicitly on scriptural sources.

theistic explanations of evil could be strengthened by supposing the world to be structured in other ways, with different conceptions of divinity, anthropology and eschatology.

The research addresses this gap in the literature with a novel theodicy constructed using analytic methods from what has been termed *bare*, *restricted standard* and *orthodox theism*.[3] This is a minimal conception of an omniperfect God shared by Jews, Christian and Muslims, as an all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good creator and sustainer of the universe.[4] From these premises, the study develops a theodicy that has three main features that set it apart from Christian approaches to the afterlife in theodicy. Firstly, it will establish that an omniperfect God is a good-maximising deity with a divine purpose to maximise the moral goodness that results from God's creative activity. Secondly, I shall argue that this purpose can be achieved by means of a *realm of enhanced agency* which fully realises the capacity for agency of self-aware embodied persons with goodness and freedom of will. Thirdly, I will argue that such a realm can only be brought into existence from a world like ours where human beings are understood to be innately good-willed but potentially bad depending on how we exercise free will. These features, a good-maximising God, a realm of enhanced agency, and an innately good yet potentially bad human nature, will have significant implications for *enhanced agency theodicy* (EAT) as an eschatological solution to the problem of evil.

The study focusses on the evidential argument from evil against the probability of belief in an omniperfect God. My methodological aim is to address the argument within an *inference to the best explanation* (IBE) evaluation of theism and naturalism as worldviews, an approach proposed by Graham Oppy (2018b) to progress a debate on God and evil that has reached deadlock with other methods. While an IBE comparison of naturalism and theism is beyond the scope of this study, to prepare future work in this area I propose to amend Oppy's methodology with critical realist assumptions to address an important obstacle for such evaluations: the tendency of those committed to rival worldviews to judge explanations using their different sets of background knowledge. A critical realist framework would minimise this epistemic bias by restricting the background knowledge employed in any analysis to a limited set of presuppositions shared by both

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[3] Trakakis lists the essential divine properties in what he terms *orthodox theism:* omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, aseity, incorporeality, eternity, omnipresence, perfect freedom, and alone worthy of worship. The attributes of creator and sustainer of the world are possessed only contingently (Trakakis, 2007a, pp.20-21). Personhood is not included, but the study takes an omniperfect God to be in some sense a person, since there is no knowledge, power and goodness without mind, agency and will.

[4] The study is not committed to the full set of metaphysical doctrines of *classical* or *perfect being theism,* which includes claims concerning the simplicity, timelessness and changelessness of God's nature that are challenged by theists such as William Lane Craig (2009) and Richard Swinburne (1993).

naturalists and theists, so that no one worldview is part of the standard for evaluating the explanations of its own worldview or those of another.

The research aims to assess whether EAT is a good candidate for inclusion in a formulation of theism that is compared with naturalism in an IBE evaluation of worldviews. To achieve this purpose the research requires two stages, the first of which will be completed in this study. By applying the IBE method I hope to show that EAT answers difficulties concerning the role of the afterlife in theodicy with greater explanatory power than two notable rivals that work with traditions of Christian theism. John Hick's *soul-making theodicy* (1966, 1981) is a paradigmatic example of an eschatological theodicy that has been highly influential.[5] Eleonore Stump's *redemptive suffering theodicy* (2010, 2018a) represents a rich contemporary engagement with Thomist thought on God and evil, and is chosen together with Hick's proposal because their theodicies have diverse features, including different positions on salvation, the nature of post-mortem existence and the origin of evil, while also drawing on a common set of Christian ideas concerning divine love, human fallenness and its final redemption.[6] As they can be thought to represent a certain range of possible worlds that are available to the Christian theodicean, an IBE analysis may allow us to discern whether problems concerning eschatological theodicies have their sources in certain features of these theodicies, or if there is some fundamental problem with the sorts of worlds that are possible on the Christian worldview. Therefore, the study aims to answer the following research question:

> Q: *Does enhanced agency theodicy provide a better eschatological solution to the problem of evil than the theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump?*

The second stage of the research needed to show that EAT is a good candidate for an IBE comparison of worldviews arises out of a methodological principle of such evaluations. While the best hypothesis will score highest in terms of the theoretical virtues of explanatory coherence, scope and simplicity, a good explanation will also have the epistemic virtue of being *confirmation conducive* (Mackonis, 2013, p.979).[7] Where a theodicy appeals to the existence of an afterlife which cannot be empirically verified, I will argue that its correlation with an actual tradition of theism that affirms belief in an afterlife has a part to play in the defeasible confirmation of such a hypothesis, pending an assessment of the probable truth of the linked tradition. In other words, if the main

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[5] Hick's theodicy is regarded by William Rowe "as perhaps the best we have" (1991, p.122).

[6] Hick's Christian mysticism and interest in global theology and the orthodoxy of Stump's Catholicism in large part explains the differences in their theodicies.

[7] See Chapter 1.2 for discussion.

features of a theodicy stand it apart from *any* theistic tradition, then it may be considered to be a merely possible or fictional explanation that provides no good reason to prefer theism to naturalism in an IBE evaluation.

While there is no scope in this study to investigate the possibility in detail, there are reasons to believe that a correlation between EAT and Muslim theism is likely. Notions of divine love, human fallenness and heavenly union with God that are excluded from or not emphasised in EAT are also not part of or not centrally important to Muslim theism. Moreover, there are correspondences between the theodicy and key Islamic ideas concerning divinity, afterlife and human nature, as the concluding chapter will outline. EAT's potential consistency with Muslim theism faces certain difficulties, particularly with respect to its character as a type of free will theodicy. Nevertheless, if further research were to establish their compatibility then it may open up new opportunities for constructive engagement between philosophers of religion and Muslim theologians on the problem of evil.

That a theodicy which correlates with Muslim theism could provide a novel and promising answer to the evidential argument from evil is also a possibility that has been overlooked in the philosophy of religion. As Yujin Nagasawa notes, the field is dominated by a dispute between Christian theists and atheists in which the intelligibility and plausibility of belief in an omniperfect God forms the basis of inquiry (2017, p.44). Nick Trakakis similarly suggests that a focus on the particular conception of divinity shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam is the reason why debate on the topic has reached a stalemate (2018a, p.1). Both recommend a non-theocentric and more *global* approach to questions concerning evil, and how to respond to it, that considers Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian perspectives and varieties of pantheism and panentheism.

These calls from Nagasawa and Trakakis for a global philosophy of religion view models of divinity outside of monotheism as providing the only avenues for new research in the field. They seem to assume, at least with respect to the problem of evil, that discussion has run its course and that Christian theism has exhausted most if not all the relevant possibilities open to the philosopher of religion seeking to defend belief in an omniperfect God. However, meaningful differences between Christian and Muslim worldviews suggest that a proposal that is compatible with the latter will provide a distinctive alternative to theodicies that work with traditions of Christian theism.

If EAT has greater explanatory power than the proposals of Hick and Stump, and it correlates with a normative interpretation of Muslim theism, then this research could make a significant contribution to the topic. It would show that the problems concerning eschatological solutions identified in this study are primarily a difficulty for Christian theodicy, not theism in general. It would also challenge Eleonore Stump on an issue of methodological importance for theodiceans. She has

argued that theodicies based on bare theism lack the resources to resolve the inconsistency between the existence of God and evil because this minimal conception of God represents only a partial sampling of the beliefs of theistic traditions (1985, p.398). For Stump, embedding theodicy in the full set of beliefs of a theistic worldview offers the best prospects for success, a position which has motivated her Thomist approach to the problem of evil.[8] She also considers the success or otherwise of theodicies based on bare theism to be irrelevant, since no believer is a bare theist, and solutions based solely on a few assumptions about God held in common by the monotheistic faiths are in her view unlikely to be compatible with Jewish or Christian or Islamic beliefs (1985, p.398).

As my proposal will primarily rely on claims entailed in, implied by and inferred from bare theism, its explanatory success would show Stump to be mistaken on the first of these points. Consequently, the research could help refocus the debate concerning God and evil on analytic approaches to the problem at a time when continental and post-modern methods have risen in influence. It would do so by furthering efforts to engage the standpoint of the reasonable agnostic inquirer for whom the rationality of theistic explanations of evil is principally a theoretical question concerning the concept of an omniperfect God entailed within the belief systems of major monotheistic faiths. That is, whether the evidential argument is philosophically answerable using the minimal set of propositions of bare theism is a prior question to whether belief in a certain tradition of theism is rationally compelling. If the first question is unanswered, the second is moot. By contrast, the assumption that any solution must be derived from or explicitly express a religious worldview is a better fit for research in philosophical theology, which understands the problem of evil primarily as an internal difficulty for believers in a particular religious tradition, rather than as a question of significance for philosophy in general, as with the evaluation of theism and naturalism as rival claims to truth.

EAT's correlation with Muslim theism would also show that an analytic approach to theodicy is not irrelevant to believers as Stump suggests. Indeed, a successful theodicy based on bare theism might provide a measure of rational support for the truth of a correlated theistic tradition *from outside of that worldview*. Moreover, the explanatory success of such a theodicy would not only imply that a Muslim understanding of the nature of the world is not an impediment to a successful philosophical response to the problem of evil, but would also suggest that an interpretation of Muslim theism may be the formulation of theism that has the most chance of success in an IBE comparison with naturalism. Such a finding is a conceivable outcome of the study which could significantly impact future research in the fields of philosophy of religion and religious studies.

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[8] Adams (1999) makes a similar appeal to the wider theological resources of Christian theism.

This study proceeds as follows. Chapter One, _Evidential Arguments, Theodicy and Afterlife: Methodological Issues,_ will review literature concerning the different versions of the evidential argument from evil and argue that a Graham Oppy-type _inference to the best explanation_ (IBE) comparison of naturalism and theism as worldviews, amended with critical realist assumptions to minimise epistemic bias, can progress a debate that has reached deadlock with other methodologies. The chapter outlines a multi-stage research strategy involving this approach and a set of success conditions for a theodicy to be considered a good candidate for an Oppy-type evaluation. It also discusses other methodological issues, such as the epistemic value of a theodicy's corelation with an actual tradition of theism, the reasonableness of theistic appeals to an afterlife and conceptualisations of eschatological goods, and principles that address ethical concerns with greater good theodicies.

Chapter Two, _God and Evil: Problems for Eschatological Solutions,_ outlines four problems concerning the role of the afterlife in theodicy: the normatively relativised logical argument from evil, and problems of heavenly freedom, hell and post-mortem suffering, and of the fate of creatures without free will**.** Chapter Three, _The Eschatological Solutions of John Hick and Eleonore Stump,_ describes John Hick's _soul-making theodicy_ and Eleonore Stump's _redemptive suffering theodicy_ and discusses the success with which they answer these challenges. Chapter Four, _Enhanced Agency Theodicy,_ presents and discusses the main propositions of the novel theodicy proposed in this research. Chapter Five, _Soul-Making, Redemptive Suffering, or Enhanced Agency Theodicy?,_ compares how the three theodicies address the four problems outlined in Chapter Two to evaluate which has the greater explanatory power. The concluding chapter, _Enhanced Agency Theodicy and Muslim Theism: Candidates for IBE Comparison with Naturalism?_, reviews the extent to which the proposed theodicy might be a good candidate for an IBE comparison of naturalism and theism and outlines its potential correlation with Muslim theism.

CHAPTER ONE

EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENTS, THEODICY AND AFTERLIFE:
METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

1.1 Inference to the Best Explanation: A Way Out of Stalemate?

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework and methodological approach of a study that focusses on the evidential argument from evil against belief in an omniperfect God. It opens in this section by reviewing the contemporary literature to explain why I endorse an *inference to the best explanation* approach to the indirect version of the evidential argument, which I argue offers a way to progress a philosophical debate which has reached deadlock with other methodologies. Specifically, I develop the proposal of Graham Oppy (2018b) to address the problem of evil within an inference to the best explanation evaluation of theism and naturalism as worldviews, and discuss various implications of this approach for theists hoping to decide the debate in their favour with an eschatological theodicy that explains the existence of our world as necessary to the realisation of ultimate goods in an afterlife.

The evidential argument provides two main types of challenge to the probability of belief in an all-powerful, perfectly good God. The *direct inductive* approach seeks to show that theism is unlikely to be true solely from evidence concerning evils *without* comparing it with any alternative hypotheses, other than the mere denial of theism (Tooley, 2021, 3.1, 3.2). The *indirect inductive* approach attempts to show that theism is unlikely to be true by establishing that there is a mutually exclusive hypothesis, other than the mere negation of theism, which is more probable than theism (Tooley, 2021, 3.1, 3.3). Both of these types of evidential argument are distinguished from the *logical problem of evil,* which aims to show deductively that it is logically impossible for both evil and an omniperfect God to exist, thereby completely ruling out the possibility of the latter.

Among direct and indirect types of the evidential argument, different versions have been proposed, but debate concerning all but one has seemingly stalled. The direct inductive argument of

William Rowe (1976, 1988) was influential in focussing efforts in the field on the evidential argument after the free will defence of Alvin Plantinga (1978) was thought to have solved the logical problem of evil. Rowe argued that evidence of horrific suffering strongly diminishes the likelihood of the existence of an all-powerful, perfectly good God. In the second iteration of his argument (1988), Rowe infers from P (No good state of affairs *we know of* is such that an omniperfect being obtaining it would morally justify that being permitting E1 or E2), that Q (No good state of affairs is such that an omniperfect being obtaining it would morally justify that being permitting E1 or E2), where E1 and E2 are cases of intense suffering caused by moral and natural evils. The argument involves an inference from *inscrutable evils*, evils for which no justification can be discerned, to the conclusion that such evils are in fact *gratuitous*, in the sense that they are not necessary for some greater good or the avoidance of some worse evil, and therefore are *unjustified* (Dougherty and Walls 2013, pp.371-72). The premise that such gratuity is unjustified on theism, and so counts against belief in an omniperfect God, rests on an assumption which Nick Trakakis takes to be a widely held among philosophers of religion on all sides of the debate: that a perfectly good, all-powerful God could not permit or cause *any* evil that is preventable and pointless with respect to God's purposes (2007a, p.303).[9]

The *noseeum* inference from P to Q, as it came to be known by *sceptical theists*, has been much debated but it is understood to rely on a generalisation that is hard to defend.[10] As William Alston summarises the objection, the *noseeum* inference unjustifiably assumes that human knowledge of goods is representative of all the goods that there are, can grasp the nature and value of goods that God can be expected to produce, and understand their conditions for realisation sufficiently to say with justified confidence that they could have been brought about without permitting the evils that exist and without sacrificing some other good (1996, pp.323-325).[11] Moreover, to undercut the inference the theist need only propose an epistemically possible *defence*, that is, a conceivable explanation of these evils that is internally coherent and true for all anyone

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[9] Inwagen (2000) rejects this assumption, arguing there is no minimum number of horrors God must permit to fulfil his purposes, but I agree with Trakakis that even if Inwagen is correct, this does not entail that just any amount of evil is permissible. There must at least be a threshold beyond which further instantiations of evil or certain quantities of types of evil become gratuitous (Trakakis, 2007a, p.314).

[10] The *sceptical theist* response of John Wykstra (1996) undercuts the inference from P to Q by arguing that due to cognitive limitations our inability to think of reasons in this case does not make it likely that no such reasons exist.

[11] Michael Tooley suggests that generalising to universals from a limited evidence base may be justifiable in instances which are reliably linked to regular laws governing relations between universals, so that the obtaining of a law may have a very high probability upon even quite a small body of evidence (2021, 3.2.3). However, Rowe's argument does not appeal to such a law.

knows. Since the theist can appeal to any *possible* explanation that has been defended successfully in the literature, such as Plantinga's free will defence for example, Rowe's direct inductive argument is ultimately unsuccessful.

To avoid trying to find a satisfactory account of the inductive step from P to Q, Rowe (1996) developed a Bayesian version of his direct argument.[12] This concluded that P taken together with our background knowledge makes it more likely than not that G, the existence of an omniperfect creator, is false. Michael Tooley (2021) finds Rowe's Bayesian argument to be unsound because its first premise violates the *total evidence requirement* for inductive arguments.[13] Moreover, Trakakis notes that Rowe's Bayesian argument is also open to challenge from the sceptical theist, because it implies the *noseeum* inference of his original argument (2007a, pp.100-101). Therefore, both of Rowe's direct arguments, in different ways, fall foul of the defence that humans are not in an epistemic position to infer directly from evidence that an omniperfect God is unlikely to have a morally sufficient reason for allowing or causing evils.

Paul Draper (1989, 1996a) may be taken as attempting to bypass this move from the sceptical theist with his Bayesian *indirect inductive argument*. Unlike the direct argument, comparing the probability of theism with that of a rival hypothesis need not rely on the disputed assumption that we *can* know that God likely does not have a morally sufficient reason to permit or cause certain types of evils (Draper, 1996b, p.179). Comparing the claim that an omniperfect creator exists with a *hypothesis of indifference* (HI), that *neither the nature nor condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons*, Draper's indirect argument concludes that O, a conjunction of observations about the biological utility of pain and pleasure, is *antecedently* much more probable on the assumption that HI is true than on the assumption that theism is true. Therefore, HI provides a good *prima facie* reason to reject theism, given that it is epistemically irrational to believe that both theism is true and that it is less probable than not (Draper, 1996a, p.15).

However, Alston (1996, pp.327-330) and Plantinga (1996b, p.250) point out that Draper's argument does not really decide between rival *explanations*. The proposition *an omniperfect creator exists* is taken as an explanation of O without reference to any theistic reasons for these facts, such as those that have been suggested by theodiceans, and HI is more of a negation of theism than an alternative hypothesis. Daniel Howard-Snyder argues that Draper's premise that, for all we know,

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[12] For a summary of Bayes' theorem see Prevost (1990, p.14).

[13] This requirement states that, "For any proposition that is not non-inferentially justified, the probability that one should assign to that proposition being true is the probability that the proposition has relative to one's total evidence" (Tooley, 2021, 3.4.2).

theism is incompatible with the biological utility of pain and pleasure, and therefore antecedently less probable, is simply false (1994, pp.458-9). Tooley argues that even if Draper's argument is sound it is not significant in Bayesian terms as it says nothing about how *much* below 0.5 the probability of theism is, and since it only considers some evidence relative to which it is unlikely that theism is true, not the total evidence, the conclusion that theism is more likely to be false can be undercut with additional evidence of a pro-theist sort (2021, 3.3).

In any event, there are reasons to doubt whether Bayes' theorem can provide an acceptable account of the degree to which evil disconfirms theism. Robert Prevost argues that explanations for apparently gratuitous evils that vindicate God's goodness are inherently too imprecise to be given a value for predictive power, one of the essential probabilities of a Bayesian calculation (1990, p.28). For example, theodicies often advance partial explanations of evil, or provide statements that do not entail the existence of any particular evils. Graham Oppy has likewise suggested that there is no acceptable method for assigning prior probabilities to theories, another crucial value in Bayes' theorem (2018b, p.70). Plantinga suggests why when noting Draper's reliance on *epistemic* probability, in which comparison of the probabilities of two incompatible explanations is done with respect to a person's given epistemic situation. As theists and non-theists have different worldviews and traditions of knowledge, they are unlikely to agree on how to assign prior probabilities to propositions (Plantinga, 1996b, pp.251, 257-8).

Rowe's direct arguments and Draper's Bayesian indirect argument may fail to demonstrate the irrationality of theistic belief, yet there remains a case for the theist to answer. Richard Swinburne rightly argues that common sense epistemology, based on the *principle of credulity*, entitles the rational person to take the appearance of pointlessness as a defeasible *non-inferential* justification for the proposition that there is pointless suffering (1998, pp.20-22). Just as someone ought to believe she is seeing a table or hearing a friend's voice until evidence appears that she has been deceived, if it seems to someone that there are pointless evils which are incompatible with the existence of an omniperfect God, then she ought to believe as much in the absence of counter-reasons. This is especially so in an epistemic position in which what seems to be case appears to fit with non-theistic explanations for those facts that affirm their pointlessness, such as provided by naturalism. As Trent Dougherty suggests, a form of *evidentialism* is assumed here, where it is always epistemically unjustified for someone to hold to a belief that has a lower epistemic probability for that person than an alternative belief. As such, "the apparent explanatory advantage of naturalism over theism requires that the theist address the issue squarely" (Dougherty, 2014, p.18).[14]

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[14] Swinburne similarly writes with respect to the seeming pointlessness of evils, "The onus of proof has passed to the theist; he needs reason for resisting the conclusion" (1998, p.22).

The theist could endorse the strategy of defence discussed above, but doing so involves accepting an inherent stalemate in the philosophical debate on evil. A theodicy may seem plausible to the theist relative to their worldview, but the non-theist does not share this background knowledge. From her standpoint, the theistic explanation may be possible, but naturalism could seem a better fit for the facts. The theist may want to adjust their epistemic standards according to the mode of discussion, putting on a philosophy hat, so to speak, to think in terms of possibility to deal with Rowe's direct argument, and wearing a theology hat to presuppose their worldview when evaluating the plausibility of explanations.[15] However, this dialectical move does little to shift the dial toward theism in the debate on God and evil, especially if we assume the heart of that debate to be the standpoint of the rational agnostic inquirer who wonders whether there are reasons to doubt naturalistic explanations of evil and good reasons to accept theistic ones, and vice versa.

A way out of this deadlock is suggested by David Hume's original strategy for the indirect argument. Rather than using Bayes' theorem, this takes an *inference to the best explanation* (IBE) approach to evaluating two mutually exclusive hypotheses, involving a comparative assessment of their explanatory power in terms of the *scope*, *coherence* and *simplicity* with which they account for the data under consideration. After his analysis of Draper's Bayesian argument, Tooley endorses Hume's IBE approach to the indirect argument as a viable way forward (2021, 3.3). Graham Oppy (2018b) also sets aside Bayesian strategies, proposing instead to address the problem of evil within an IBE assessment of naturalism and theism as worldviews. Described as "innovative" and "relatively new" by Eleonore Stump, this expanded Humean approach compares the theoretical virtues of theism and naturalism as "rival grand unifying theories of everything" (2018b, p.81). She takes Oppy's proposal to be an appropriate deepening of the discussion on the problem of evil, since "any theodicy or defence – and any argument against a theodicy or defence – is embedded in a rich worldview that includes ethics, epistemology and metaphysics, as well as scientific and theological claims" (2018b, p.81). In other words, a worldview is a system of belief concerning the nature of reality, how it can be known, and what the possessor of that worldview should do with this knowledge. Prevost alludes to a similar idea when discussing the inductive evaluation of theism and materialism as "world hypotheses" (1990, pp.96-103).

David Hume's own indirect argument suggests why an IBE approach should consider the problem of evil in such depth. Hume relies on the criterion of simplicity counting against the *cause* of the universe being a perfectly good deity given the mixture of good and bad states in the world, and

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[15] Inwagen (1988) takes his theodicy to be plausible for the Christian theist because it coheres with Christian revelation and is not improbable given scientific knowledge, while suggesting it is merely possible for any other rational person without his commitment to Christianity. Stump (2010, 2018a) endorses a similar approach.

counting in favour of a deity that is neither good nor evil.[16] As noted above with Draper's argument, the simple causal hypotheses considered by Hume do not include any theistic reasons that might explain the mixed nature of the world, and so his strategy is unlikely to be adequate or decisive. Rather than a merely casual explanation of the universe, Prevost correctly defines theism as an *integrative explanation*, one that "explains by integrating the data of the universe into a single coherent interpretative framework" using a central organising idea (1990, p.121).[17] Given that the integrating idea of theism is a God who is a purposeful agent, theistic hypotheses entail a teleological dimension, suggesting that an IBE assessment will be inadequate if theism is taken not to include the sort of explanation provided in a theodicy. Prevost and Oppy are therefore right to propose a more expansive IBE evaluation than that of Hume and Draper, consisting of a comparison of fully developed explanations of competing worldviews, or in Oppy's terms their "best formulations", which for theism will include a theodicy as part of its hypothesis (2018b, p.71).

The commitment to provide a theodicy for such an IBE evaluation does place an epistemic burden on the theist. Whereas the direct argument can be undercut by a defence, a possible explanation for evil that shows we cannot claim to know that the evidence strongly diminishes the probability of God's existence, the theist answering the indirect argument must provide a theodicy that is at least *plausible* and has a good chance of being more probable than the alternative.[18] Nevertheless, Hume's focus on comparative probability has a helpful epistemic implication. On the one hand, the theist presenting a theodicy as part of her hypothesis could only hope to be successful in an IBE evaluation if she thought that her theodicy had a good chance of being true. On the other hand, there is no requirement on the theist to claim with certainty that her theodicy *is* true. Hume's strategy works for him even if his indifferent deity hypothesis is neither true, nor probable nor more reasonable than not to believe. It only needs to be more likely than theism, since if two hypotheses are incompatible and the first is more probable than the second, then the probability of the second is less than half regardless of how probable or improbable the first is (Howard-Snyder, 1994, p.453).[19] That this is also the case for the theodicean is conceded by Draper when he points out that

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[16] Hume considers four hypothetical causes of the universe: a deity that is perfectly good, one that is perfectly evil, one that is both good and evil, and a deity that is neither good nor evil (Howard-Snyder, 1994, p.452).

[17] For Prevost materialism is an integrative explanation that interprets the universe, including phenomena of value and meaning, in terms of one kind of thing, matter (1990, pp.99-100).

[18] As Inwagen argues, the probability of a defence will never be high, since if the defender of theism knew of a story that accounted for the sufferings of the actual world and was highly probable on theism, he would employ it as a theodicy (1996, p.156) .

[19] Also see Tooley (2021, 3.3) for discussion of comparative probability in Hume's indirect argument.

"if the theist could construct a very successful theodicy… Humean arguments from evil would be in trouble" (1996b, p.178). Therefore, unlike the direct evidential argument, an IBE approach to the indirect argument offers a way forward that in principle could be decisive for either side of the debate on the problem of evil.

1.2 Naturalism and Theism as Worldviews: Challenges for IBE Comparison

To examine the problem of evil with an Oppy-type IBE evaluation of naturalism and theism as worldviews, this study follows Adolfas Mackonis (2013) in defining IBE as combining two *abduction* premises that generate a possible hypothesis with a third premise which grants the conclusion that this explanation is probably or defeasibly true:

1) The surprising fact C is observed;

2) But if A were true, C would be a matter of course,

3) No available competing hypothesis can explain C as well as A does.

4) Hence A is true.[20]

As Mackonis summarises, an IBE argument cannot get off the ground without an *abduction trigger*, the surprising phenomenon that demands explanation. A fact is surprising relative to the content of relevant background knowledge, where some fact is an abductive trigger if it is either not explained by or contradicts that knowledge. I shall return to the question of background knowledge in the next section. The point to note here is that the following formulation of the problem of evil is suggested by this definition of IBE. On theism, the surprising facts in question concern the quantity, distribution and intensity of suffering caused by moral and natural evils which *prima facie* contradict our background knowledge concerning the sort of world we might expect a perfectly good God to create. The naturalist would propose his hypothesis for A, and in the third premise argue that no formulation of theism containing a theodicy provides a better explanation of these facts, hence naturalism is probably true.

The better explanation is the one that performs best in an assessment of the theoretical virtues of explanatory *coherence*, *simplicity*, and *scope*.[21] Importantly, proponents of IBE claim that

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[20] Mackonis explains that the aim of abduction is to generate an explanatory hypothesis that is possibly true, the aim of IBE is to generate an explanatory hypothesis and assess its truth (2013, p.977).

[21] Mackonis uses the term unification instead of scope to refer to the degree to which a hypothesis successfully explains a variety of different kinds of facts (2013, p.983).

finding that a hypothesis is the best explanation is a sufficient condition to accept the truth of this hypothesis, without any appeal to confirmation or empirical testing (Mackonis, 2013, p.979). This means that metaphysical hypotheses such as theism and naturalism can count as good explanations if they explain the known observations under consideration. Nevertheless, IBE presupposes that the hypothesis that performs best in an assessment of theoretical virtue must also be empirically virtuous by being *confirmation conducive* (Mackonis, 2013, pp.979-980). Section 1.4 will discuss philosophical reasons for making a theodicy's correlation with an actual tradition of theism a provisional part of its empirical confirmation as a good explanation.[22]

A significant challenge for IBE evaluations is that, unlike direct and Bayesian approaches to the evidential argument, they are not decided using a formal logical method. As Prevost notes, the inductive evaluation of competing explanations involves *informal* judgements concerning their relative theoretical virtue and the overall balance of evidence. Such IBE judgements are inevitably imprecise because the virtues of coherence, scope, and simplicity are typically traded off to determine the explanatory power of rival hypotheses (Prevost, 1990, pp.106-107). For example, Hume's own indirect argument relies on the criterion of simplicity counting against the cause of the mixed states of universe being a perfectly good God (Tooley, 2021, 3.3). However, the argument fails in Paul Draper's view because Hume's indifferent deity hypothesis lacks the explanatory scope to account for good and bad phenomena much better than the alternatives (1992, p.316), a defect that Draper attempts to rectify in his version of the argument.[23]

That the criteria of scope, simplicity and coherence may *each* involve many facets of analysis is a further reason why IBE evaluations are inevitably informal and imprecise. Judgements about the scope of a hypothesis assess the comprehensiveness of its explanation of data, but can theists and non-theists agree on the explananda in question?[24] For example, William Rowe distinguishes four levels of theodicy, the explanation of why there is any evil at all on theism, why there are the various kinds of evil in the world, why there is the amount of evil there is, and why particular evils obtain (1988, p.131). While he suggests that the theist cannot reasonably be expected to explain particular evils, others may disagree.

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[22] In the scientific literature, predictive success is also commonly understood to be required alongside explanatory power. However, Wilko van Holten argues that hypotheses, including well established scientific ones, have been accepted as good without confirmed predictions, as a theory's success is foremost a measure of how well it accounts for known observations (2002, p.275).

[23] Jerry L. Walls further objects that the idea of an indifferent deity is incoherent because it is more reasonable to believe that a deity that creates mixed phenomena is perfectly evil, not amoral as Hume concludes, since making us fit for pleasure and happiness while permitting our suffering and misery would make such a deity evil (2002, p.23).

[24] Stump (2018b, p.81) raises this question.

Ceteris paribus, simplicity is often taken to count in favour of a hypothesis but the criterion itself has different aspects. It has an ontological dimension, involving a requirement to minimise the number of entities posited by a hypothesis, such as laws, causes, objects, principles and properties.[25] It also has a syntactic dimension concerning the number of language components used in a hypothesis or the number of its structural parts (Mackonis, 2013, p.987).[26] Yet these dimensions of simplicity complicate its use as a criterion for evaluating competing theories. For example, Prevost argues that theism and materialism are simple in different ways: theism simplifies by explaining everything in terms of the power and will of God, while materialism posits that everything is one substance, matter, in contrast to the dualism of spirit and matter implied in theism (1990, p.106). Even if comparison is possible, complex theories are not necessarily less true or probable than simpler ones. As Trakakis notes, evaluating hypotheses in terms of relative simplicity relies on an assumption about the nature of reality not held by many philosophers of science. For example, classical Newtonian mechanics was superseded by more complex theories of quantum physics (2007, p.116).

In terms of the criterion of coherence, IBE assessments can have an internal and external dimension. The internal aspect is emphasised by Prevost when he uses the term *integration* to refer to how a hypothesis "unifies a diverse range of phenomena into a single coherent description" (1990, p.96). Clearly, the different propositions contained within an explanation must be logically consistent with one another, but analysis of internal coherence also concerns the intelligibility of ideas within given propositions. The external aspect concerns any epistemic warrant that an explanation derives from its coherence with other explanations or traditions of belief which are understood to be true. For example, Hick (1966) takes coherence with Darwinian evolution as providing epistemic support for his Irenaean theodicy. An IBE evaluation may consider both dimensions of coherence, as in the three-stage assessment of worldviews proposed by Oppy (2018b), which includes an internal evaluation of their logical consistency and a comparison of their fit with well-established knowledge or theory. The coherence of a theory also depends on its *ad hocness*, the degree to which it relies on auxiliary hypotheses to account for unexplained counter

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[25] Also known as the principle of Ockham's razor.

[26] C. Stephen Layman identifies four main facets of simplicity: the number of things postulated, the number of kinds of things postulated, the simplicity of the terms used, and the number of theses within a hypothesis that get little or no probabilistic support from other theses belonging to the same hypothesis (2003, pp.3-4).

evidence. A theory is more *ad hoc* and less coherent the more hypotheses it contains (Holten, 2002, p.275).[27]

If IBE judgements are inevitably imprecise due to their multi-faceted nature, they are nonetheless considered rationally defensible taken as *cumulative case arguments*. Prevost defines these arguments as those in which a set of singular reasons severally cooperate to support a conclusion without a formal convention that legitimizes an inference to the conclusion from the evidence. As such they use *informal reasoning*, a process of making distinctions, objections, and counter objections that builds up to a conclusion which is cumulative in the sense that it accounts for a variety of data and derives its judgement from the collective weight of the various objections and counter-objections (Prevost, 1990, pp.67, 70). To illustrate how this differs from the demonstrative reasoning of deductive and probabilistic logic, Prevost uses the example of a judge deciding in situations of legal ambiguity. While her final verdict is not based on reasons which conform to a set of formal rules that make the conclusion acceptable, the account of the reasoning behind her judgement must be rationally defensible, otherwise it will be overturned on appeal as an arbitrary decision (1990, p.59). The essential logical difference is that in informal reasoning there is an "inescapable and necessary element of evaluative judgement" (1990, p.60), but the fact that we generally recognize the rationality of the judge's decision in such situations lends weight to the claim that informal reasoning is an acceptable mode alongside deduction and inductive probability.

Nevertheless, the fact that these arguments give the evaluative judgements of an *individual* reasoner such a prominent role stands in tension with the objective standpoint usually sought in the analytic philosophy of religion, since persons who possess various worldviews may judge the same matter differently. William Hasker alludes to this difficulty when contrasting the conventional claim that arguments in the field should be objectively convincing to "any rational person" or "any competent reasoner", with the fact that the success of many arguments is typically "person-relative" and dependent on differences in "background knowledge", "predispositions" and "value orientations" (2007, p.430).[28] In the context of our discussion of theodicy, Hasker's point means that the different sets of background knowledge that naturalists and theists may have good reasons to believe are true, albeit defeasibly, will have an important bearing on what reasons are taken to be good ones, and which explanations rise to the level of plausibility. It is a position Eleonore Stump fully accepts when she writes, "The wider worldview within which a claim is embedded matters to the evaluation of the claim. Plausibility is relative to a worldview" (2018c, p.109). However, if the

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[27] Holten distinguishes this meaning of *ad hoc-ness* from the rule applicable to scientific theories that they must have *predictive success*, not just explanatory power, in order not to be considered *ad hoc* (2002, pp.270-271).

[28] For discussion of the perspicuity and subject relativity of reasons see John Pollock (1970).

aim is to decide the evidential argument in favour of either naturalism or theism, then presupposing this person relativity, whether or not prior commitments are frankly admitted, appears to be an obstacle to progress, as it would seem to encourage, if not entitle, both camps to privilege their different epistemic resources when evaluating rival explanations.

This problem of epistemic bias is linked to a wider debate concerning the proper role of analytic methods in the philosophy of religion. Trakakis argues that the scientific ideal of objectivity in the analytic tradition is not fit for the purpose of philosophizing about religion, as it "cannot come to terms with the mysterious transcendent reality that is disclosed in religious practice" (2009, quoted in Knepper, 2014, p.121). Rejecting the analytic philosophy of religion, he endorses epistemic perspectivalism as part of his turn toward non-realism and continental philosophy. Nancey Murphy mounts a parallel argument, following Alasdair MacIntyre in taking rationality to be tradition-dependent with no transcultural standpoint external to any particular religion from which competing claims to knowledge can be adjudicated (2008, p.33). On this view, theocentric inquiry into the problem of evil is not the universal human activity of philosophy, but merely the expression of forms of rationality specific to traditions of Abrahamic theism. For Murphy, practitioners in the field should be philosophers with religious interests, not *of* religion, only philosophizing about the beliefs internal to their traditions "without the pretence of being uncommitted to their point of view" (2008, p.37).[29]

These contributions of Murphy and Trakakis may be taken as two post-modern responses to the globally aware, multicultural milieu of contemporary philosophy of religion. They also bring to the surface a long-standing tension within a field parented by the two disciplines of philosophy and religious studies. While Murphy completely subordinates philosophy of religion to religious studies, Trakakis perhaps strives to preserve a role for philosophy as a way to navigate these new waters from the personal viewpoint of the continental philosopher of religion. However, on the question of God and evil Murphy's position is mistaken, since the problem is an important question for *philosophy in general*, not just for the study of religion. As theism is an explanation of the world that is logically incompatible with naturalism, if it is true then naturalism is false. Therefore, any philosopher, whether agnostic, theist or atheist, who is interested in engaging serious questions and using philosophical methods to examine their beliefs, cannot ignore theism and the problem of evil. The same imperative is not there for the pantheism and panentheism which have been subjects of interest in recent proposals for a global philosophy of religion (Nagasawa, 2017; Trakakis, 2018a),

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[29] Murphy notes MacIntyre's view that comparing rival traditions is possible, but to judge one to be rationally superior is matter of a tradition's relative success as a *narrative* in maintaining its identity in the face of historical change and crises, not of the truth of its explanations (2008, p.34).

since these monistic models of reality are potentially compatible with naturalistic accounts of the world.

In principle then, the evidential argument from evil may be addressed using analytic methods. As summarised by Timothy Knepper, these include the advancing and testing of hypotheses, the use of formal logic and empirical science where applicable, where it is not the use of systematic and coherent argumentation that is clear and precise, the professionalism and critical self-awareness needed to strive for objectivity and minimise distorting biases, and the epistemic humility not to claim to have attained the absolute truth (2014, pp.121-122). On this construal, the distance between analytic and continental traditions which Trakakis appears to want to emphasise is probably overstated.[30] In his argument against the analytic philosophy of religion, Trakakis looks to be equating the analytic tradition with practices of formal logic and empirical science. However, while he is perhaps correct that such methods are unsuited to the nature of some religious subjects, to deny that IBE has any role to play in analytic philosophy would be surprising, given that scientific inquiry is impossible without it. If Trakakis hoped that direct and Bayesian versions of the evidential argument could yield a decisive verdict on the problem of evil, and his embrace of continental philosophy is a response to the failure of these methods, then he may be overlooking the analytic tradition's scope to make progress on the problem through IBE evaluation and cumulative case argumentation.

1.3 A Critical Realist Solution for Epistemic Bias in IBE

As an Oppy-type comparison of worldviews is challenged by the epistemic biases of naturalists and theists, I propose to address this problem with a critical realist framework for IBE evaluation. Andrew Wright defines critical realism to include *ontological realism*, that there is a reality that mostly exists independently of human perception, *epistemic pluralism*, that our ways of knowing this reality are limited, contingent and plural, and *judgemental rationality*, that it is possible to judge between conflicting truth claims while recognising that all such conclusions are defeasible and necessarily open to further adjudication (2013, pp.9-16). Epistemic pluralism acknowledges the perspectivalism discussed above, but unlike the relativism of McIntyre and Murphy, I take the

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[30] Knepper notes that the central premise of Trakakis' epistemic perspectivalism, the conditioned and contingent nature of knowledge, is in fact uncontroversial among analytic philosophers (2014, p.121), a point corroborated by Hasker (2007) and Pollock (1970). Moreover, Trakakis's notion of non-realism, the claim that religious language refers to a different reality to that examined by the sciences, is not the radical sort of non-realism that analytic philosophers typically object to (Sherman, 2010, p.419).

affirmation of ontological realism and judgemental rationality to mean that there is, in principle, an objective trans-cultural standpoint from which competing truth claims can be adjudicated, at least defeasibly. In other words, critical realism implies that since there is a mind-independent reality it is worth our best efforts to try to judge matters from an objective viewpoint despite the mind-dependency of our various ways knowing.[31]

That those best efforts can be made by using philosophical methods is a point that ought to be defended. Perhaps the universality or tradition-independence of such methods can be substantiated by a study of the commonalities in various approaches to rational inquiry undertaken in world cultures throughout history. The assumption here would be that the *products* of reasoning which are the unique heritage of certain traditions conditioned by particular histories can be separated from the *methods* of reasoning that have been used and which may be universal in character. There is clearly much that could be said on this topic, but if it is granted that the general methods of philosophy are transcultural, then critical realism provides a theoretical framework that is in principle respectful of different traditions of knowledge and supportive of genuine philosophical inquiry. In particular, cumulative case arguments and inference to the best explanation evaluations look to be a good methodological fit for this framework. For instance, whether one hypothesis is simpler, less *ad hoc*, or more comprehensive than another hypothesis should be discernible to any reasonable person irrespective of their worldview.

Finding a way to minimise the person-relative element in the informal reasoning involved in such judgements appears to be the main difficulty. I take critical realism to have two important implications for addressing this problem of epistemic perspective. Firstly, while an IBE approach to the indirect evidential argument brings both theistic and naturalistic systems of belief into view as rival hypothesis, a critical realist framework would insist that *no one worldview is part of the standard for evaluating the explanations of its own worldview and those of another*. This point is illustrated by Oppy's three-stage methodology, in which a descriptive analysis and internal assessment of competing worldviews in stages one and two is followed by a comparative evaluation of theoretical virtues in the third stage that includes "fit with well-established knowledge or theory" (2018b, pp.70-71).

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[31] I take critical realism to accept that there are types of *certain* knowledge, like mathematical statements or propositional knowledge derived from deductive arguments, but that these domains of knowledge are relatively limited.

Graham Oppy's three stage inference to the best explanation evaluation of worldviews:
1) *Articulation*: the description of compared worldviews as articulated theories to the same level of detail.
2) *Internal evaluation*: does a worldview fail on its own terms, for example with respect to logical consistency?
3) *Comparative evaluation of worldviews that survive the second stage:* which is the most virtuous, scoring best on an appropriate weighting of theoretical commitments, including ontological and ideological commitments, explanation of data, predictive accuracy, fit with well-established knowledge or theory?

Oppy does not specify what these established domains of knowledge are, but he is likely to share the naturalism of Trakakis and take evolutionary theory, for example, to be the sort of widely accepted scientific and historical view that should form part of the background assumptions which any theodicy would have to be consistent with in order to be considered reasonable (Trakakis, 2007a, p.240). Yet on critical realism, presuming the truth of the core set of claims and theories of naturalism and making them part of the adequacy conditions or evaluative criteria for the general reasonability of all explanations introduces an epistemic bias. Indeed, Trakakis is open about wanting to preclude certain explanations from consideration, arguing that we "need to substantially enlarge the set of propositions that constitute our background knowledge" in order to "rule out" theodicies such as those that "appeal to the doctrine of the Fall" or "to the machinations of Satan" (2007a, p.239).

However, in expanding this set of propositions what criteria should be applied? If, for example, neo-Darwinian evolution is made part of our background knowledge, and creationist accounts of the origin of life are ruled out, then there seems little reason not to exclude claims concerning an afterlife from our assumptions, since there can be no tradition of belief or body of evidence about its existence which a naturalist would accept as established knowledge. The difficulty here is that no theistic explanation of evil and suffering is likely to succeed without appealing to an afterlife, as forthcoming sections will discuss.

By contrast a critical realist framework would be tradition-neutral in assuming the fallibility of most if not all human knowledge and rationality. Therefore, it would take both theism and naturalism as comprising the claims of different systems or traditions of belief that are defeasibly held and which are in principle subject to assessment. This means that on critical realism any adequacy conditions for the reasonability of explanations or criteria for their evaluation would have

to be restricted to a set of fairly uncontroversial presuppositions that are held in common by both naturalists and theists.

For such content, two suggestions from Trakakis have merit: commonsensical views about the world, such as belief in other minds, an external world, and commonly held beliefs regarding various good and evils; and intuitively plausible moral principles, such as the notion that punishment should be proportionate to the offence (2007a, p.240). To these may be added related claims concerning the existence of knowledge, power and goodness, which can inform reasonable suppositions concerning the potential extension of these phenomena in the attributes of an omniperfect God. Unlike the ideological content needed to understand bodies of theory, these presuppositions refer to knowledge that is in principle epistemically accessible to all reasonable persons as experiencing, thinking and moral beings, and so may be taken as background knowledge that is shared by both naturalists and theists. They also contain knowledge that is needed for facts about evil and suffering to be surprising enough on theism to require explanation, as well as for philosophical reflection concerning possible explanations for these the facts. Therefore, in principle, *restricting background knowledge to this minimal set of presuppositions allows any reasonable person to defeasibly judge whether one hypothesis concerning evil and suffering has greater explanatory power than another without assuming the truth of a particular worldview.*

The insistence not to allow one worldview to frame the evaluation of another has a second important implication. It makes the background knowledge that is specific to both naturalism and theism *part of the content of an IBE evaluation*. In terms of the assessment of explanatory virtues, this would involve a greater emphasis on the internal dimension of coherence and a more limited role for external coherence, since *the background knowledge that is conventionally considered to be external to an explanation will instead be taken to be an internal part of an expanded version of that explanation.*

This amends Graham Oppy's three-stage analysis of worldviews in the following way. Where the *internal evaluation* of Oppy's second stage looks at a worldview's internal coherence and consistency with data, and the *comparative evaluation* of his third stage examines which worldview is most virtuous, performing best on a weighting of theoretical commitments, explanation of data, and fit with well-established knowledge or theory, a critical realist framework for IBE evaluation would move the well-established knowledge of both worldviews into the internal, second stage of assessment. This means that, with respect to naturalism, beliefs that are presumed to be true in the third stage of Oppy's inquiry become part of the evaluation. For example, an internal assessment of naturalism might not only examine Darwinian evolution's consistency with data concerning suffering, but also the explanatory power of the materialism it presupposes, prior commitment to

which is an important contributor to the theory's person-relative plausibility for naturalists. In other words, naturalism's complete account of ultimate reality, history and meaning would be in view.[32]

Theists need not be pessimistic that such a comparison with naturalism precludes any chance of success for their side of the debate. Naturalism may seem a better fit for apparently pointless evils from the epistemic position of the reasonable agnostic inquirer. Nevertheless, it is not safe to assume that naturalism will have greater explanatory power when its theories and presuppositions are examined. For example, Thomas Nagel (2012) argues that the origin of life and evolutionary history cannot be fully explained by physics and chemistry.[33] In his discussion of the main weaknesses of materialism and theism as rival world hypotheses, Prevost notes that the materialism which naturalism presupposes may be costly in not "saving the phenomena" of personal experience, such as consciousness, free will, morality, aesthetic appreciation, or even the fundamental categories that differentiate one thing from another (1990, pp.106-107).[34]

An amended Oppy-type IBE comparison of worldviews involves an expansion to an already challenging methodology, and there is certainly no scope in this study to undertake such an assessment. Nevertheless, despite the significant challenges involved, a critical realist approach in principle minimises the epistemic bias that comes with privileging different background beliefs when evaluating explanations. It also seems feasible in practice in that I interpret Oppy as allowing for the provisional assessment of outlines of worldviews. This means that progress can be made without first carrying out the sort of extensive descriptive analysis of worldviews he thinks is ultimately needed for a genuine comparison of their best formulations (2018c, p.91). Knepper has similarly argued that the task of evaluating worldviews "ought to be largely suspended until thick descriptions and formal comparisons can be produced" (2013, quoted in Trakakis, 2018c, p.85). However, since the defeasibility of inductive reasoning naturally accommodates provisional steps, there need not be a focus on description and comparison at the expense of *all* evaluation. For the theist responding to the evidential argument, this suggests a methodological approach with three stages:

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[32] For example, Murphy interprets Carl Sagan as offering a "naturalistic religion" with its own account of ultimate reality, human origins, sin, salvation, purpose and ethics (2008, pp.40-41).

[33] For similar scepticism toward Darwinian evolution, see agnostic philosopher David Berlinski (2009).

[34] For Prevost explaining evil given the existence of an all-good and all-powerful God is the main challenge for theists (1990, p.107).

1) The development of a philosophical theodicy and an initial assessment of its explanatory power.

2) If the theodicy shows promise, the provisional evaluation of outlines of naturalism and a formulation of theism that incorporates the theodicy.[35]

3) The summative evaluation of best formulations of these worldviews involving detailed descriptions of each.

The relationship between these stages needs clarification. By *philosophical theodicy* I mean an explanation of God and evil that is entailed in, implied by and inferred from the attributes of an omniperfect God. In the second and third stages, this explanation would likely be incorporated into a wider formulation of theism because a theodicy typically does not provide the total content of a theistic hypothesis. This implies that for any proposed theodicy to progress from stage one to outline and detailed IBE comparisons of naturalism and theism in stages two and three it will also need to be compatible with or embeddable in the worldview of an actual theistic tradition, a point which will be discussed further in the next section.

It could be asked, why begin with a philosophical theodicy in the first stage? For instance, we could start with scriptural sources and expound a religious theodicy as a work of philosophical theology. This would ensure that the theodicy is embedded within a given worldview at the outset, so that there would be no question of the theodicy not progressing to the second and third stages of evaluation. However, the first step suggested above is likely to be the most practicable. For the reasonable agnostic inquirer, a plausible philosophical account of why the existence of an omniperfect God is probable despite evidence of evil is a necessary condition of any wider judgement to prefer theism to naturalism in an IBE evaluation, since this minimal conception of God is entailed within the belief systems of the major monotheistic faiths. In our secular and scientific culture, such an inquirer is also less likely to engage with a religious theodicy developed from scriptural sources and intended to defend the rationality of a particular theistic tradition. Moreover, advancing a religious theodicy introduces another problem of perspective: which *interpretation* of a traditional form of theism should constitute the material from which such a theodicy is constructed? The history of Christian and Muslim theism, for example, shows that adherents have variously

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[35] Layman (2003) is an example of the sort of outline comparison of naturalism and theism being suggested here. Layman is concerned with the relative simplicity of compared hypotheses as a condition of their antecedent probability, but his analysis suggests that an article length treatment of a provisional IBE evaluation is feasible.

interpreted these worldviews over many centuries.[36] The challenge of navigating these waters suggests that those taking Knepper's advice to suspend all evaluation until thick descriptions of traditions are produced may be in for a very long wait.

Rather than embark on a "detailed and …historically sensitive and hermeneutically nuanced" account of a religious worldview (Trakakis, 2018c, p.85), starting with a philosophical approach is likely to contribute to the overall economy of the three-stage methodology proposed above. The first step completes a close analysis of a potential philosophical solution to the problem of evil. A successful theodicy could then help to focus research on any tradition of theism with which it may be compatible, by identifying which interpretation of that tradition may represent its best formulation and so merits the descriptive study needed to set up outline and detailed comparisons with naturalism. Alternatively, if analysis shows that the theodicy lacks explanatory power then there would be little point in developing a detailed description of the theistic worldview with which it is most consistent. In other words, by highlighting which interpretation of an actual theism ought to be given prominence, a successful philosophical theodicy could help direct the agenda of religious studies scholars with an interest in contributing to research on this topic in the philosophy of religion.

Employing this framework, *the aim of this study is to develop and evaluate a theodicy in the first stage to determine whether it is a good prima facie candidate for an IBE comparison of worldviews in the second and third stages.* If successful, it would then be for future research to incorporate EAT into a formulation of theism and undertake an IBE comparison with naturalism to ascertain if the theodicy contributes to a defeasible success for theism. The strategy taken to accomplish this aim likewise has three steps, the first two of which will be completed in this study:

1) Use analytic methods to develop and defend *enhanced agency theodicy* (EAT) as a philosophical theodicy.

2) Compare its explanatory power with two existing theodicies; John Hick's *soul-making theodicy* (SMT) and Eleonore Stump's *redemptive suffering theodicy* (RST) are chosen for reasons outlined in the introductory chapter.

3) If successful examine the extent to which EAT is compatible with an actual tradition of theism.

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[36] See Hick (1966) and Hoover (2003) for surveys of the varieties of theological thought on the question of evil within Christian and Muslim theism.

1.4 Success Conditions for Theodicy: Bare and Actual Theisms

The previous section outlined the overall methodological approach and research goals of this study. This section specifies three success conditions for assessing EAT's candidacy for an IBE evaluation with naturalism, a key part of which concerns the distinction between bare and actual theisms. The theodicy proposed in Chapter Four does not include three key features of a Christian worldview: the focus on a relational concept of love as a divine attribute and motivation, the essential fallenness or sinfulness of human nature, and its heavenly redemption through everlasting union with God. Such a theodicy is philosophically possible since in the terms of William Rowe, *restricted standard theism* does not entail these features of a Christian *expanded standard theism.* Rowe defines restricted standard theism to include any proposition that is *entailed* or *strictly implied* by G, the claim *an omniperfect God exists*, but not those that are merely *implied* by G, while expanded theisms include claims that are *not* entailed in or strictly implied by G.[37] However, does this mean that a proposal can stand apart from *any* tradition of theism? This section will argue that an eschatological theodicy that is developed from the propositions of bare or restricted standard theism *cannot be taken as prima facie plausible unless it is consistent with at least one actual form of theism which affirms the existence of an afterlife*.[38]

The difficulty with appealing to an afterlife to explain evil without reference to actual traditions of theism is that the reasonable agnostic inquirer may take this type of theodicy to be a *just-so story*, a tale told to illustrate possibility. As noted in section 1.1, such possible stories are typically advanced in solutions to the logical problem of evil or when challenging the epistemic position from which it is claimed that evidence of evil strongly diminishes the probability of God's existence. While this sort of move may suffice for these purposes, it adds little to the explanatory power of theism in IBE comparisons with naturalism. This may be termed *the objection of fictionalism*. A theodicy may be coherent and convince that the existence of evil and an omniperfect God is possible, *but there would be no good reason to believe such a theodicy if its explanation is merely a fictional possibility.*

The proponent of IBE could object that what matters most in such evaluations is the comparative assessment of explanatory virtues, since judging an explanation to be the best is

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[37] As Trakakis summarises, in *logical entailment* A entails the proposition B only if B can be logically deduced from A. In *strict implication* A implies B only if it is logically impossible for A to be true and B false. To say of A that it *implies* B is to say that either it is not the case that A is true and B is false (in which case A is said to materially imply B) or that A evidentially supports or probabilifies B (2007a, pp.107-108).

[38] Stump uses the term *bare theism* (1985, p.398), which I take to be synonymous with *restricted standard* and *orthodox* theism, as noted in the introductory chapter.

sufficient to conclude that it is probably true. This implies that a theodicy could perform well in an IBE evaluation irrespective of any relationship it may or may not have with an actual theism, since for the hypothesis with the most theoretical virtue to be considered empirically virtuous it need only account for the surprising fact in the abductive trigger and other known observations about the world that are relevant to appraising its explanatory power.[39] However, this position appears to face difficulty when a hypothesis makes substantial claims about matters that are beyond empirical confirmation, such as claims about the existence and nature of an afterlife. If a significant part of an explanation consists of mere philosophical speculation about such a possibility, then the reasonable agnostic inquirer would seem entitled to favour a hypothesis like naturalism which makes use of resources that are largely confirmation conducive.

How, then, does being aligned with an actual theism help a theodicy answer this objection? Whereas a fictional theodicy is a mere possibility, it is reasonable to suppose that a theodicy that is aligned with a tradition of theism is *prima facie* plausible. This is because the fact that such traditions exist at all is unsurprising on the hypothesis that there is an all-powerful, perfectly good God. The reasonable agnostic inquirer should expect such a God to provide providential guidance to human beings. By contrast, a deist conception of divinity in which God sets up the precarious conditions of earthly existence only then to abandon humanity to its fate is incompatible with belief in a perfectly good God. Providential guidance is also unsurprising on free will explanations of evils. Given that God cannot interfere directly with our wills to bring us to a good end, it is likely that human beings would be guided in ways that respect our freedom of will, through inspiration, revelation, miracles and prophets.[40] Therefore, the fact that such traditions claim to be based on knowledge revealed from God is itself a *prima facie* reason to take them seriously on the supposition that theism is true. This suggests that a theodicy that has some likelihood of being true will probably also be consistent with the content of at least one theistic tradition. Otherwise, the theodicean would be in the paradoxical position of endorsing a deep scepticism toward existing monotheisms while claiming to have special knowledge that a providential God has failed to reveal over thousands of years of human history.

Therefore, unlike with fictional accounts of evil that stand apart from any theistic tradition, *it would be unreasonable a priori to dismiss as implausible a theodicy that is consistent with an actual theism without further investigation of that tradition's truth claims*. In other words, the sceptic

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[39] As discussed in section 1.2, pp.19-20.

[40] Swinburne also argues that if human beings' ultimate good depends on our free will, then we have *a priori* reason to believe that a perfectly good God would provide information that helps us attain this good (1989, pp.4-5).

would not be justified in believing the theodicy to be false or improbable without investigating the truth claims of the tradition with which it is linked, just as the proponent could not show that the theodicy is plausible, and not merely a fictional account, without also showing that the linked tradition has a good chance of being true.

To concede this point, anyone with a prior commitment to naturalism would have to suspend their beliefs, but the theist is obliged to do likewise when critical realism is assumed in inference to the best explanation evaluation. There is then still the question of whether the theistic tradition to which a theodicy is linked has any truth value. This question would be considered during the third, detailed stage of IBE comparison in the expanded Oppy-type investigation outlined in the previous section. Nevertheless, before such an evaluation the reasonable agnostic inquirer would be justified in taking an explanatory powerful theodicy that is linked to an actual theism as a *prima facie* reason to prefer theism to naturalism *because* of its relationship with that tradition, whereas no such justification exists for the fictional theodicy.

This study uses the term *correlation* to refer to a theodicy's conceptual overlap with a tradition of theism. The term distinguishes this research from the work of religious theodicies that presume the truth of certain theological doctrines and attempt to make them cohere with claims about evil. Rather, in the approach outlined in this chapter the theodicean begins with a philosophically constructed explanation and then discovers the extent to which this account is corroborated by relevant beliefs in a theistic tradition. Since an actual theism and its concept of the afterlife is not presupposed, a philosophical theodicy based on bare theism *in principle may correlate with the content of more than one theistic tradition to the same or differing degrees*.

Nevertheless, where there is a strong correlation with a specific form of theism, the reasonable agnostic inquirer may take an explanatorily powerful theodicy as a *prima facie* reason to accept theism. If a correlation is weak, in the sense that some ideas of the theodicy fit very poorly with corresponding ideas in an actual theism, then the link with a tradition will not provide this epistemic support. A theodicy's correlation with an actual theism therefore serves a dual purpose in the three-part research methodology outlined in the previous section. It determines whether a philosophical theodicy has the epistemic support to progress to stages two and three of the evaluation. It also determines which actual theism, or interpretation of it, forms part of the wider formulation of theism which is compared with naturalism in these latter stages.

The forgoing discussion suggests how a set of success conditions for theodicy proposed by Peter Van Inwagen (1996) may be amended in light of this distinction between bare and actual theism. Where *S* stands for a proposition that describes the amount, kinds, and distribution of

suffering of all sentient creatures that there are or ever have been, and *h* is a theodicy, an "auxiliary hypothesis" of theism which purports to explain how S could be true given theism, Inwagen argues:

> "It is clear that if a theodicy is to be at all interesting, the probability of *S* on the conjunction of theism and *h* (that is, on the theodicy) will have to be high – or at least not too low. But whether a theodicy is interesting depends not only on the probability of *S* on the conjunction of theism and *h*, but also on the probability of *h* on theism….The task of the theodicist, therefore, may be represented as follows: find a hypothesis *h* such that P(*S*/theism & *h*) is high, or at least not too low, and P(*h*/theism) is high" (1996, p.154).

Interestingly, Inwagen suggests that for any theodicy which has actually been proposed in the literature *no real case has been made for P(h/theism) being high*. He does not expand on this point, but I interpret him to take theism here to be bare theism, since the high probability of Christian theodicy on Christian theism may be assumed in most cases. For example, he suggests that whether facts about suffering are unsurprising on Plantinga's free will defence, taken as a theodicy, is a separate matter from the question of whether the free will defence is itself surprising on theism. If this interpretation is correct, it introduces the consideration of *which* theism, bare or actual, is being discussed.[41] This means that *a theodicy may be improbable on bare theism and probable on an actual theism, or it may be probable on bare theism and improbable on an actual theism, or it may be probable on both or improbable on both.* The point is significant because actual theisms entail bare theism, so improbability on the latter is seemingly a difficulty for a theodicy.

I propose amending Inwagen's success conditions to include both bare and actual forms of theism in the following way. Where *t* is bare theism and $t_{1/2/3}$ are different theistic traditions, such as Jewish, Christian and Muslim theisms, the theodicean must find a hypothesis *h* such that:

1) P(*S*/*t* & *h*) is high, or at least not too low,
2) P(*h*/*t*) is high *and*
3) P(*h*/$t_{1/2/3}$) is high.

That is, the probability of the amount, kinds, and distribution of suffering on the conjunction of bare theism and the proposed theodicy must be high or not too low, the probability of the

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[41] Another interpretation is that Inwagen takes theism here to be Christian theism, and in his point concerning P(h/theism) he is questioning whether certain theodicies working with Christian resources do in fact cohere with Christian theism traditionally understood, as can be doubted with Hick's Irenaean theodicy, for example.

theodicy on bare theism must be high, *and the probability of the theodicy on an actual theism must be high*. For the first condition I will take explanatory power as a proxy for P(*S/t* & *h*), where high explanatory power is equivalent to high probability. For the second condition I take a theodicy which is entailed in, implied by, and inferred from the propositions of bare theism to be very probable on bare theism. This means that for P(*h/t*) to be high a hypothesis need not limit itself to claims that are only entailed or strictly implied by God's omniperfection, as in Rowe's restricted standard theism, but P(*h/t*) will be low for theodicies that include claims that are not even implied by God's omniperfection, such as Christian claims concerning the fallenness of human nature and its redemption through union with a Triune God.[42] For the third condition, a strong correlation between a theodicy and an actual theism can be taken as a proxy for P(*h/t_{1/2/3}*) being high, where $t_{1/2/3}$ is a normative interpretation of this form of theism, or includes ideas endorsed by theologians recognised as orthodox in the tradition.

The introductory chapter noted Eleonore Stump's argument that a theodicy based on bare theism is unlikely to be compatible with actual forms of theism and that such a theodicy will lack the resources needed to resolve the problem of evil, unlike those solutions that work with the complete belief systems of theistic traditions (1985, p.398). The above amendment to Inwagen's success conditions implies that Stump may be mistaken on both these points. Indeed, this must be the position taken in this research because the strategy outlined in this chapter aims to develop an explanatorily powerful theodicy that is both probable on bare theism and strongly correlated with an actual theism. It is a line of inquiry Stump's position appears to want to head off, perhaps because Christian ideas concerning divinity, human nature and ultimate ends may in fact be a structural problem for those theodicies that work with this framework of ideas.

Stated in the terms of the amended success conditions above, it is not clear that a solution which is highly probable on Christian theism will also be highly probable on bare theism. Indeed, it may even be the case that the more probable a theodicy is on Christian theism, the less probable it is on bare theism. This is because the creation of the world as a cosmic drama of fall, redemption from sin and human-divine union *seems surprising on bare theism,* even if theodicies that employ these ideas are internally coherent. The possibility investigated in this study is that a theodicy which structures the world with different initial conditions put in place for other purposes may be more likely on the hypothesis that an omniperfect God exists. To satisfy the three success conditions outlined above, this theodicy must be probable on bare theism, have greater explanatory power than the theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump, *and* be probable on or strongly correlated with

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[42] P(*S/t* & *h*) is likely to be low for a theodicy that restricts itself to claims that are entailed or strictly implied by God's omniperfection, since this precludes appeals to an afterlife, as the next section will discuss.

an actual tradition of theism. If Chapter Four demonstrates that the claims of the proposed theodicy are entailed in, implied by, and inferred from the propositions of bare theism, and Chapter Five establishes the theodicy's relative explanatory power, then the first two success conditions will be satisfied. If future research also substantiates a strong correlation with a normative interpretation of an actual theism, then the third condition would be fulfilled.

1.5 IBE and The Rationality of Appeals to an Afterlife

The appeal to an afterlife is not central to the argument of all theodicies: conventional free will theodicy explains why the possibility of moral evil is the price of a universe created for the great good of making free and autonomous choices; natural law theodicy explains natural evils to be the cost of regular, orderly laws of nature, without which a world of morally responsible free action would not be possible. However, as Michael J. Murray rightly concludes, neither can provide a comprehensive theistic explanation for worldly evil, since free will theodicies have difficulty explaining the necessity of natural evils and not all natural evils serve the purpose of establishing the law-like regularity needed to exercise free will and moral responsibility (2009, pp.362-367). If the story does not continue after death in some way, how may it be claimed that God is perfectly good to the young child who accidentally dies, or to the millions of innocents who suffer and die in wartime genocides or famines, or to the countless animals that perish due to predation? These questions follow from the widely held assumption among philosophers of religion that a perfectly good, all-powerful God could not permit or cause *any* evil that is gratuitous or pointless with respect to God's purposes (Trakakis, 2007a, p.303). It seems that without goods that are realised in an afterlife theism could at most explain some evils, in which case the proponent of the evidential argument will have made her case.[43]

If a complete theistic explanation for the intensity, quantity and distribution of evil is likely to involve other-worldly goods, what entitles the theodicean to make appeals to goods that are presently unknowable? Rowe argues that we are in an epistemic position to make such claims. For example, he considers the Christian notion of experiencing *total felicity in the eternal presence of God* to be a good we can intellectually grasp, and therefore takes it as one of the *known* goods that would not justify horrific moral and natural evils in his direct argument (1996, p.275). Alston correctly objects, however, that Rowe's clarification that we do not have a very clear understanding of the nature of this post-mortem state makes his notion of being *known* too ambiguous, where

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[43] This is recognised on both sides of the debate on God and evil, as noted in the Introduction, p.7, fn.1.

having such knowledge does not help us to assess the magnitude of eschatological goods or weigh them in the balance against evils that are known (1996, pp.324-325). It seems, then, that while some form of an afterlife can expand the explanatory scope of a theodicy, any appeal to eschatological goods will invite reasonable scepticism from the non-theist, by virtue of the fact that they are supposed to exist beyond our ken in a life after death.

Nevertheless, the IBE approach to the indirect argument does provide epistemic grounds to posit the existence of an afterlife outside the appeal to religious belief. Unlike the direct evidential argument, which directly challenges the claim that there is an omniperfect creator, comparing the theoretical virtues of rival explanations in an IBE evaluation *allows the theist to suppose the truth of theism when advancing her hypothesis*. Consequently, the theist supposing that an omniperfect God exists is entitled to construct an explanation of data concerning evil and suffering that is consistent with this supposition, and to consider how it might fare in an IBE comparison with alternative accounts of these facts. Moreover, the initial supposition is a reasonable one, given that outside of theodicy there are other arguments for God's existence that are supported by evidence and which give theism some likelihood of being true. For example, cosmological arguments, the fine-tuning argument for design, arguments from consciousness, and arguments from history, morality, and religious experience are examples of evidence-based arguments that support the *prima facie* truth of theism. Although such arguments cannot be assumed to be decisive in making theism more likely than not, especially as they are countered by the evidential argument from evil, any reasonable person irrespective of their worldview would have to grant that *prima facie* they give theism *some* chance of being true.[44]

The IBE approach therefore allows the following argument from evil for the existence of an afterlife. If the claim *an omniperfect God exists* has no scope to provide a comprehensive explanation for the apparent gratuity of evil if the claim *an afterlife exists* is false, then the existence of some form of afterlife is more probable than not *on the supposition that theism is true*. In other words, if a theodicean were to attempt to explain the types of apparently gratuitous moral and natural evils described in Rowe's direct argument, then on theism such evils are likely to be explained by some account of the realisation of further or greater goods in a post-mortem existence. Given that the mortal body is destroyed following death, it seems such an account implies some form of dualism, where at the very least an immaterial part of the self survives into an afterlife. More will be said on this in subsequent chapters. Here, the argument from evil for the existence of an afterlife can be stated in the following way: where G is the proposition *an omniperfect God exists*, A is the claim, *an afterlife exists for mortal creatures*, and E refers to evidence of the apparent

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[44] Other such arguments include *theistic* arguments from evil (Dougherty & Walls, 2013).

gratuity of earthly moral and natural evils, then P(G &~A/E) < P(G & A/E): the existence of an omniperfect God and no afterlife for mortal creatures is less likely than the existence of such a God and an afterlife given the apparent gratuity of earthly moral and natural evils.

A look at the Bayesian version of Rowe's direct argument illustrates the space that the IBE approach to the indirect argument gives to theistic appeals to an afterlife. When considering whether eschatological goods are part of restricted standard theism, Rowe rightly argues that while their existence may be implied by G, their existence is not entailed or strictly implied by G (Trakakis (2007a, pp.107-8). In terms of the proposition outlined above, P (G &~A/E) < P(G & A/E), A cannot be logically deduced from G as in entailment, and it is not logically impossible for G to be true and A to be false as in strict implication, but A is implied because G evidentially supports or makes more probable A given E.[45]

That G merely implies A would be a weakness on Rowe's view, since a conjunction with A would put G outside RST, making it a form of expanded standard theism that is less simple, and therefore *a priori* less probable using his Bayesian method. However, in an IBE evaluation of rival hypotheses, the conjunction of G and A is not necessarily a weakness. Any reasonable person making such an assessment is free to weigh theoretical virtues in the balance, judging whether (G & A) has advantages in terms of explanatory scope against any difficulties of simplicity and coherence. Consequently, the theodicean is not only epistemically entitled to posit the existence of an afterlife when supposing the truth of theism in an IBE evaluation, *but she is also not precluded from success in doing so*, as she would be in Rowe's Bayesian direct argument.[46]

While the foregoing discussion has outlined an epistemic case for the non-religious appeal to the existence of an afterlife in theodicy, this is not to say that any notion of an afterlife will do. As John Cottingham notes, simply adding more time to life after mortal existence cannot "bear all or even most of the weight" of explaining worldly suffering on theism (2017, pp.15-16). On the other hand, in IBE comparisons of theism and naturalism, any gains in the scope and coherence of a

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[45] Dougherty argues that since "theism entails that there is no possible world containing fallen creatures that lacks an afterlife, heaven is an entailment of bare theism" (2014, p.142). However, even if Dougherty is correct that all worlds with fallen creatures must have an afterlife, on theism a possible world where creatures are not fallen in the Christian sense is conceivable, so Dougherty goes too far in claiming that heaven is an entailment of bare theism.

[46] Rowe uses Bayesian principles to argue that where expanded standard theism (EST) entails restricted standard theism (RST), the prior probability of EST alone, given our background knowledge, is lower than the prior probability of RST alone and that the probability of EST on E (evidence of evils) is just as low as the probability of RST on E (Trakakis, 2007a, pp.110-112). James Beilby points out that not only does this mean that the probability of EST is much lower than RST in Rowe's view, *but that nothing can be added to RST which would increase its probability on E* (Belby, 1996, cited in Trakakis, 2007a, p.112).

theodicy resulting from its appeal to eschatological goods cannot come at the cost of making it too complex, as simplicity tends to count in naturalism's favour. Agreeing with Rowe, Oppy points out:

> "The additional entities that are postulated by theism might pay their way because
> they lead to better explanations of data... However, if all else
> is equal – i.e., if, on all other considerations, theism manages nothing better
> than a tie with naturalism – then there is, indeed, all-things-considered reason
> to prefer naturalism to theism" (2018b, p.73).[47]

However, the appeal to an afterlife *is* likely to make theism more complex than naturalism. Such theodicies must not only address the conventional problems of explaining why there is any evil at all, the various kinds of evils, and the amount of evils that exist, but they have the added burden of explaining the role of the afterlife as part of a multi-stage account of existence. For example, this appears to be a difficulty for *just-deserts* views of life after death. Why would a perfectly good and powerful God create a mortal life for creatures only to punish and reward their behaviour in an afterlife? Does it make sense to take heavenly existence to be a compensation for a bad life when giving recompense for injury cannot be the purpose for which the world was created? It seems that such notions of the afterlife make theodicies more complex without providing sufficient reasons for a two-stage world.

One feature of Hume's original indirect argument is worth noting with respect to this problem of complexity. Hume is concerned to show that observed facts concerning *both* good and evil are more likely on his indifferent deity hypothesis than on theism. Howard-Snyder notes that Hume's aim here was to close off the response that the good in the world is much more likely on theism (1994, p.453), but the strategy of providing a total explanation of the mixed phenomena of the world could also help to simplify a theodicy that appeals to an afterlife. As Oppy points out, naturalistic accounts of the world are economical because they require no extra ontological or ideological commitments that are "keyed to data concerning the distribution of suffering and flourishing in our universe" (2018b, p.76). The theist not only needs such an auxiliary hypothesis, but in advancing a theodicy she typically adds another layer of sub-theory by targeting the special problem of why *suffering in particular* is allowed or caused by an omniperfect God. However, Oppy rightly argues that it remains open to the theist to answer questions concerning God's involvement

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[47] On this point Rowe and Oppy follow Hume, who argued that appealing to goods beyond our ken adds complexity which counts against theistic explanation, as long as the alternative hypothesis is not *a priori* less probable (Tooley, 2021, 3.3).

in and attitude toward suffering "without appealing to any theoretical commitments that are keyed to the provision of those answers" (2018b, p.77).[48]

For example, the truth of a theodicy that provides separate sub-theories for different types of evil, like moral and a natural evil, and human and animal suffering, is reasonably thought of as more *ad hoc* and complicated, and so less probable, than a theodicy that integrates all these types of evil into a single explanation. This suggests that following Hume's strategy of working with explanations of the nature of the world as a whole, including the good and the bad it contains, rather than only explaining facts concerning evil and suffering, will both simplify the theistic hypothesis and expand its scope, strengthening its explanatory power. In other words, the theodicean can compensate for the ontological complexity involved in appealing to an afterlife with the greater syntactic simplicity of unifying the phenomena of suffering *and* flourishing into a single explanation. The theodicy proposed in Chapter Four will adopt such a strategy.

1.6 Conceptualising Ultimate Goods

If IBE evaluations support the reasonableness of a theodicy's appeal to an afterlife how then do we reason beyond our ken about the possible *nature* of this post-mortem future and the divine purposes it may serve? The theodicean pursuing this aim perhaps has two strategies open to her. A *top-down* approach might involve her interpolating certain religious ideas into her explanation, for example Christian notions of beatific vision, beatific intimacy or union with God. This would be consistent with the approach of a religious theodicy that presupposes the doctrines of a particular theistic tradition, but this method is precluded from the strategy outlined in section 1.3, which seeks to formulate a theodicy based on bare theism using only philosophical resources.

Another top-down approach would restrict itself to bare theism and simply equate a good afterlife with *the* highest good of God's omniperfect being and posit some form of coextensiveness between the two. However, while this idea suggests an overlap with notions of beatific intimacy and union in Christian theology, it is not clear why the highest good that is supposed to exist on theism, the being of an omniperfect creator, should be taken to be identical with the highest *creaturely* good. This coextensiveness generates an explanatory problem. Can we account for how attaining the highest good closes the incomprehensible metaphysical distance between infinite God and finite

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[48] Oppy further writes, "it is at least conceivable that there are theistic worldviews in which there are no theoretical commitments for which it is true that the sole reason - or even the major reason - that theists have for taking on those commitments concerns their role in the explanation of distribution of suffering in our universe" (2018b, p.77).

human? Adams alludes to the extent of this challenge when she notes that Biblical religion affirms the "metaphysical puniness" of not only individual creatures but creation as a whole in relation to an infinite God (1993a, p.168). Consequently any conception of human-divine unity would have to show how human personhood and free will can exist in such a state and why embodied existence is necessary for it. In other words, it is not clear how the immense gap between human beings and an omniperfect God can be closed without altering the fundamental categories that define what it is to be a human person.

Instead, it may be simpler for a theodicy to conceive of the good afterlife as the ultimate good *for the type of creatures that we are* and posit it as ontologically distinct from God. This possibility is compatible with a *bottom-up* approach to theorising about ultimate goods that attempts to infer the nature of a possible reality beyond death from knowledge of goods in our own world. Stump (2018a) interprets Aquinas to have taken this sort of approach to form part of his account of the highest good. He begins with the conviction that *personal relationship* is the genus within which the greatest goods for human beings fall. Since God is characterized by mind and will, and so is a *person* in our sense of the word, a union of love with God is thus a personal relationship and the greatest of all personal relationships. It is also a shareable good, since union with God is a union with other persons in relationship with God. Therefore, the highest good for human beings is this shared union with a loving God. Aquinas's thought goes beyond this argument to include metaphysical and religious claims about the nature of the beatific vision.[49] Nevertheless, the *conceptual* link that Aquinas draws between the notion of personal relationship and the highest good of union with God illustrates how a bottom-up view of ultimate goods may be developed.

To conceptualise ultimate goods this study will rely on a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Chapter Four advances a metaphysical argument concerning the nature of an omniperfect God, *that such a God is a good-maximizing deity*. It draws out the implications of this view to conceive of an ideal possible world a good-maximizing God might be expected to create. This is a stand-alone realm that is paradisal in lacking moral and natural evils, but which is not presupposed to be the afterlife of a prior stage of existence. Nevertheless, its model of an ideal environment inevitability involves a picture of how certain types of goods that are known to us through everyday experience might be amplified, optimised or enhanced. The chapter then proposes a theodicy that explains why this realm of enhanced agency requires the creation of a world like ours as part of a two-stage existence involving a life before and after death.

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[49] For discussion of Aquinas on the beatific vision see Justin Noia (2018).

Section 1.5 argued that IBE evaluations allow the theist to suppose the existence of an omniperfect God and that a successful theistic hypothesis will involve the existence of some form of afterlife. However, what grounds do we have for thinking that our experience of known goods is in any way relevant to a credible or plausible picture of ultimate goods beyond our world? The answer involves the structure of an eschatological theodicy as a greater good argument that applies the *end justifies the means* principle. Stewart Melville argues that *all* free will and soul-making theodicies and defences apply this principle in some fashion (1993, p.65).[50] When the end justifies the means, the positive value of an end is thought to offset in some way the negative value of the means to that end. The principle only appears to be coherent, however, when it relies on what may be termed a *continuity of value* assumption. This assumes that the nature of a means corresponds in some important respect to the nature of the end with which it is causally or logically linked. For example, the unintelligibility of training an astronaut in jungle survival for the end of existing on a planet that is entirely a water world seems to assume this notion of continuity. Similarly, Stanley Kane (1975) implies this assumption when he objects that Hick's soul-making theodicy is absurd to require the suffering involved in developing certain character traits that will have no practical use in the perfect end state of union with God.[51]

Kane's point illustrates how the continuity of value assumption can inform critiques of greater good theodicies, but I propose to employ it to ground inferences about ultimate goods in a possible afterlife from the world of our experience. The theodicean may reason in the following way:

1) If the ultimate goods that could explain evils do not exist in the world of our experience, then on theism they must exist in another reality, otherwise earthly suffering would be gratuitous.

2) As our world does in fact exist, then on theism it must provide the necessary conditions for bringing about these ultimate goods, otherwise earthly suffering would be gratuitous.

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[50] Melville discusses deontological theodicies but argues that these also involve greater good justifications, concluding that "the only viable justification procedure for the theist is a teleological one" (1993, p.79).

[51] Hick's response is that what matters about soul-making is the "entering into a certain relationship with God" that comes with developing specific character traits, not the traits themselves (2010, p.382); nevertheless, Kane's argument illustrates this notion of continuity.

3) If this world is a means for realising ultimate goods in another reality, then there must be some fundamental relationship between the properties of this world and those of this other reality, since if not, an omniperfect creator could conceivably bring about the same end using entirely different means, for example through another possible world with much less suffering.

4) If our world and this other reality share important characteristics, and the latter is a much greater good than the former, *then the other reality must contain a fulfilment of goods that are found in the world of our experience*, where the notion of fulfilment refers to the fullest or highest realisation of some good.

This rationale suggests how the continuity of value assumption can contribute to the economy and coherence of an eschatological theodicy, since it provides for a systematic picture of how ante- and post-mortem existence might fit together as parts of a practical scheme in which the realisation of the latter explains the nature of the former. However, to use the assumption to ground inferences about a possible afterlife, an important caveat should be noted. Continuity of value does not assume a correspondence between the *total* nature of a means and the total nature of an end. For example, the means of using a multi-stage rocket to land a vehicle on the moon is not something that is carried forward in a meaningful way into the end, as it is discarded shortly after leaving earth's orbit. Similarly, if a surgeon causes harm to a child as part of her best efforts to remove an aggressive cancer, the harm does not continue into the end state of the successfully treated patient. This is because the harm may be taken to be part of a mixed means alongside the preservation of the healthy functioning of the child's body, where the latter part is carried forward from means to end. In other words, the nature of a means may contain elements that are intrinsic to and extrinsic to the final end.

One theoretical advantage of assuming continuity of value when inferring the possible nature of eschatological goods from the world of our experience is that it makes those goods comprehensible to any reasonable person irrespective of their worldview. This potentially addresses two concerns raised by William Alston and Marylin McCord Adams concerning afterlife goods. As noted in Section 1.5, Alston objected to Rowe's view that everlasting felicity in the presence of God is an unexperienced good that is nonetheless within our intellectual grasp and therefore knowable. Alston's main point is that we have a clearer grasp of the value of unexperienced goods that have a stronger analogy with experienced ones, and for him eternal bliss with God is of the sort that is strongly disanalogous with experienced goods. The difficulty facing the theodicean, in Alston's view, is that such unexperienced goods "may be the livest candidates for goods the realization of which

would justify God in permitting suffering", placing us "in a bad position to determine whether the magnitude of the good is such as to make it worthwhile for God to permit a certain evil in order to make its realization possible" (1996, p.324).

Alston's objection is presented as part of a sceptical defence against Rowe's evidential argument, but in principle it also provides the theodicean with a strategy. It implies that afterlife goods that *do* have a strong analogy with experienced ones may allow us to see whether their magnitude and nature accounts for the evils that there are in the world. The challenge for the theodicean taking this approach is to show that the realisation of eschatological goods that are analogous to known ones would be worth the cost of creating this world and all the suffering it contains. Adams rejects this possibility when horrendous evils are concerned, arguing that since such evils "constitute the *prima facie* ruin of a person's life", they cannot be outweighed or defeated by any package of *immanent goods*, such as experiencing the beauty of nature, joy of creativity or personal intimacy with others, which are merely commensurate with worldly goods (1988, p.235). Only the incommensurable goodness of beatific intimacy, a transcendent yet personal relationship with the divine persons of the Triune God, is "big enough" to defeat horrendous evils within someone's life (Adams, 1999, pp.82-83).

However, as Alston points out, there is a difficulty in appealing to unquantifiable goods when accounting for bad states of affairs that are in principle quantifiable, such as the amount of human and animal suffering in the world. Even if the non-theist grants assumptions about the infinite value of Adams's notion of beatific intimacy, the appeal to the transcendent and incommensurable is mysterious, inviting reasonable scepticism when considering how eschatological goods might win out over known evils. This study aims to evade this choice between goods which are unexperienced and experienced, and those that are immanent and transcendent. It focusses on how certain kinds of commensurate immanent-type goods *might be amplified and enhanced*, in the sense that the scope to produce and participate in such goods is greatly improved relative to experienced goods, both in terms of quantity and quality. Enhancing the value of immanent-type goods that are somewhat commensurate to and strongly analogous with experienced goods may provide an account of afterlife goods that is tangible and quantifiable, and which addresses the difficulties raised by Alston and Adams.

1.7 Greater Good Justifications of Evil

Eschatological theodicies face a further difficulty concerning the morality of greater good arguments and their instrumental justifications of evils. So-called *anti-theodicy* objections, raised by Kenneth Surin (1986), D.Z. Phillips (2001, 2004) and Nick Trakakis (2017, 2018c) among others, reject any attempt to justify evils as means to greater goods as doing so tacitly sanctions and trivialises them, rendering the theodicean and the God they seek to defend morally insensitive to the utter gratuity of much suffering (Scott, 1996). On this view, rational explanations designed to show the place of evils in God's good plan are too costly, since making them explicable and so in some sense tolerable subverts moral ideas and sentiments we would prefer not to live without. Such justifications are also thought to hinder responses to the practical or existential problem of evil, by promoting a moral passivity and fatalism that works against an individual's efforts to deal with and alleviate suffering (Trakakis, 2018c).

There is no scope in this section to discuss anti-theodicy arguments at length except to suggest one implication of IBE evaluations which may address their main concerns. The objection to the appeal to greater goods seems plausible if theodicy is only construed as a response to the *direct* evidential argument from evil, as with Trakakis (2007a) and Stump (2010, 2018a) for example. The direct argument concludes, *there is no morally sufficient reason for an omniperfect God to cause or allow cases of intense human and natural suffering*, and challenges the theist to show that this conclusion is false by providing such a morally sufficient reason. In other words, the theodicean attempting to answer this argument can be taken to be providing a *moral* justification of evil, and so invite the objection that theodicies trivialise evils or demoralise efforts against them if that justification is accepted.

However, the objection seems to dissolve for the theodicean taking an IBE approach to the indirect evidential argument. The theist advancing a theodicy for such an assessment is more appropriately thought of as providing an *explanation* of the world on theism to put up against the rival explanation of naturalism, rather than justifying God's uses of evil. Adams considers John Hick to have adopted this approach to theodicy, taking him to prefer an emphasis on understanding how evils originate and explanations of why God permits them that are compatible with human values, rather than presuming God to be morally culpable for evil and in need of exoneration (Adams, 1988, pp.216-217). Certainly, a theodicy that is part of an IBE evaluation will involve presenting morally sufficient reasons for God creating a world with evil, but as noted in section 1.1, in an IBE evaluation this would be one part of a wider theistic hypothesis which Prevost terms an integrative explanation

(1990, p.121). As such, the emphasis is on a theodicy's contribution to the overall explanatory power of theism, not just challenging the major premise of the direct evidential argument.[52]

This difference broadens the parameters of discussion concerning the moral insensitivity and fatalism that theodicies are supposed to engender. For example, section 1.5 suggested that a theodicy which provides a single explanation for the suffering *and* flourishing in the world, and not just facts concerning its evils, will simplify a theistic hypothesis while expanding its scope, thereby strengthening its explanatory power. In this case, a theodicy cannot solely be taken to provide a morally sufficient reason for evils. Furthermore, if the relative explanatory power of naturalism is brought into the picture, the objection that greater good justifications trivialise evils or undermine efforts against them invites a similar argument against naturalism. For example, sociobiologists and evolutionary theorists have suggested explanations for the survival of altruistic behaviour given the notion of natural selection. Yet if their accounts of altruism as the manipulation of various social instincts by those who benefit from such activity, or as feats of elaborate self-deception which mask our real purpose to manipulate others for personal gain, also give little encouragement to moral behaviour, then this is a point to be weighed in the balance in a comparison with theism.[53]

Anti-theodicy objections also appear to have less force against theodicies that involve a macro or global view of the world as a system which puts in place the conditions needed to bring about some future good. One reason why is that such an approach gives the theodicean space to attribute to an omniperfect God a negative attitude toward evil within that system, despite being responsible for its creation, a feature which could not be taken as trivialising or sanctioning such evils or encouraging moral passivity. An analogy with an exam illustrates the point: to run the assessment the college puts in place a marking scheme that takes a positive attitude to good performance and a negative attitude to bad performance. The college passes or fails students based on their answers, with the resulting consequences for their future. The college will also need to apply exam procedures rigorously and impartially to ensure the integrity of the exam. Having all this *explained* to students so that they understand the exam process *ceteris paribus* does not by itself stop them from taking it seriously or make students ambivalent toward doing well or badly.

Nevertheless, this chapter closes by outlining a set of principles which qualify the instrumental justification of evils and address concerns over the ethics of greater good theodicies.

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[52] On theism, integrative explanations for evil are likely to involve at least partial answers to four theodicy questions outlined by Adams (1988, p.216): 1) *Where* do evils come from? 2) *How* do they originate? 3) *Who* (if anyone) is morally responsible and/or to blame for the existence of evils? 4) *Whether*, *how,* and *to what extent* can good triumph over evil?

[53] For discussion of evolutionary accounts of morality see Walls (2002, p.171).

Firstly, the problem of undeserved suffering may be answered with the *sufferer centred requirement* (SCR), the intelligibility of which has been affirmed by Nick Trakakis, William Rowe, Eleonore Stump, William Alston, Marilyn McCord Adams and Michael Tooley, among others (Trakakis, 2007a, pp.175-176). This posits that the suffering of an innocent person is permissible *only if* that person benefits from the good secured by the means that causes that suffering. Trakakis states the principle this way: "It is morally permissible for an agent A to allow a person S to undergo intense, involuntary and undeserved suffering *only if* the good secured by S's suffering (or one of the goods secured by that suffering) is shared by S in a conscious way" (2007a, p.175). Therefore, a theodicy that explains the nature of the world as a means by which an omniperfect God realises an eschatological future that benefits victims of undeserved suffering has scope to satisfy SCR.[54]

Secondly, a greater good theodicy need not involve evils directly as means to better ends. Rather it can employ the *principle of double effect*, in which evils are foreseen yet unintended consequences of a means to a good end, as with the free will defence, where moral evil is a by-product of having free will. One qualification of this principle is that bad outcomes should in some sense be proportionate to the benefit gained through the means to ensure that "the over-all package (means, side-effect and end) is a great enough good" (Adams, 1988, p.227).[55] Another consideration is that there may be good states of affairs that are brought out of the unintended negative consequences of a means, but since in such cases the means itself is not intended to realise those good outcomes they fall outside the principle of double effect.

Thirdly, with respect to divine agency and the end justifies the means principle, I take the view of Melville that since an omnipotent God is not constrained by causal necessity, as human beings are in a world governed by natural laws, that the principle needs the stronger link of logical necessity (1993, p.66). In other words, for an end state E and for a means M that involves suffering, E *logically* cannot exist without M. An evil means would be gratuitous if it were merely causally necessary, since an omnipotent God could use an alternative way to achieve the end. However, it is not sufficient to explain evil only on the grounds that it is logically necessary to some good end, since the aggregate of evils that are necessary for that good may together cancel out the positive value of the end. Therefore, an evil comes under a greater good analysis *iff* the good in question entails the

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[54] Luke Gelinas notes that some find SCR controversial because it amounts to a denial of the claim that God could be justified to permit evils on something resembling agent-neutral consequentialist principles (2009, p.543).

[55] Stewart Goetz argues that when such harm is unintended there is no certain amount of harm that may be permitted to accomplish a purpose such that the occurrence of more than that amount would be unjustified (2009, p.477). However, proportionality is seemingly a valid criterion when judging whether harmful side effects are justified by the principle of double effect.

existence of an evil or evils, *and* the good in some sense wins out over the evil when taken together as an overall package (Melville, 1993, p.87).

Finally, to define in what sense greater goods win out over evils, I will follow Marilyn McCord Adams and Nick Trakakis and use the notions of *outweighing* and *defeat* as defined by Roderick Chisholm (1990).[56] Trakakis sets out Chisholm's notion of the outweighing of an evil by a good in the following way: with respect to a whole composed of a good part and an evil part, the good may be said to outweigh the evil part when a) the whole itself is good and b) the good part is the larger part of the whole (2007a, p.234). In other words, the value of the part of the whole that is good must be greater than the value of the part that is bad, otherwise the positive value of the whole may be less than the negative value of the bad part. As Trakakis points out, this is a much stronger construal of outweighing than that of William Rowe, who proposes that an evil E is outweighed *iff* there is a good G such that the conjunctive state of affairs G and E is a good where the positive value of G and E taken together need not be greater than the negative value of the bad part E (Trakakis, 2007a, p.234). That is if G has a value of +7 and E has a value of -5, then G would outweigh E on Rowe's construal since the value of G and E would be +2, but on Chisholm's understanding it is not outweighing since G and E as a whole would be less of a good than E is a bad, with a value of +2 compared to -5.[57]

> *Outweighed evil* ^{df} = a necessary part of a good whole where the net positive value of the whole is greater than the disvalue of the evil part.

For defeating goods Trakakis summarises Chisholm's position in the following way: a good is greater in the sense that G *defeats* E, *iff* a) G and E is a good state of affairs, b) G and E is better than E, *and* c) G and E is better than G (2007a, p.235). This means that both good and bad parts contribute to the positive value of the whole. In other words, the whole is greater than the evil part alone *because of not in spite of* that part.[58] Chisholm gives the example of the good state of contemplating a wrongful act and the bad state of experiencing displeasure when contemplating that act, which taken together forms the virtuous activity of repentance. Similarly, experiencing fear and exercising courage are intrinsically bad and good states of affairs respectively, but as courage is

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[56] Trakakis uses the term *outweighing* in place of Chisholm's *balancing off*, but both terms refer to the same concept. I shall side with Trakakis' usage as having the clearer meaning of the two terms (2007a, p.234).

[57] Michael J. Murray uses the term *sufficiently outweighing* to refer to Chisholm's understanding of outweighing (2009, p.358).

[58] Adams defines the defeat of evil as its inclusion "in some good-enough whole to which it bears a relation of organic unity" (1999, p.28).

made up of both the value of the whole is greater because of the intrinsic qualities of both the good and bad parts (Chisholm, 1990, p.60).

> *Defeated evil* [df] = a necessary part of a good whole that contributes to the goodness of the whole, where the positive value of the whole consists of both its good and evil parts.

However, Adams rightly argues that it will not do for a theodicy to show that it is *God* who deems a person's suffering to be defeated (1999, pp.28-31). Rather the person *herself* must attribute positive value to her life from an internal point view and in a way that makes sense of her conscious experiences in terms of the goals, ideals and relationships she values. Adams' specification for the defeat of evils makes a person's subjective assessment of suffering essential to the fulfilment of this condition. Nevertheless, adopting a strategy of defeat does not save the theodicean from considering how much suffering there is and whether it might need to be outweighed. For example, Adams suggests a hybrid strategy where horrendous evils are defeated and small to medium-scale evils are outweighed (1988, p.227, n.21), although bringing all evil into a single relationship with the good, whether defeating or outweighing, may be more economical. Yet even if a theodicy were to adopt a strategy of defeating *all* evils, horrendous or otherwise, the overall balance of good and evil must still be considered. For example, the theodicean may think that no amount of evil is too much as long as it is all defeated, or that the more evil that there is the better the world will be which defeats it. Yet the quantity of evil in such evil defeating worlds might not be worth the price if there are other possible worlds which contain much less evil. Like the principle of double effect, therefore, the defeat of evils brings into question the proportion of evil to good, and by implication the quantifiability of eschatological goods.

Having set out in this chapter a methodology and research strategy for an inference to the best explanation approach to the evidential argument, in the next chapter I summarise four problems concerning the explanatory power of eschatological theodicies. These are philosophical difficulties with explanations which suppose that the world, and the evil and suffering it contains, constitutes the means by which some great good in an afterlife is realised. While they may challenge any attempt to integrate a life after death into explanations of earthly suffering, they do seem to arise from a Christian framework of ideas concerning divinity, human nature and the afterlife: an emphasis on a relational notion of love as a divine attribute and motivation, a view of human nature as essentially fallen or separated from the divine, and redemption from this condition through heavenly union with God. There is no scope in this research to review the extensive theological literature on these aspects of Christian theism. Discussion in forthcoming chapters will provide

insight into some of the content of and relationships between these ideas, but I understand Christian notions of divine love, human fallenness and heavenly union with God as forming a triad of logically nested concepts that typically structures the worlds of eschatological theodicies in the field.[59] This is unsurprising as many of these theodicies specifically aim to defend the rationality of Christian theism. However, as discussed earlier, theists need not work with these features of a Christian worldview. These four problems will be the focus of Chapter Three's examination of the theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump. There may be other difficulties concerning the role of the afterlife in theodicy, but the study takes these to be the most prominent discussed in the literature. The first concerns the attribute of divine love and the ultimate nature of God's relationship with humanity.

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[59] See Hick (1966, 1981), Inwagen (1988), Adams (1999), Plantinga (2004), and Stump (1985, 2010, 2018a).

CHAPTER TWO

GOD AND EVIL: PROBLEMS FOR

ESCHATOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

2.1. The Normatively Relativized Logical Argument from Evil (NRLAFE)

The *normatively relativised logical argument from evil* (NRLAFE) of John Bishop and Ken Perszyk (2011) argues that belief in an all-powerful, perfectly loving God is incompatible with any theodicy in which this God contrives and sustains the conditions of human suffering so that we may be rescued from these conditions by means of and for the sake of personal relationship with God, since any such relation could only be morally flawed and less than supremely loving. Plantinga (2004) and Adams (2008) exemplify this problem in their discussion of the former's *felix culpa* theodicy, in which they draw a parallel between God's role in both sustaining and redeeming human suffering and the psychological disorder Munchausen syndrome by proxy, where caregivers deliberately cause harm to those under their care to gain sympathy and praise for their care giving.[60] The analogy adapted to reflect the NRLAFE would have the abuser contrive the conditions of their victim's suffering so that rescuing them from these conditions may cause the victim to love the abuser.

For Bishop and Perszyk, this logical argument from evil is normatively relativised because the claim that such a human-divine relationship is defective has force if the theist is committed to values which entail this normative claim. This is so with values derived from a definition of God's goodness that prioritises a relational concept of love as a divine attribute and motivation (Bishop and Perszyk, 2011, p.122). In this study I shall refer to a theodicy's commitment to such values as involving a *theological ethic of divine love*, where love entails the notion of supremely good personal relationship and a desire for union with the beloved, and where everlasting union with God is the

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[60] Plantinga cites the example of a father who throws his children into a river so that he can heroically rescue them, or a doctor who spreads a horrifying disease so that his virtuous efforts to find a cure can earn him praise (Plantinga, 2004, p.20).

ultimate human good. Given love cannot be coerced, *freedom* is a fundamental value. As Inwagen argues, God made creatures "to love Him in return" but "love implies freedom: for A to love B is for A freely to choose to be united to B in a certain way" (1988, p.163). *Reciprocity* and *mutuality* are also key aspects of the rightness of such relationships, since loving relationships are essentially interpersonal.

This theological ethic is endorsed by theodiceans working with the Christian tradition, such as Hick (1966, 1981), Inwagen (1988), Adams (1999), and Stump (2010, 2018a).[61] On their view, a loving God created the world to enter into personal relationship with us, but since the sin and suffering involved in having a fallen nature is a consequence of humanity's essential separation from God, our only redemption from this state is a freely chosen union of love that ends this separation. More generally, Bishop and Perszyk argue that the NRLAFE demands an answer from the theodicean working with any theological ethic with the notion of *right relationship* at its centre, which they take to be the best strategy available to the theist. For example, they suggest that a utilitarian approach to theodicy will answer their argument but that sophisticated theists will generally not endorse this sort of ethic (2011, pp.122-123). However, their focus on divine love implies that a theodicy may evade the NRLAFE if it can make good use of an alternative model of divinity and supreme value, one that perhaps reconceives the nature of the relationship between human beings and God. This suggests that the NRLAFE may fail as a *logical* argument from evil, while being persuasive as an *evidential* argument against those theodicies which are committed to an ethic of divine love.

The research will not focus on one question raised by Bishop and Perszyk: does the mere fact that a human-divine relationship has been contrived for some divine purpose count against the rightness of that relationship? (2011, pp.123-124). The main ethical concern here appears to be a Kantian one about treating creatures as ends in themselves. God fails to do so by requiring humans to suffer for divine purposes and without our prior consent (Plantinga, 2004, pp.20-21). In principle, this objection looks to be answerable in a way consistent with the sufferer centred requirement outlined in Chapter 1.7: that suffering yields a good which is so supreme that victims' subsequent participation in this good defeats the evil needed to bring it about, so it can be assumed that they would have consented to being used for such a divine purpose if given a choice. As Adams summarises the argument, some would gladly accept the chance to suffer for a good end if given a choice in advance, while others might be glad of it in retrospect (2008, p.133).[62]

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[61] As Prevost remarks, "In Christian theism…God's desire to relate to creatures with freedom to respond in love is fundamental" (1990, p.109).

[62] Hick alludes to this sort of counterfactual consent when he writes that the sufferings of human beings "will be *seen* to be justified by their outcome [emphasis added]" (2010, p.340).

Bishop and Perszyk query whether such consent really does defeat the objection that the consenter has been treated as a means to an end, even if outcomes are supremely good (2011, p.123). In response, the theodicean can follow Adams in finding such divine manipulation to be no more problematic than a parent's manipulation of a child to prevent serious harm, since the parent could assume that once the child becomes an adult and attains the emotional maturity and wisdom of the parent that she would have no concern at all that her childhood behaviour had been manipulated for a beneficial outcome (1999, p.157).[63] However, this answer only has force if the parent has indeed acted wisely in exercising parental control and only knowingly caused any harm out of necessity.

Therefore, as the theodicies targeted by the NRLAFE affirm that human-divine relationship is the ultimate good and the most supreme kind of personal relationship, an assessment of its rightness depends on its content. Is it the kind of relationship that would justify any manipulation involved and invite the counterfactual consent of human participants? It will not do to appeal simply to the infinite value of everlasting union with God because what is in view is the *nature* of that relationship and the extent to which the parties to it take it to be supremely loving. To examine this issue the study will focus on two questions:

1) Are there difficulties with the particular way in which the conditions of the human-divine relationship have been contrived?

2) Is the ultimate good brought about through this relationship valuable enough to make the contriving of these conditions worthwhile?

Although not explicitly mentioned by Bishop and Perszyk, considerations of counterfactual consent imply that the human perspective is key to examination of the NRLAFE. The appraisal of the quality of a relationship involves the subjective experiences of those involved. This means that an answer to the NRLAFE must show how the human-divine relationship is understood to be loving and meaningful from the *internal point of view* of the human participant in the relationship.

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[63] Buckareff and Plug suggest that this answer is available to those who like Adams are attracted to the Irenaean strand of theodicy (2013, p.141).

2.2 Problems of Heavenly Freedom

This study will focus on two main problems of heavenly freedom. There is another notable difficulty concerning the coherence of the idea that humans in heaven have free will while also being impeccable or morally perfect (Kittle, 2018). This is perhaps a particular challenge for Christian theism, since love and personal freedom are linked inextricably in its view of human-divine relationship, while it also affirms that heavenly impeccability is necessitated by the experience of beatific intimacy or union as some form of continuous immersion in the being of God.[64] There is no scope in this research to engage this topic, but its more general aspects will be relevant to the two other problems of heavenly freedom considered here. These concern the explanatory consistency of theodicies which claim that the freedom to do otherwise with respect to morally significantly choices is of such great value that it justifies the creation of a world with moral evil, while also maintaining that a heaven where there is no freedom or opportunity to make such choices is supremely valuable. This implies that either,

i)   Heaven is not such a great good after all, because it lacks morally significant freedom, or

ii)   That it is possible to realise the greatest goods without morally significant freedom and therefore without moral evil (Nagasawa, Oppy, Trakakis, 2004, p.103).

Simon Kittle terms the first explanatory difficulty concerning the nature of heavenly goods the *lack of value problem* (2018, p.100). Is realising a heaven where choices between two or more goods, for example playing the harp or singing in a heavenly choir, really worth the cost of creating a world of moral evil and suffering? [65] To address this problem, Kittle suggests non-choice based accounts of the value of heavenly freedom may be needed, which do not focus on the freedom to do otherwise with respect to moral choices. For example, the theist may endorse concepts of free will which emphasise other sources of value, such as being able to realise ones wants, having lower-order desires aligned with higher order desires, being free from obstacles or being able to act in accordance with what is good and true (Kittle, 2018, pp.100-101). Alternatively, building on suggestions by Swinburne (1989) and Pawl and Timpe (2009, 2013), Kittle suggests the main challenge for a choice-based view of the value of heavenly freedom is to "give some idea of how the

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[64] For the nature of beatific vision or intimacy as a kind of immersion in the being of a Triune God, see Swinburne (1998, pp.119, 250) and Noia (2018).

[65] This example of heavenly choice is taken from Pawl and Timpe (2009, p.410).

types and number of choices that an agent might face in heaven add up to a level of freedom that it would be desirable to have" (2020, p.465).

The second difficulty has been formulated into an *argument from heaven* by Nagasawa, Oppy and Trakakis (2004). This argues that if heaven is a great good without morally significant freedom, then an omniperfect God would choose to create it only and not a world that contains heavenly goods along with the freedom and moral evils that exist in our universe. *Therefore, that the world of our experience exists is evidence that an omniperfect God cannot exist* (2004, pp.103-104). Nagasawa, Oppy and Trakakis primarily note the scope for uses of *derivative freedom* to provide a response. If an agent in heaven acts freely when performing an action from necessity due to their own freely formed character, as these accounts argue, then a life of heavenly freedom without moral evil can be made dependent on a prior causal history of character formation involving morally significant choices (Sennet, 1999; Pawl and Timpe 2009, 2013; Timpe 2014). However, in their judgement it is simply implausible that character forming choices in mortal life could be the *sole* determinants of heavenly impeccability, and so explanations that rely on derivative freedom fail (Nagasawa, Oppy, Trakakis, 2004, pp.110-111).

James Sennet (1999) attempts to answer this objection by suggesting that persons are perfected upon death by God filling in the missing gaps in their character, while Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe (2009, 2013) appeal to a stage of purgatorial purification to resolve this problem. However, Benjamin Matheson (2017) argues that any appeal to derivative freedom is incoherent on a control account of free will. For Matheson, while there is plausibly a tracing component in accounts of derivative *responsibility* which links present culpability to past actions over which an agent had control, it makes little sense to think of an agent as derivatively free when the agent has no control over present choices.[66]

Nevertheless, Kittle's distinction between strong and weak free will theodicies suggests how in general the argument from heaven may be answered. Strong theodicies claim that free will is intrinsically valuable enough to justify the existence of evil, while weak theodicies make free will a necessary condition for other greater goods which justify evil (Kittle, 2018, p.109). Consequently, a weak free will theodicy can consistently claim that freedom with respect to morally significant choices is a necessary condition of realising higher sorts of goods in heaven *and* that it is not intrinsically valuable to life in heaven. Therefore, the argument from heaven can be answered by an explanation which shows that a heavenly existence without morally significant freedom is only possible if there is an earthly existence that has such freedom.

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[66] Drink driving cases are paradigm examples of derivative responsibility (Matheson, 2017). Kittle (2020) endorses Matheson's view on the incoherence of derivative freedom.

2.3 Problems of Hell and Post-Mortem Suffering

This problem typically concerns the compatibility of belief in God's perfect justice and the existence of a hell that eternally torments the damned as punishment for their sins. Adams uses the term *grim hell* for this traditional view (1999, pp.46-47), against which there are three main objections. The *vagueness objection* focuses on the fairness of treating two similar individuals in a radically a disparate manner, granting one paradise and another hell, based on an arbitrary cut-off between the two cases (Sider, 2002). The *proportionality objection* argues that it is impossible for any individual to merit eternal punishment for finite sins (Kershnar, 2005). The *diminished capacities objection* concerns the injustice of eternally punishing persons in hell when they lack the ability to conceive adequately the ultimate nature and consequences of choices for which they are held responsible (Adams, 1993b; Buckareff and Plug, 2013). Grim hell also invites the *argument for escapism*, that since the soteriological activity of a perfectly good God will be motivated by a desire for the most just and loving outcome, such a God would offer those in hell post-mortem chances to freely accept God's offer of salvation (Buckareff and Plug, 2005, 2015). A further difficulty for the traditional view concerns the internal inconsistency of explaining a retributive hell as the consequence of divine justice while taking heavenly life to be the result of divine love (Kvanvig, 1993, pp.107-133).

This study takes the problem of hell and post-mortem suffering more broadly to concern any afterlife outside of heaven that involves suffering. Included, therefore, are concepts of *mild hell*, choice-based accounts that prioritise divine love over justice in which God respects the natural consequences of human freedom and allows those who reject God's love to exist eternally in hell as the persons they have chosen to become (Swinburne, 1983; Stump, 1986; Walls, 1992). Mild hell also provides for an *issuant view of the afterlife* in which the existence of heaven and hell both stem from the same divine motivation, God's love for created persons (Kvanvig, 1993, p.112). The main difficulty for this concept of hell is a version of the diminished capacities objection, in which God is understood to force a decision in mortal life that could withhold a great benefit from individuals who are not in a position to make an informed choice regarding that benefit (Buckareff and Plug, 2013, pp.137-138).

The problem is also taken to involve universalist strategies that envisage a transient stage of post-mortem suffering that removes the imperfections of human beings to make their heavenly existence possible. These strategies include conceptions of temporary purgatory and hell, and the succession of afterlives envisaged in Hick's theodicy (1966, 1981). The main difficulties for universalism are the *denial of autonomy* and *gratuitous earthly life objections*. The former states

that universalism threatens personal autonomy because choices to reject God are never efficacious. The latter states that the earthly existence of human beings is a gratuitous evil if universalism is true because choices and suffering are ultimately pointless since the final outcome for all persons is the same (Buckareff and Plug, 2013, pp.138-141). Finally, the problem of hell concerns the merits of *annihilationism*, the view that those who do not enter heaven are annihilated, either immediately or after a period in hell. The main difficulties for annihilationism are the vagueness and proportionality objections when the termination of life is taken to be a great or infinite harm to individuals that precludes any possibility of their achievement of ultimate human flourishing (Buckareff and Plug, 2013, pp.135-137; Kvanvig, 1993, p.68-70)*.*

Furthermore, the natures of the fates given in these models of hell and post-mortem suffering raise questions concerning a theodicy's scope to account for the quantity, distribution and intensity of evil in the afterlife. Can a theodicy reconcile the overall quantity of suffering experienced by large numbers of human beings for eternity, as in the traditional view of hell, or for an extended period as in Hick's succession of multiple afterlives, with the existence of a perfectly good God? Is the distribution of post-mortem suffering arising from the selection criteria God has for determining who is excluded from heaven consistent with belief in God's perfect goodness? Are choice models of hell less problematic than punishment models, because suffering appears much more intense in the latter? Finally, if all models of eternal hell are paradigmatic cases of horror, as Adams (1993b) argues, then should a theodicy endorse a universalism where all eventually achieve a good afterlife?

2.4 The Fate of Creatures without Free Will

The final problem concerns the post-mortem fate of beings that are seemingly excluded from theodicies that make free will and character development central to achieving a good afterlife. Inwagen alludes to this problem with respect to the standard free will defence, suggesting that its probability is low since of all the cases of suffering by sentient creatures only a minuscule proportion involves beings with free will (1996, p.154). In view are the lives of human infants and children, the severely cognitively disabled and animals. These beings are classified together because they lack the self-conception and sophisticated cognition needed to have rational desires, although animals and the severely cognitively disabled differ from human children in not having remote or proximate potential for sophisticated cognition.[67] Those with severe cognitive disabilities include individuals

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[67] This classification extends Scott M. Williams's definition of profound cognitive disability to include animals and human infants (2018, p.5).

who have acquired a cognitive impairment, such as a person in a persistent vegetative state following significant brain trauma, and those with a congenital disability, such as persons with microcephaly.[68] The difficulty arises when free will with respect to morally significant choices is a necessary condition of realising higher sorts of goods in heaven, because individuals in this class are not moral beings that are capable of such rationality.

Explanations of the earthly suffering of unfree creatures may focus on the special problem of horrendous suffering to examine whether a good afterlife can defeat such evil for those who lack the cognitive capacity to understand deep suffering as a meaningful part of a good life. Andrew Chignell (1998) argues that no theodicy of defeat is required for those unable to have self-conscious beliefs about the evils they experience, and therefore a theodicy need only outweigh their suffering. Scott M. Williams (2018) and Trent Dougherty (2014) suggest that with post-mortem cognitive enhancement, severely mentally impaired humans and animals could retrospectively attribute meaning to suffering experienced in their ante-mortem lives, and so a strategy of defeat is possible for these beings.

Quite apart from the question of how the deep suffering of some unfree creatures might be defeated, what may be termed the natural fates of all such beings also requires explanation. For example, what is the post-mortem destiny of infants and young human children who die suddenly or painlessly, or animals that have a natural death after a fruitful and contented life involving some moderate discomforts, or a severely cognitively impaired person who is cared for and loved and whose struggles may be taken to be ordinary relative to their condition, unlike a cognitively impaired person whose lifetime of neglect and abuse qualifies as a horrendous evil. Different afterlife scenarios for this class of beings create certain problems for the explanatory power of free will theodicies. For example, explanations which claim that unfree creatures achieve the same good afterlife as those with freedom of will may be internally inconsistent.[69] Timpe argues that the implication that individuals can attain a good afterlife without the involvement of their wills undermines the importance of free will and the other goods for which it is necessary (2015a, p.286). This is particularly a problem for Christian theodicies which view human beings as by nature having wills that are predisposed toward evil, since it would be inconsistent to claim that the young who die without free will achieve the same good afterlife as those who die having had a chance to freely reconcile themselves with God.[70]

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[68] This is a congenital disease in which an individual has a smaller than typical size human brain (Timpe, 2015a, p.290).

[69] Chignell suggests this is a problem for Stump's theodicy (1998, p.214).

[70] Protestants generally hold that all who die in infancy are saved, baptized or not (Walls, 2002, p.88).

A theodicy may address this problem by claiming that unfree creatures achieve a different sort of good afterlife at a lower level than the heavenly flourishing enjoyed by those with freedom of will. Such a solution is less economical and more *ad hoc* than theodicies which propose a single good afterlife.[71] It also calls into question God's perfect goodness to unfree human beings since this would arbitrarily destine them for lesser goods through no fault of their own. Equally, belief in divine goodness is incompatible with theodicies which imagine a bad afterlife for young human beings and the severely cognitively disabled.[72] As discussed in relation to the problem of hell, the annihilation of children and the cognitively impaired may also be taken as a bad outcome that unfairly denies them ultimate goods. Furthermore, proponents of animal annihilation are unlikely to able to show how the enormous quantity of animal death and suffering that is not defeated or outweighed by a good afterlife is consistent with claiming that the world as whole is one that a perfectly good, all-powerful God would create.

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[71] The *limbus infantium* of Catholic theology is a state of perfect happiness specifically for those who die without baptism before the age of reason (Timpe, 2015a, p.278).

[72] The view of Augustine and Anselm is that infants who die without baptism are damned due to original sin (Timpe, 2015a, p.284).

CHAPTER THREE

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS OF

JOHN HICK AND ELEONORE STUMP

3.1 John Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy

3.1.1 Overview

In Hick's theodicy an all-powerful and perfectly good God has created the world as a vale of soul-making, a religiously ambiguous natural and social environment of real physical hardships and genuine moral risk, so that imperfect human beings can freely choose to grow in moral and spiritual maturity to perfect themselves for an eternal union with God. As such, soul-making theodicy is both teleological in building an explanation of the world around the realisation of a divine purpose, and eschatological in locating that purpose in bringing all of humanity to its ultimate end beyond death.[73]

To simplify this review of Hick's soul-making theodicy (SMT) I will focus on what can be considered his mature thought concerning the problem of evil and life after death. This includes themes discussed in *Evil and the God of Love* (1966, 2010) and 'An Irenaean Theodicy' (1981), as well as *Death and Eternal Life* (1976) and 'A Possible Conception of Life after Death' (1989). Excluded is Hick's late thought on the nature of divinity in which he rejects the idea of a personal God.[74] As the focus of this study is the problem of evil, Hick's God is taken to be a *person*, since the God of his theodicy is a creative agent with a purpose for the world and a desire for loving personal relationship with humanity. Also excluded is Hick's earlier view of the eschaton in *Evil and the God of Love* as

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[73] Hick writes, "Theodicy…must look towards the future, expecting a triumphant resolution in the eventual perfect fulfilment of God's good purpose" (2010, p.340).

[74] Hick (2009) favours a conception of ultimate reality or God that is impersonal and transcategorical, which he calls "the Real". See Howard-Snyder (2017) for discussion

involving an embodied existence in separate, spirit-like bodies (2010, p.260).[75] As Hick (1981) suggests that the perfecting of human beings would require a succession of afterlives and refers the reader to *Death and Eternal Life* for discussion of this possibility, this study takes the *pareschaton* and *eschaton* in Hick (1976) to be part of his developed view of the role of the afterlife in soul-making theodicy.[76]

Consequently, I understand Hick's soul-making theodicy to relate divinity, human nature and the afterlife in the following way. God's goodness is understood in terms of the attribute of *divine love*, and the desire for loving relationship and union with human persons. The extent of God's love is *infinite,* making possible a universalism in which God has the will and power to perfect every person for union with the divine (2010, p.340). Hick's God is also understood to be an *immaterial being*, since humanity's union with God consists in some form of communal disembodied experience of the eternal and infinite consciousness of God (1976, pp.463-464).[77] Hick's God is also *atemporal* since the final state of union with the divine "is probably not in time" (1976, p.464).

This ultimate good is made possible by the human being's tripartite nature as body-soul-spirit, where the connection of the mind-soul to the supra-individual spirit or *atman* which Hick identifies as God or Ultimate Reality, allows its disembodied existence in the eschaton through which we contribute the results of our past histories to divine consciousness but no longer as separate and autonomous units (1976, pp.450, 453, 458). To attain this state human beings participate in the soul-making process to transcend the self-interested animal natures we have inherited from our evolutionary origins (2010, pp.254-255, 287). As a single life span is not enough to perfect human beings for union with God, and the soul can only make progress toward its final goal in an incarnate state by responding to real challenges in material environments, a series of embodied lives is needed to complete the soul-making process.[78]

Therefore, after death there is a *pareschaton* consisting of multiple real yet otherworldly spatial-temporal environments that host a succession of embodied afterlives for the process of soul-making, and an *eschaton* comprising the disembodied existence of the ultimate state (1976, pp.455-464). This eschaton is static in nature, since "the ever changing states which constitute human

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[75] In this more traditional view, Hick envisages a purgatory or intermediate state before heavenly existence to complete the process of sanctification (2010, pp.347-348).

[76] For his allusion to *Death and Eternal Life* when discussing soul-making theodicy see Hick (1981) as reproduced in C. Robert Mesle (1991, pp.xxxi-xxxii). Hick (1989) reaffirms this view of the afterlife.

[77] A similar idea is found in Lutheran theology (Chia, 2005, pp.186-187).

[78] The worst human beings may need hundreds of afterlives to reach perfection (Hick,1976, pp.419, 456). Also see Hick (1989, pp.189, 192-193).

existence in time are abolished" (1976, p.458). If upon death a person is not ready to unify with God, their disembodied consciousness experiences a dreamlike *bardo state* that consists of culturally conditioned projections of the hopes and fears of the former embodied self (1976, pp.414-416). The consciousness that carries a person's basic dispositional structure then reincarnates in a new body to influence the formation of another embodied self in the next soul-making environment, so that the basic character of the resurrected individual consists of the basic character they had in their previous life (1976, pp.416-417).

Hick's *replica theory* is taken to be the way to understand the manner in which an individual undergoes successive re-embodiments and progress their soul-making career (1976, pp.279-284). This theory defines resurrection as the process by which a person ceases to exist at a certain location and a being subsequently comes into existence in another location in a form which is physically and psychologically alike in every particular. On this view a person's stream of consciousness, memory, emotion and will continues in the replica person where it had left off at the death of the original person and resurrection maintains a direct physical continuity between old and new bodies, in contrast to the repeated cycles of maturation from baby to adult of traditional reincarnation (1976, p.418). Hick also suggests that fading memories from an immediately past life may carry over into the experiences of the re-embodied self, along with some residual awareness of the fact of having many previous lives (1976, pp.419-420).[79] Therefore, Hick's replica theory provides for a pareschaton in which there is *dispositional*, *bodily* and *personal* continuity across embodiments, fulfilling all three conditions of personal identity (1976, pp.305-309). This continuity makes it possible for a person to learn from their previous lives and complete the soul-making process within a finite number of afterlives.

It is unclear to what extent Hick's progressive afterlife, and the universalism that motivates it, is consistent with Christian tradition. Thomas Talbott agrees with Hick that universalism is deducible from orthodox Christian ideas concerning God's loving and almighty nature and lists Hick among Christian universalists "despite his religious pluralism" (Talbott, 2008, p.446). Yet Lindsey Hall suggests that there is no biblical support for the idea of a succession of afterlives (2018, p.162). If Hall is correct then Hick's theory of a progressive afterlife sets SMT apart from a meaningful correlation with Christian tradition, making it vulnerable to the objection of fictionalism outlined in Chapter 1.4. However, as Hick claims his theodicy is consistent with an Irenaean strand of Christian

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[79] Hick concludes the present life must be our first, since otherwise our first experiences in this life would be as resurrected persons not infants (1976, p.417).

thought, this is a matter for Christian theologians to decide.[80] Hick summarises his proposal in the following way:

> P1) The divine intention in relation to humankind, according to our hypothesis, is to create perfect finite personal beings in filial relationship with their Maker.
>
> P2) It is logically impossible for humans to be created already in this perfect state, because in its spiritual aspect it involves coming feely to an uncoerced consciousness of God from a situation of epistemic distance, and in its moral aspect freely choosing the good in preference to evil.
>
> P3) Accordingly the human being was initially created through the evolutionary process as a spiritually and morally immature creature, and as part of a world which is both religiously ambiguous and ethically demanding.
>
> P4) Thus that one is morally imperfect (i.e., that there is moral evil), and that the world is a challenging and even dangerous environment (i.e., that there is natural evil), are necessary aspects of the present stage of the process through which God is gradually creating perfected finite persons.[81]

There is space only in this section to highlight some important premises of Hick's argument. P1 involves two goods the realisation of which Hick thinks plausibly justifies the creation of a world with evil and suffering by an omnipotent and perfectly good being: (G1) the good of human beings freely developing themselves into perfected moral and spiritual beings; (G2) the good in which all such beings freely enter into an eternal life of love and fellowship with God (Rowe, 1991b, p.114). Hick understands G1 as collapsing into G2, since the good of becoming morally perfect is part and parcel of freely coming to know and love God (Barnwell, 2013, p.38).

P2 involves *value* and *impossibility* propositions concerning God's motives and power (Speak, 2013). According to the value proposition, the importance of humans having libertarian freedom in G1 is not that it is necessary for moral goodness, but that it is necessary only for the most valuable kind of goodness, that of humans becoming deeply good in the highest possible way (Speak, 2013, p.207). Hick suggests that free will adds this value by making possible *hard won virtues,* where in contrast to human beings created with ready-made virtues, struggling to acquire a

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[80] Mark S. M. Scott (2010) argues that Hick's theodicy has more affinity with the thought of Origen than Irenaeus.

[81] Hick (1981) as reproduced in Mesle (1991, pp.xxvii-xxviii).

virtuous character through choices made with libertarian freedom is far more valuable (Hick, 1981, in Mesle, 1991, pp.xxii-xxiii). The impossibility proposition states that while it is logically possible for God to ready-make human beings so that they will always freely act rightly, it is logically impossible for God to ready-make human beings so that they freely and authentically respond to God in love and with trust and faith (Speak, 2013, p.208).

Hick argues this point with his hypnotist analogy, which contrasts freely chosen love with a relationship in which a therapist makes her patient love her by implanting a post-hypnotic suggestion in his mind. To the patient his love would seem genuine and free but to the therapist the patient's love would be inauthentic (Hick, 2010, pp.272-274). Hick therefore endorses an incompatibilist view of free will, where to freely acquire hard-won virtues and enter into relationship with God requires *epistemic distance* from God, a cognitive state in which we are not conscious of God's presence and existence. This is because if human beings were to exist in God's direct presence we would have no choice but to love God, and such compelled love would be inferior to love that is freely chosen. Consequently, to preserve our cognitive freedom human beings have been created through the process of evolution to exist in an environment where God's presence remains hidden and which is capable of being interpreted either theistically or naturalistically (Hick, 1981, in Mesle, 1991, p.xxi).

The combination of an animal nature and libertarian freedom in a religiously ambiguous world makes moral evil or sin "virtually inevitable" (Hick, 2010, p.323). Nevertheless, human beings have a predisposition to desire union with the divine (2010, p.345). This motivates the soul-making process by which humans fully actualise their potential for eternal life with God (2010, pp.254-255). The process requires a natural and moral environment of real hardships and risk because the intellectual, ethical and spiritual development of the human person "is a product of challenge and response" (Hick, 1981, in Mesle, 1991, p.xxv). Human beings respond to these challenges with *limited creativity*, a form of self-creation in which free actions arise out of character but not in a fully predictable way, as a person partially forms and reforms her character in moments of decision (Hick, 2010, p.276). However, to be saved human beings must accept God's help or "gracious invitation" (2010, p.287).[82] In the soul-making process God's grace works on our wills like divine therapy, freeing human patients from the inner blockages and inhibitions that stop us from becoming truly living consciousnesses unbounded by self-limiting egoism (Hick, 1976, p.460). Every human being is thereby united with God, an ultimate good of such infinite magnitude that it justifies any finite suffering involved in its realisation (Hick, 2010, pp.340-341).

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[82] Stewart Melville interprets Hick as regarding divine redemption to be a necessary part of the soul-growth process (1993, p.139).

3.1.2 The Normatively Relativized Logical Argument from Evil (NRLAFE)

As summarised in Chapter 2.1, the NRLAFE argues that theodicies which endorse a theological ethic of divine love are incoherent because the idea of a perfectly loving God wanting a heavenly union with human beings is incompatible with accounts of this God contriving and sustaining the conditions of human suffering so that we may be rescued from these conditions by means of and for the sake of personal relationship with God. In soul-making theodicy (SMT), Hick certainly makes God the contriver, sustainer and redeemer of the human predicament. He acknowledges God's omni-responsibility for human suffering, suggesting that God is responsible just as someone who makes alcohol easily available to an alcoholic is accountable for the failure of the addict's treatment (2010, p.290). Similarly, Hick's God contrives the conditions of epistemic distance in which humans with animal natures will inevitably sin. Sustenance of those conditions is implied by Hick's universalism, which has God provide persons with multiple lives and environments to continue the soul-making process until completion. SMT's God is also a redeemer, providentially involved in progressing the soul-making careers of every individual, in a role Hick likens to that of a psychiatrist whose therapy helps patients fully realise their true natures (1970, pp.421-422). If alcoholism corresponds to human fallenness, and the co-operation of the addict and the therapist in the former's treatment is the soul-making process, we can extend Hick's therapy analogy in the following way: Hick's God is like the psychiatrist who makes his patient an alcoholic through post-hypnotic suggestion and secretly funds her addiction so that in treating its ruinous effects she may come to love him.

In discussing the two main questions concerning the NRLAFE set out in Chapter 2.1, I will take God's role as *sustainer* to refer to both God's contrivance of the initial conditions which lead to human suffering and God's ongoing sustenance of those conditions. An ethical distinction could be made between contrivance and sustenance, for example between a therapist who merely makes someone an alcoholic though post-hypnotic suggestion, and one who having done so also funds the addict's habit. However, the sort of deism implied in the first of these scenarios, where God establishes the natural laws by which the universe sustains itself without the need for God's power or providential interference, is not the sort of divinity supposed in the theodicies considered in this study or indeed any theodicy concerned with orthodox theism. Therefore, God as *sustainer* is taken to refer to the past and present parts of a single divine activity that manipulates the conditions of human existence and the suffering it involves, as distinct from God's role as *redeemer*, which refers to the separate divine act of rescuing human beings from these conditions.

Q1: Is there a difficulty in the particular way in which the conditions of the human-divine relationship have been contrived in SMT? The Munchausen syndrome by proxy parallel summarised in Chapter 2.1 and the psychiatrist-alcoholic analogy above *prima facie* show that God's role as sustainer and redeemer of human suffering makes the human-divine relationship in SMT less than supremely loving. If it is perhaps mistaken to suggest that this relationship is exploitative or abusive, SMT's God nonetheless seems overly demanding, obsessive or oppressive in wanting relationships with us in this way. Might not the psychiatrist invite the patient to coffee instead of making her an alcoholic? Rather than be rescued from a drowning, would not the son prefer bonding with his father with a game of catch on the lawn? The difficulty appears to arise from a concept of redemption in which relationship with God is both the means by which we are rescued from our suffering and the goal for which conditions of suffering are sustained. Moreover, even if it were granted that a certain level of suffering is a necessary condition of having a relationship with God, we may doubt whether all kinds of suffering are needed for this end. In other words, we would prefer a human-divine relationship to form in conditions other than those contrived by SMT's sustainer-redeemer God.

To examine this point further we can look at the possible worlds that an omniperfect God could choose to create and ask whether a rational human agent under a Rawlsian veil of ignorance would decline or accept the opportunity to be actualized in Hick's vale of soul-making.[83] Specifically, the world of SMT can be compared with other possible worlds made by a loving God for the purpose of soul-making, but created using different *freedom-with-minimal-evil strategies*.[84] Three alternatives are considered here: an Eden-type world discussed by Nick Trakakis (2005), a vale of soul-making involving compatibilist freedom, and a possible world proposed by J.L. Schellenberg (1993) where human beings exist in greater epistemic immediacy with God.

Trakakis's Eden planet is a twin of our Earth inhabited by human beings who like us are capable of moral evil. Eden resembles Earth in almost every respect except that it is a world where no suffering is caused by natural disasters such as pandemics, famines, floods, storms and earthquakes, and no people are born with hereditary diseases (Trakakis, 2005, p.38). Since there are no such natural evils in Eden, it would contain less total suffering than Hick's world and less undeserved and horrendous suffering, but the scope for moral evil would mean that it does provide opportunities for soul-making. Would there be enough evil, suffering and challenge in Eden to preserve epistemic distance between humans and God and to support the soul-making process? Trakakis rightly argues that the benevolence of Eden's natural laws does not create a situation of

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[83] Adams (2008, p.134) asks this question of Plantinga's *felix culpa* theodicy.

[84] This notion is taken from Bishop and Perszyk (2011, p.119).

epistemic immediacy, since it does not follow from the fact that there are no natural disasters and hereditary diseases that this is so because there is a God who intervenes in nature. Moreover, it seems that Eden has ample scope to support soul-growth through hardships caused by various moral evils, such as the hoarding of wealth, pollution of the environment, building of oppressive political regimes, acts of murder and rape, and the waging of wars (Trakakis, 2005, pp.40-41).

In a point not made by Trakakis, the SMT defender could argue that without natural evils there would be less coverage of the total population of Eden, making opportunities for soul-making more scarce because undeserved suffering would be less widely distributed. However, if Eden is like Hick's world in providing for a succession of afterlives for all human beings, there is no need for every inhabitant of Eden to have soul-making experiences within one lifetime, since they would get those opportunities over the duration of their soul-making careers. Although these less challenging environments might require many more lives to complete the process, it seems that the Rawlsian agent is likely to choose existence in the somewhat softer Eden world rather than Hick's vale of soul-making, and to find any contrivance in the human-divine relationship more acceptable in the former than the latter, and therefore more consistent with belief in a loving God.

In the second Rawlsian comparison, the world of SMT is contrasted with one inhabited by persons with compatibilist freedom. In the latter, human beings always freely act rightly and are determined to relate to God with love. *Ceteris paribus* the Rawlsian agent would likely opt for this freedom-with-minimal-evil world, yet the choice depends on what value attaches to incompatibilist freedom in Hick's world. The SMT defender would argue that freely reciprocating God's love is part and parcel of the most supreme kind of relationship, but what is the relevant difference between freely coming to love God and being constituted or determined to love God *from the human person's point of view*?

David Ray Griffin (1981) rightly notes that the difference in Hick's hypnotist analogy between the patient who merely believes she freely loves God and the authentic love of a genuinely free person is an epistemic one. In the latter case, God has made humans with libertarian freedom "so that *God* can have knowledge that the creatures have come to love God freely [emphasis added]" (Griffin, 1981, quoted in Barnwell, 2017, p.40). If the Rawlsian agent would experience less suffering in the freedom-with-minimal-evil world, is the fact that *God* knows that human love for the divine is undetermined a good that tips the scales toward Hick's vale of soul-making? From the perspective of the Rawlsian agent it is not clear that it does. Not only does God knowing that our love is given freely not seem worth the cost of all the moral evil resulting from libertarian freedom, as Griffin maintains, but the self-concern of a God that creates a Hickian world to bring about this benefit also seems to be morally lacking. For example, might it not be more loving for God to create a freedom-with-

minimal-evil world for persons whom God freely loves but who themselves merely believe they freely love God? Loving another person while knowing that they do not love oneself as deeply as one loves them involves a selflessness that may be taken to be the essence of altruistic love and therefore greater than the freely reciprocated and fully interpersonal love which is valued in SMT.[85]

To answer this compatibilist objection, the SMT defender may appeal to the *value proposition* outlined in the previous section: that libertarian freedom is necessary for the most valuable kind of goodness, that of humans becoming deeply good in the highest possible way (Speak, 2013, p.207). However, even if this claim is granted, the requirement to perfect oneself for union with God, which implies most will need to undergo soul-making across many afterlives to achieve this end, seems likely to make the cost of Hick's world prohibitive at some point. For example, we can imagine a variant of SMT where human beings are more strongly predisposed to desire union with God relative to the animal nature which is prone to moral evil. In this possible world, many more achieve sainthood in the course of their first lives, creating a more loving and supportive environment for others to progress their soul-making careers and leading to less overall suffering across a shorter succession of afterlives. If a cost-benefit analysis of possible soul-making worlds were to persuade the Rawlsian agent to prefer this alternative, as seems likely, then she has reason to think of relationship with God in Hick's world as less than the highest form of love.

The SMT defender may object that in this alternative world moral behaviour and relationship with the divine is essentially determined and human beings are no longer epistemically distant from God. However, J.L. Schellenberg rightly argues that Hick's position on epistemic distance involves a false dichotomy: either God's presence is overwhelmingly evident to us, or it is not (1993, pp.48-52). It seems possible, as Schellenberg suggests, that having a sense of God's presence in our background awareness, for example, could be persuasive without being coercive and so capable of being ignored or overridden, thereby preserving our freedom in relation to God.[86] If this kind of background awareness were to form part of Hick's human predisposition to desire union with the divine, then we can imagine a vale of soul-making in which our in-built bias towards God is less weakly felt and the subtle activity of God's grace is more efficacious.

Nevertheless, even if this modified Hickian world enables a more supreme personal relationship with God in the estimation of the Rawlsian agent, SMT may not have the resources to accommodate it. Hick's anthropology has difficulty explaining even the weak predisposition towards

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[85] This point perhaps relies on the ethical merit of the idea of living a noble lie for the sake of the good of others. Some may argue that the lack of complete truth between loved ones corrupts such relationships.

[86] Schellenberg's use of divine hiddenness to justify disbelief in God's existence is motivated by the possibility that human beings could have been created in a strong epistemic position in relation to theism (1993).

God that he takes humans to have. To be predisposed to think or act in certain ways is a quality that is not acquired but somehow innate. Having a nature that is imbued with some form of God-given spirit might explain how humans have an in-built bias towards God, but what is its source in Hick's evolutionary account of human origins? It seemingly cannot be inherited from animal ancestors since they are excluded from the soul-making process. Perhaps the cognitive capacity that sets humanity apart from other animals gives rise to an awareness of imperfection and drives human beings to seek perfection and completion. However, how could this evolutionary heritage motivate human beings to seek that perfection in a disembodied unity with an immaterial God? It would be less surprising if biological evolution were to find its culmination in the perfection of some physical, embodied form of existence.

The evolutionary origins of humanity's animal nature combined with a perfectionist soteriology that requires most persons to risk deep suffering across multiple lives suggest that a Hickian world would be less preferable to a Rawlsian agent than a possible world in which *God is more supportive and less demanding in contriving the conditions of God's relationship with human persons.* The SMT defender could respond that Hick's world is the only possible way to unite human persons with God, as claimed by the impossibility proposition outlined in section 3.1.1: that it is logically impossible for God to ready-make human beings so that they freely and authentically respond to God in love (Speak, 2013, p.208). Perhaps a deity with the binary choice of whether or not to create a soul-making world is less vulnerable to the objection that the contrivance involved is morally flawed than a deity with the power to create many Hickian worlds expressing different value preferences concerning which parameters and conditions to put in place. The Rawlsian agent in the first scenario would prefer to exist rather than not to exist. In the second scenario, she may wonder about the manipulation involved in the multiplicity of providential schemes available to God. However, the Eden and Schellenberg variants of Hick's vale of soul-making show that it is not impossible for there to be *other possible worlds where God's personal relationship with human beings is more supportive and less demanding, and therefore more supremely loving.*

Q2: Is the ultimate good brought about through this relationship valuable enough to make the contrivance of these conditions worthwhile? Since SMT's ultimate good *is* everlasting personal relationship with God, the answer to the previous question determines the response to this one. If human-divine union is tainted by God's dual role as sustainer and redeemer of our suffering, then it is not a supremely good relationship, no matter how beneficial the outcome might be for us, because the way the relationship has been contrived is an intrinsic part of its interpersonal story. That the psychiatrist manipulated the patient to make her love him can never be undone from her point of view, irrespective of any compensations the relationship might bring to her.

The SMT defender could respond that whatever flaw or injury there is in the manipulation of the relationship, it is nevertheless defeated or outweighed by the great good of its final fulfilment, so much so that our counterfactual consent would still be forthcoming. The difficulty here is that Hick's eschaton is essentially mysterious, since its disembodied union with God alters the fundamental categories of what it is to be a human person. At most we can say that Hick's conception of humanity's ultimate end, to the extent that it may be considered human, involves:

i)   disembodied perfected persons with some form of continuing consciousness, identity and memory;
ii)   their corporate existence in the direct presence of God;
iii) the contribution of their experiences of material existence to divine consciousness;
iv)   no further soul-making development;
v)   probably no free will, since there is no cognitive freedom in the presence of God; and
vi)   infinite goodness.

Does not this radical discontinuity between the physical nature of the soul-making process and the immateriality of its final culmination render all the suffering of material existence gratuitous? Hick acknowledges the difficulty, suggesting that the "extreme" idea of the disembodied self's "total absorption" in Ultimate Reality "empties the temporal existence leading to it of all significance and value" (1976, p.458). He attempts to address this concern by emphasising the interpersonal nature of personhood and identifying egoity as the main obstacle to the perfecting or complete fulfilment of this dimension of our existence (1976, pp.459-460). For Hick, therefore, soul-making is the process by which the ego self is transcended so that the individual's interpersonal nature can be fully realised in a corporate experience of the infinite consciousness of God.

However, while the self as ego is plausibly a psychological barrier to interpersonal flourishing, Hick does not explain why the self as *body* limits a person's relational existence. Perhaps he is implying that egoity is a concomitant of embodied being. Yet, it could equally be argued that the concrete boundedness of conscious life that comes with having a body is a necessary condition of being a person who is an individual with a particular life history and subjective experience of reality. In a corporate merger of disembodied selves with ultimate reality it is not evident what loving relationship with God might consist of without the usual parameters of personal experience.

For the Rawlsian agent, the discontinuous nature of Hick's eschaton presents two main problems. If Hick envisages the universal Chisholm-type defeat of evil and suffering, it is not clear how, given this radical discontinuity, earthly and post-mortem suffering is made meaningful by coming to be seen as an intrinsic part of a good whole. Perhaps a gnostic cosmology could make

sense of the discontinuity, since it takes material existence to be an evil from which embodied spirits must escape to return to the immaterial source of their true essence (Gray, 2018, p.75). Yet it seems that an SMT adapted in this way cannot claim that earthly evil is defeated in Chisholm's sense because the ultimate goal is a good that is attained *in spite of* not because of the intrinsic badness of material existence.[87] In other words, the person reaching her goal could have well done without the unnecessary experience of mortal life beforehand. Perhaps this objection is addressed by Hick's suggestion that the embodied parts of the lives of immaterial souls are valuable because they contribute experiences of material existence to divine consciousness (1976, p.458). However, requiring embodied beings to suffer for this self-serving purpose seems inconsistent with belief in a perfectly good God. For example, a material existence with compatibilist freedom and no moral evil would seemingly suffice for this purpose.

The SMT defender could instead argue that soul-making suffering is outweighed rather than defeated. This move seemingly relies on the infinite value of union with God to provide the quantity needed to outweigh any suffering. Perhaps the individual will not need to see how her suffering is an intrinsic part of a good whole if her soul-making experience will be simply overwhelmed and forgotten when united with God's infinite goodness and love. It should be noted, however, that there are difficulties concerning the concept of infinity in theological discussion. Graham Oppy (2011) suggests that while it is *prima facie* plausible to think of certain divine attributes, such as omniscience, as infinite, research on these topics is underdeveloped. For example, talk of an omniscient God knowing an infinite set of propositions, or an omnipresent deity being infinitely extended in an infinite universe may have content, whereas the concept of an infinitely loving or good God may not. Moreover, other accounts of mathematical ontology, such as constructivist, intuitionist, finitist and formalist theories, preclude any theological research in this area because they do not permit the existence of actual infinites (Oppy, 2011, pp.243-244). If the claim that finite suffering is outweighed by infinite goods is not meaningful, other than as an allusion to some unspecified value that is vast in quantity, then the appeal to the unlimited nature of outweighing goods cannot clarify whether the goodness of human-divine union is such that a Rawlsian agent would think it right for God to have contrived the conditions of that relationship through the suffering of a soul-making world.

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[87] See Chapter 1.7 for a summary of Chisholm's notion of defeat.

3.1.3 Heavenly Freedom

Chapter 2.2 outlined two main problems of heavenly freedom concerning the internal consistency of free will theodicies that appeal to an afterlife without morally significant freedom: the lack of value problem and the argument from heaven*. On the value problem, it seems the SMT defender must rely on asserting the infinite value of eternal relationship with God to explain why a heavenly life without morally significant freedom is supremely valuable. There can be no morally significant choices in SMT's eschaton, since the soul-making process has been completed and there is no further need to respond to challenges with libertarian freedom in conditions of epistemic distance (Hick, 2010, pp.325-326). Humans no longer have freedom in relation to God, since this is impossible for anyone existing in God's direct presence in SMT's eschaton.[88] It is also unclear what if anything remains of human freedom in Hick's conception of the highest good as some form of disembodied corporate experience of divine consciousness, as this existence seems not to involve the sort of bounded subjective experience and personal agency that characterise the lives of embodied individuals who exercise free will.

The previous section noted the mystery of appeals to the infinite nature of ultimate goods. Nevertheless, even if their infinite value is granted the lack of freedom in SMT's eschaton may undermine the theodicy's coherence. While morally significant freedom is intrinsic to the process of acquiring hard won virtues, it also seems plausible to think of the human freedom to reciprocate God's love as not only essential to the choice of *entering* into such a relationship, but also as an intrinsic part of *being* in love with God. For example, to be in state of freely chosen obedience to another person involves the continual submission of one's will to the will of the other, not having one's behaviour determined by a single decision in the past, as if this choice makes one a drone or robot without any free will. Similarly, it seems that a person's in principle freedom to accept or reject another's love is an ongoing feature of being in a loving relationship. Choosing love may be inevitable, but that there are choices and they are continually made is how the value of a loving relationship builds over time.

Yet on Hick's view such freedom of will cannot persist in a state of epistemic immediacy with God. It could be objected that the selfless and unconditional nature of love diminishes the importance of free will in such relationships, but for Hick what makes such selfless love truly valuable is that it is given by someone who has the genuine freedom to do otherwise. Perhaps

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[88] As Keith Ward writes, for Hick "freedom becomes only a transitional stage on the way to necessity" (1970, p.226).

cognitive freedom in God's direct presence is consistent with a compatibilist account of freely chosen love.[89] However, this raises a further question about whether a compatibilist model of soul-making could be expected to involve less suffering than exists in the actual world, since if God were involved in determining free actions horrific moral evils could be prevented and the overall amount of moral evil reduced. This possibility is acknowledged by Alvin Plantinga and Jerry Walls, who both accept the principle that *in all worlds where persons are either not free or have compatibilist free will God could eliminate all moral evil*.[90]

As outlined in Chapter 2.2, the argument from heaven is less of a difficulty for weak free will theodicies in which libertarian freedom is a necessary condition for the realisation of *other* goods which justify evil (Kittle, 2018, p.109). In SMT, morally significant freedom is not intrinsically valuable enough by itself to justify the existence of moral evil, but it is a necessary condition of the ultimate good of an authentically loving union with God. SMT claims that it is logically impossible for God to ready-make human beings so that they freely and authentically respond to God in love (Speak, 2013, p.208). Hick's hypnotist analogy aims to show that it is essential to the nature of personal attitudes such as trust, respect and affection that they arise as an uncompelled response to the personal qualities of others (2010, pp.272-274). For Hick, transcending egoity through acquiring hard-won virtues in the soul-making process is a necessary condition of being able to respond to the personal qualities of God. Therefore, as union with God is impossible for human beings who lack the freedom to acquire hard-won virtues through the soul-making process, this ultimate good could not exist without there being a world like ours with the moral and natural evils it contains.

However, is this explanatory link between morally significant freedom and union with God entirely successful? While a weak free will theodicy may be internally consistent if it can show that an earthly existence involving morally significant choices is logically necessary for a heavenly life without them, it is not clear the same conclusion applies to accounts of heaven that lack any sort of freedom at all. Yet as discussed above this seems to be the kind of existence we might expect in Hick's eschaton, where there is no further soul-making requiring libertarian choices, no epistemic distance to allow our cognitive freedom in relation to God, and no embodied life with which to exercise personal agency. It seemingly lacks all valuable kinds of freedom, not just freedom with respect to morally significant choices.

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[89] On Stump's interpretation, Aquinas understands that all persons are necessitated by the beatific vision to love God, therefore his view of heavenly freedom rejects the *principle of alternative possibilities* (PAP) at the core of the argument for incompatibilism (Stump, 2003, as discussed in Noia, 2018, pp.77-78).

[90] Plantinga (1992) and Walls (1992) as discussed in Goetz (2009, pp.455-456).

If the continuity of value assumption is correct, and instrumental explanations are coherent when important aspects of a means carry over into the end, then this radical discontinuity between pre-eschaton existence and its final end suggests that Hick's appeal to libertarian freedom is incoherent. In particular, SMT construed as a weak free will theodicy appears to lack internal consistency because it fails to distinguish freedom with respect to morally significant choices from other valuable aspects of free will, and provide an account of how the eschaton continues the latter. Consequently, the argument from heaven is seemingly successful against SMT. If libertarian freedom is of intrinsic value to soul-making, but it is of extrinsic value to the ultimate human good, then it seems possible that an all-powerful God could make use of other means to realise this end, including those which do not involve libertarian freedom and the moral evil it produces.

3.1.4 Hell and Post-Mortem Suffering

As outlined in Chapter 2.3, the problem of hell and post-mortem suffering includes Hick's theory of a progressive afterlife, which envisages the post-mortem continuation of soul-making until union with God is achieved by all. The main difficulties for SMT's universalism include the *denial of autonomy* objection, which argues that universalism is incompatible with personal autonomy because choices to reject God are never efficacious, and the *gratuitous earthly life* objection, which argues that earthly existence of human beings is a gratuitous evil if universalism is true because their choices and suffering are ultimately pointless if the final outcome is the same for everyone (Buckareff and Plug, 2013, pp.138-141). This section will also discuss whether the quantity of suffering experienced in Hick's progressive afterlife counts against SMT.

Before discussing the denial of autonomy objection, it should be noted that universalism is not entailed in bare theism as Hick suggests when he argues that belief in an all-powerful and perfectly good God is only possible if everyone is perfected and united with God (2010, p.340). The advocate of a choice-based concept of hell in which God respects the human freedom to reject eternal life with God will argue that such a hell is logically compatible with belief in a perfectly good God. Likewise, those endorsing a retributive hell will argue that it is consistent with defining God's goodness primarily in terms of the attribute of justice. Moreover, God's omnipotence is not compromised when human persons choose evil or separation from God when the creation of persons with libertarian freedom entails the logical possibility of such choices (Rist, 1972, pp.98-99). Indeed, Hick accepts that human choices to freely reject God are logically possible (2010, p.343). Therefore, whatever other difficulties there are with non-universalist alternatives, SMT is not necessarily advantaged because of its universalism.

Since Hick does not endorse necessary universalism, it seems the denial of autonomy objection is unsuccessful against SMT. Hick accepts having libertarian freedom entails the logical possibility that persons can refuse God's love, and objects that his universalism is not necessary in the sense that creatures are predetermined to love and obey God. Rather, he rejects the practical possibility that anyone undergoing the soul-making process will be ultimately able to choose to reject God's love, because we can be confident that an omniperfect being has the motivation, resources and time over a succession of embodied lives to succeed in bringing all people to union with God of their own free will. Therefore Hick believes no logical contradiction is involved in holding that humans have libertarian freedom and that all humans will freely choose to accept God (2010, pp.343-344).

As Lindsey Hall notes, some doubt that Hick is endorsing anything other than necessary universalism (2018, p.137), but his theory of a progressive afterlife does appear to accommodate a universalism that is not predetermined.[91] Firstly, Hick supposes that post-mortem soul-making environments are epistemically distant from God. Secondly, while the human predisposition to desire union with God makes it reasonable to hold that all will eventually accept God's love, rather than indefinitely delay this choice, Hick envisages that most will need many afterlives to transcend their animal natures and achieve the required perfection. This means that the desire to unify with God which is inherent in human nature may be taken to be weak enough for the limited creativity with which a person forms his or her own character to be exercised in a free and undetermined way. It could be objected that to bring everyone to their final state God will have to exercise manipulative control over at least some recalcitrant individuals, involving a denial of their autonomy. Yet the SMT defender could argue that such divine manipulation is as acceptable as a parent's manipulation of a child to keep them from serious harm (Buckareff and Plug, 2013, p.141).

However, there are at least two difficulties with SMT's account of free will and universalism. It relies on human nature having a built-in bias toward union with God, since without this predisposition the soul-making process may be expected to last indefinitely, given that unperfected human beings after death will have the same animal natures and will continue to exist in conditions of epistemic distance. Yet, as noted in discussion of the NRLAFE (Chapter 3.1.2), it is not clear that Hick's evolutionary account of human origins, and the materialism that it presupposes, can explain why human beings have a deep-rooted desire to unify with God.

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[91] Hall suggests it may be necessary to define a separate category for Hick's universalism, apart from a necessary variety where the outcome is predetermined and a contingent universalism which only claims that in this particular world it so happens that all people will be united with God (2018, pp.136-137).

More fundamentally, the notion that Hick's progressive afterlife is epistemically distant from God may be incoherent. SMT's pareschaton must be epistemically distant because earthly suffering would be gratuitous if soul-making were possible in less religiously ambiguous environments. Yet as section 3.1.1 outlined, Hick envisions a direct physical and psychological continuity between the ante and post-mortem person, and the carrying over of personal memory at least into the beginning of a resurrected life to make it possible to learn from previous lives and progress the soul-making process. For example, Hick contemplates an atheist in his resurrection body remembering his former life and reflecting on the beliefs he had formerly held (Cheetham, 2003, p.60). However, as David Cheetham rightly points out, supposing that resurrected persons will consciously experience their own survival after death seriously compromises the notion that the afterlife would be religiously ambiguous to them, since the materialist worldview which rejects this possibility would be completely undermined (2003, p.60).

Perhaps SMT's progressive afterlife can remain epistemically distant if each new embodiment repeats the cycle of maturation from baby to adult as in the traditional view of reincarnation. This suggestion assumes that personal memories from a previous life would fade during infancy. The difficulty here is that on Hick's own view if there is no personal and physical link across different embodiments, and the only influence on the formation of character is the basic dispositional structure a person inherits from their former life, then it is unclear how any soul-making progress might occur. The grasping and unloving responses of a malevolent person in one life would seem to condition their responses to challenges in the next life. This is a formula for an indefinite series of bad lives rather than the hundreds which Hick envisions might be needed to bring the worst of individuals to union with God.[92]

The *gratuitous earthly life* (GEL) objection outlined in Chapter 2.3 targets *sophisticated universalism*, which allows for some form of intermediate state before ultimate goods are realised, as opposed to a *naïve universalism* where all are equally transformed into heavenly beings upon death, irrespective of the sorts of lives they had lived (Buckareff and Plug, 2013, p.139).[93] As a variety of the former, SMT seems immune to the objection that an earthly existence of suffering and morally significant choices appears pointless when the final outcome is the same for everyone. A person's earthly existence does have a significant bearing on how things go in their soul-making

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[92] This point may be developed into an argument for the incompatibility of reincarnation with belief in an omniperfect God.

[93] Hick argues against naïve universalism, writing that if upon death we are "transmuted in the twinkling of an eye into perfect creatures, the whole earthly travail of faith and moral effort is rendered needless" (2010, p.347).

career, since the number of afterlives a person may have before uniting with God depends on the degree of spiritual progress made in each embodied life.

Nevertheless, even if SMT's universalism is safe from this GEL objection, other features of SMT's progressive afterlife invite a similar challenge. Firstly, in suggesting that a succession of afterlives may be needed to attain union with God, Hick does not envisage that these lives occur in this world as in Buddhist and Hindu reincarnation, but through re-embodiments in other worlds with their own spatial-temporal environments and laws (1976, pp.418-419). Therefore, on Hick's own view the natural environment of our world cannot be taken to provide necessary conditions for soul-making, since the process is possible in other sorts of environments where the conditions in which humans suffer are different. In another GEL objection, it seems SMT must affirm, as noted above, that resurrected persons consciously experience their own post-mortem survival. This is because Hick's progressive afterlife is only coherent if a person has a continuous identity and memory from one life to the next. Yet, for the reason suggested by Cheetham, it is unlikely that these afterlife environments would be religiously ambiguous in the same way as an earthly life in which no one has knowledge of what happens after death. Therefore, if soul-making can occur in conditions where belief in God is more likely, then the suffering resulting from earthly conditions of epistemic distance would be gratuitous. A further problem arises from Hick's claim that the final state of union with God consists of the disembodied corporate experience of the divine. If embodied being is not an intrinsic part of SMT's eschaton, then the suffering throughout a person's soul-making career, not just in earthly life, would be gratuitous, since an all-powerful deity need not make physical existence in a material world like ours a precondition for this highest good.

Even if these difficulties can be addressed, SMT defenders must be committed to a cosmology that requires large amounts of suffering across multiple soul-making environments. In Hick's view, embodied afterlives have to be the same as earthly lives in preserving cognitive freedom in relation to God and motivating soul-making progress with real challenges that risk deep suffering. The predisposition for union with God must be weakly felt to preserve the limited creativity by which a person freely forms their character. As union with God requires a perfected will or soul, and only few achieve perfection or saintliness within earthly life, many will need multiple lives to perfect their souls if similar conditions persist in post-mortem environments. Therefore, Hick's progressive afterlife extends the duration and increases the quantity of the suffering involved in the soul-making process. Might not a perfectly good and all-powerful God favour a more parsimonious cosmology, one which limits the overall amount of suffering in creation as a whole and that experienced by each individual? It seems such a deity would set the initial conditions of the world so that soul-making may be completed within one lifetime or a few rather than many.

3.1.5 The Fate of Creatures without Free Will

SMT's universalism means that all human beings irrespective of their capacity for free will in earthly life will eventually achieve the same ultimate good of union with God. To answer the problem of internal consistency outlined in Chapter 2.4, at least with respect to human beings, the SMT defender must show how children and the severely cognitive disabled get to use free will to progress their soul-making careers in the pareschaton. The main constraint on SMT's response to this problem is Hick's replica theory for the resurrection of the person, which is taken to be his suggested way to understand how human beings transition from one life to the next in SMT's progressive afterlife. The replica theory involves three main claims:

i) the self is an indissoluble psycho-physical unity, which means that since the self is identified with the body there is no soul in distinction from the body and no question of a soul surviving the death of the body;

ii) the body exemplifies a pattern or code of information that can be transmitted to another place and translated back into its original form using different parcels of matter;

iii) resurrection is the process by which a person ceases to exist at a certain location and a being subsequently comes into existence in another location in a form which is physically and psychologically alike in every particular, with the same stream of consciousness, memory, emotion and will continuing in the replica person where it had left off at the death of the original person (Hick, 1976, pp.279-284).

There is an apparent contradiction between claim i) and Hick's disembodied eschaton. I will assume that this is resolvable is some way through a human being's tripartite nature as body-soul-spirit and the mind-soul's link with ultimate reality, as outlined in section 3.1.1.[94] Granting Hick this possibility, the SMT defender can coherently claim that on replica theory all children who die prematurely will be resurrected as children in a new spatial-temporal environment to continue their soul-making journeys. There is a practical difficulty in that these children would most likely have to be matched with new parents or guardians in order for them to be raised in this environment, but this is not insurmountable. For example, the adoption of such children could be part of the post-mortem soul-making journeys of adult caregivers who had lost their own children in a former life.

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[94] For discussion of this contradiction in Hick's thought see Stiver (1991).

However, is there a coherent way for SMT to bring individuals with severe cognitive impairments into this progressive afterlife? Much of Hick's justification for excluding animals from the soul-making process seems equally applicable to the severely cognitively disabled. In his view, animals are not rational and moral beings capable of responding freely to God's love, since animals only live in the present moment, from instant to instant, and so "cannot carry their experience in conscious memory" (2010, p.316). In the terms of Marilyn McCord Adams, animals lack "transtemporal psychic unity", the ability to perceive the flow of time (1999, p.28). Hick therefore rejects the possibility that a good afterlife could compensate animals for their earthly suffering, since compensation requires that the victim understands that their present gain outweighs a previous loss (2010, p.316). Moreover, Hick would agree with Adams that a strategy of defeat is not needed, since animals lack the self-consciousness and transtemporal psychic unity to experience evils as a threat to the meaningfulness of their lives, let alone have them defeated by coming to see how suffering is an intrinsic part of a good whole (Adams, 1999, p.28).

These phenomenological assumptions about the nature of animal consciousness are open to challenge, as will be discussed below, but it is hard to see how the SMT defender can claim that the severely cognitively disabled are not in a similar position. If this group of human beings is also to be excluded from the soul-making process, and cannot have their suffering outweighed or defeated, then perhaps their annihilation upon death is the fate that coheres most with SMT. However, this would make their earthly suffering gratuitous and arbitrarily denying them ultimate goods because of their disability seems inconsistent with belief in a loving and just God.

An alternative afterlife scenario for the severely cognitively disabled is suggested by the post-mortem fate of elderly people in Hick's replica theory, but this also has its difficulties. The theory requires *full initial bodily similarity* between the resurrected person and the pre-resurrection person, because it supposes that personal identity is fully bound up with the body (Hick, 1976, pp.293-294). This implies that resurrecting an elderly person in the body of the thirty-year old version of that person would involve the loss of all the memories and character development she had accumulated since that age. However, this also means that a person who dies of old age will be resurrected in a body that is at or close to the point of dying. Consequently, Hick suggests that the elderly will be subject to healing and repair processes that return the body to good health and even reverse its aging, in order for the person to be in a fit state to continue their soul-making journey (1976, p.294).

We can see how this principle can be extended to cover persons with severe cognitive impairments. The brain trauma victim in a persistent vegetative state undergoes a healing process that regenerates the brain functioning he once had. The case of individuals with microcephaly and

other similar congenital disorders is perhaps harder to imagine, but it is not inconceivable that they might consciously experience the physical and psychological changes that result from the radical reconstruction of their genetic codes as they develop the brains and nervous systems they never had.[95] However, this brings to mind a bizarre environment, where over time infants mature into adults, the elderly become younger, the physically disabled recover the use of their limbs, and the cognitively impaired regain or acquire a rational and moral nature.

Assuming such changes are possible, the variety of outcomes for individuals, young people getting older and old people getting younger for example, suggests that separate soul-making environments may be needed for certain sub-classes of individuals, since epistemic distance would likely be compromised in an environment where people undergo changes which can only be described as miraculous when compared with earthly experience. If these post-mortem scenarios overly complicate SMT's progressive afterlife, then this follows from Hick's suggestion that preserving identity from one life to the next requires the full initial bodily similarity of the resurrected person, but it is open to the SMT defender to propose an alternative to Hick's replica theory to address its problems.

Providing for a progressive afterlife for the severely cognitively impaired also suggests that SMT should be adapted to include the resurrection and post-mortem soul-making of animals. After all, if human beings who do not have rational and moral natures can be cognitively enhanced so that they do, then why not animals? A defender of Hick's position on animals may object that it is one thing to suppose that a human genotype can be repaired so that a person becomes a fully functioning human being, but quite another to expect that animals will be enhanced genetically so that they function like human beings, since in the latter case, the genetic profiles of animals are being altered to create entirely new creatures. Perhaps it is reasonable to suppose that there is some environmental or epigenetic explanation for congenital forms of severe cognitive disability. In which case a defender of Hick's position can make a meaningful distinction between all human persons having an innate capacity to acquire a rational and moral nature by virtue of being human, and animals that can only acquire such capacities by having their intrinsic natures radically altered.

Nevertheless, if the SMT proponent follows Hick and excludes animals from soul-making, then there is still the problem of how to explain animal suffering on theism. It seems very probable that many sentient beings, not just higher animals, not only feel physical pain but also experience fear and anxiety, as well as forms of emotional suffering that suggest some awareness of the flow of

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[95] Kevin Timpe similarly proposes that those with severe genetic impairments might undergo radical healing in limbo so that they can be offered a chance to choose heaven and hell (2015a, pp.290-291).

time, such as grief, boredom, loneliness and depression.[96] Hick denies the problem exists to the extent that we might think, suggesting that our sense of the gratuity of animal suffering arises from the mistake of projecting our human experiences onto creatures of a much lower order (2010, p.314). His main solution to the problem is that animal life serves the divine purpose of human soul-making by providing us with a natural origin and setting that contribute to the epistemic distance by which we can freely perfect ourselves for union with God. As Hick writes, "The problem of animal pain is thus subordinate to that of human sin and suffering" (2010, p.316).

However, there is seemingly too much animal suffering for the purpose of making our environment religiously ambiguous enough for human soul-making. On Hick's account of human origins, the quantity of animal suffering extends over millions of years of animal evolution. If, as in the Eden world of Trakakis, an environment without natural disasters would still have the epistemic distance to support human soul-making, then so would a world with less animal suffering over a much shorter natural history. Granted, Hick would argue that the intensity of this suffering is relatively low given the limited cognitive capacities of animals. Nevertheless, even if animals lack the meaning-making powers to be considered persons and so need not be of concern when examining God's goodness to individuals, the excessive amount of animal pain does call into the question the goodness of the world as whole, since the amount of historical and ongoing animal suffering appears wasteful when compared to other possible soul-making worlds where animals might exist in lower numbers, for example, or in more benign conditions involving less predation.

In response the SMT defender may make use of an argument of Michael Tooley's, which claims that where evil can be necessary for a greater good that outweighs it, the conceiving of a series of worlds that are ever larger in size strongly suggests that no upper limit can be placed on the quantity of evil that might be found in a world created by God (1991, p.92). This means that in SMT, for example, *that no quantity of animal pain is too large* if it is outweighed by the good of human soul-making. Trent Dougherty, however, rightly challenges this idea by considering a series of larger and larger worlds with ever more quantities of suffering but with ever decreasing percentages of evil being outweighed by greater goods (2014, pp.32-34). Are the larger worlds where greater amounts of evil comprise a lower percentage of the whole better than worlds with lower amounts of evil which comprise a higher percentage of the whole? It seems, for example, that a world containing ten people where one person suffers is not worse than a world with a trillion people where a billion suffer, even though the per capita suffering in the latter is much lower.

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[96] For discussion of the evidence for animal suffering see Francescotti (2013) and Dougherty (2014).

If this point is granted, it suggests that a perfectly good God would likely prefer to create a world in which large amounts of animal pain is outweighed by a good afterlife for these creatures, or a world in which there is no such afterlife for animals but where the quantity of their earthly suffering is minimised, rather than make a Hickian world where animal pain is both large in quantity and not outweighed by a good afterlife. Perhaps the only move open to the SMT defender is to endorse a proposal by Dougherty (2014) to graft animals into Hick's progressive afterlife by extending the radical healing and regeneration of the severely cognitively disabled to include the resurrection and post-mortem soul-making of animals. However, it is doubtful whether this can be coherently and plausibly argued, not least because the cognitive enhancement of resurrected animals would render gratuitous their suffering in earthly lives lacking any soul-making progress, and makes conceivable similarly radical transformations of resurrected human beings that would make Hick's progressive afterlife superfluous.

3.2 Eleonore Stump's Redemptive Suffering Theodicy (RST)

3.2.1 Overview

In Eleonore Stump's *redemptive suffering theodicy* (RST), an all-powerful, perfectly good deity permits suffering to bring human beings to the acceptance that they need God's help to rectify and perfect their inherently flawed natures for a heavenly union with God. Stump primarily takes her proposal to be an *epistemically possible defence,* an internally consistent explanation that describes a possible world with the same pattern of suffering found in the actual world which specifies a morally sufficient reason for an omniperfect God to allow such suffering. She also takes RST to be a plausible theodicy for those committed to a Christian worldview (2010, p.155). Her theodicy only accounts for the suffering of *mentally fully functional adult human beings* (2018a, p.13). Stump holds that any morally sufficient reason for God to allow evils must meet two constraints: that the suffering primarily benefits the sufferer and the benefit of the suffering sufficiently outweighs the suffering endured (2010, p.378). Since in her view the evidential argument is a challenge to the coherence of systems of theistic belief, Stump also argues that the *scale of value* by which consistency is judged ought to be the scale embraced by the religious worldview in question (2010, p.386).[97]

As with SMT, outlining key aspects of the relationship between Stump's notions of divinity, human nature and afterlife will be useful at the outset. In her view of omniperfection God is a person with a mind and will (2010, p.387), who is motivated by *divine love* to desire what is good for human beings and to draw us into personal relationship with God (2010, pp.102, 164). *Omnipresence* is a key attribute, since God's presence with every human person is a precondition of loving human-divine relationship (2010, pp.112, 164). The human being is a *soul-body unity*, a composite of a corporeal body and an incorporeal rational soul which is identified with the intellect and will, where the human person is not identical with its soul but is the substantial product of the union of a soul with a particular body (Worsley, 2019, p.268). Stump endorses the *doctrine of original sin* and the *fallenness of human nature*, which she sees as consistent with any account of the human propensity for wrong-doing that is not the fault of an omniperfect God (2010, pp.154-5, 377-8).

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[97] Draper comments that Stump focusses on the direct inductive version of the evidential argument and so does not consider other negative evidential relations besides inconsistency (2011, para. 33).

Her distinction between God's *antecedent* and *consequent will* clarifies this point. The former is what God would have willed if everything in the world had been up to God alone, the latter is what God actually does will, given what God's creatures will. God's antecedent will is for human beings to have a life without suffering, in union with God, but after humanity's Fall God's consequent will includes allowing moral evil and suffering for the purpose of bringing humans to union with God (2010, p.385). Granting this distinction, Stump's RST is an eschatological theodicy in the domain of God's consequent will, building an explanation of evil around the realisation of God's ultimate purpose and locating that purpose in an afterlife.

Since having free will involves a relationship among reason, the will and desire, and reason recognises what is good, what is inherited in humanity's fallen nature is a weakened influence of reason and a strengthened influence of appetites on the will, resulting in a loss of the will's natural inclination to follow reason (Stump, 1985, p.404).[98] Nevertheless, the ordinary reason of normally functioning human intellects can grasp the essentials of an objective moral order and can never be totally ignorant of it (Stump, 2010, p.138). Moreover, human beings are hardwired with an innate desire for God, which is subject to a person's voluntary control (2010, p.440). For these reasons, Stump takes her view as endorsing an optimistic account of human nature, since a person's intellect, will and desire can only ever be integrated around the good and never be wholeheartedly evil (2010, p.127). This is because a person's ordinary reason and innate desire for God will always make a human being double-minded about taking something to be good that is objectively evil (2010, p.138).

Death brings about the dissolution of the soul-body union and the continued existence of the soul in a radically incomplete and imperfect form during the interim period between death and the soul's re-embodiment at the general resurrection.[99] The spiritual state of a person at the time of their death determines whether they will exist in *heaven* or *hell* post-resurrection (Stump, 2010, p.388). This is because a disembodied soul without access to the sense perception of the body cannot learn anything new, and therefore a soul that has become habituated with a second nature cannot change its mind or the state of its will when disembodied (Worsley, 2019, p.268).

Resurrected persons in heaven have a shared experience of everlasting union with a loving God (Stump, 2010, p.91). The blessed in heaven are both free and *inancaritable*, where inancaritability is the property of being incapable of not loving God (Noia, 2018, p.77). They cannot but love God not because their wills are coerced but because the clear view their intellects have of

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[98] By appetites I assume Stump is referring to physical and emotional desires.

[99] For Aquinas's view of the soul's incomplete existence in the interim state, see Christopher Conn (2012).

the nature of the good determines their wills by *natural necessity,* where a person wills something by natural necessity if it appears good and it cannot be viewed as in any way not good. This clear view is afforded by the *beatific vision* in which a person's intellect and God become one in terms of understanding, so that the blessed know God, "in Himself, through Himself, by uniting themselves with God, so that it can truly be said that the entire divine essence – the three person of the Trinity – dwells inside the blessed" (Noia, 2018, p.88). In heaven the peak human condition for a person is their *glory*, a state of being analogous to deification, but since there are differences in the willingness and capacity to receive God's love, union with the divine comes in degrees and so human glory will vary from person to person (Stump, 2010, p.391).

In RST the world was created so that human beings with free will can live in loving union with each other and with God. If we reject relationship with God our separation from the divine will become permanent in hell which is "the natural state…of those whose free wills are not in conformity with the divine will" (Stump, 1985, p.402). Re-embodied souls in hell experience the unending absence of personal loving relationship with God (Stump, 2010, p.123). There they can exist without harming the innocent and any pain they experience is a natural consequence of the way they choose to act. Those in hell do not therefore flourish, but their existence is better than their non-existence, and by restraining the evil they can do God loves them by preventing their further degeneration and thereby maximizing their being (Stump, 1986, pp.196-197). The two ultimate states of heaven and hell, or everlasting union with and permanent separation from God, mark out the extrinsic upper and lower bounds of the scale of human flourishing (Stump, 2018a, p.16).

Paul Draper reduces Stump's theodicy of redemptive suffering to the following four explanatory steps:

(1) God loves me and so desires to be united in love with me.

(2) Such union is impossible even for God in my current psychically fragmented condition. To make union possible, I need to be internally integrated around the good and

(3) To achieve such integration, I need to undergo a process of justification and sanctification.

(4) The best means available to God to promote that process is to cause or allow me to suffer (Draper, 2011, para.9).

As with SMT, there is scope in this section only to summarise the key premises of Stump's argument, specifically those concerning the process of *justification* and *sanctification*. In Stump's

view, a personal relationship of love involves a set of interconnected states entailed in what she terms *significant personal presence* (2010, p.126). This includes *rich shared attention*, a mutual closeness where one person's awareness of another involves their mutual awareness of their awareness of one another (2010, pp.116, 127). An omnipresent God is always and everywhere in a position to share attention with any person able and willing to share attention with God, but since human beings lack this willingness God cannot be significantly present to us (2010, p.117). We lack this willingness by virtue of the psychic fragmentation of our fallen natures, which both inclines us toward evil and is able to grasp right from wrong, making us alienated from our desires and unable or unwilling to reveal our true selves to others. Only the wholehearted integration of our desires and volitions around goodness will allow us to be close and personally present with others in the way needed for loving union with God (2010, p.126).

However, the volition for a will that wills the good cannot originate in the defective will of a human being, nor can it result from God's cooperation with a person's will, given the natural unwillingness of the latter. Only the activity of God's grace can produce such willingness in a person, yet God cannot bring this about unilaterally by interfering with that person's free will (2010, p.165). There is no contradiction, however, since a will that is free can respond in three ways: it can assent to something, reject it, or be *quiescent* and simply do nothing at all. A person's innate resistance to integrating their will around the good is overcome by providence shepherding them toward becoming quiescent, at which point God infuses grace into the person's will, thereby causing her to have a will that wills the good (2010, p.166). This is the process of *justification*, a state of faith which is necessary and sufficient for attaining heavenly union with God and avoiding hell (2010, p.163). Once a person has a will that wills the good, this part of her divided will can then ask God's help with the struggle to harmonise her higher and lower desires and volitions around goodness, cooperating with God's will in the process of *sanctification*. In this way, a person justified by faith can grow morally and spiritually through sanctification, forming a deeper union with God in a process that continues in the afterlife, perhaps indefinitely, limited only by the degree of good that a person freely wants to will (2010, pp.160-161).

Suffering is the best means available to God to promote justification and sanctification because it brings a person's will to the state of quiescence needed for them to accept God's redemption. The suffering involved in a person's justification is involuntary *simpliciter,* or unwilling in every way. This kind of involuntary suffering is only justifiable if it wards off a much greater harm, as with a person's justification which prevents everlasting separation from God in hell (2010, p.392). Suffering which promotes sanctification is involuntary *secundum quid*, unwilling in only a certain respect, since persons freely cooperating with God to integrate their wills around goodness are only

partly unwilling. For these persons, the positive benefit of becoming closer to God is a morally-sufficient-reason for their suffering (2010, p.396). Since there is more objective value in having flourishing last forever in heaven rather than for a finite time on earth, it is reasonable to endure the involuntary suffering involved in the process of justification and sanctification and accept the loss of any earthly flourishing this might involve (2010, p.419). In this way, RST meets Stump's two conditions for a successful theodicy, that the suffering primarily benefits the sufferer and the benefit of the suffering sufficiently outweighs or defeats the suffering endured, therefore establishing, in her view, a morally sufficient reason for God to allow earthly evils.

3.2.2 The Normatively Relativized Logical Argument from Evil (NRLAFE)

Stump's answer to the argument that any human-divine relationship is morally flawed and unloving with a God that rescues human beings from conditions contrived and sustained by this God would in part rely on RST's explanation for the fallenness of human nature. She takes fallenness to refer to any notion in which the human propensity for moral evil has an origin that is "not attributable to a fault or defect on the part of omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God" (2010, p.155). We shall return to this definition below, but as outlined in section 3.2.1, this claim concerning human responsibility for moral evil involves a distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will. When the contrivance of the conditions of a relationship is considered separately from the sustenance of those conditions, God's antecedent will for human beings to live without suffering in union with God suggests an answer to the NRLAFE that is unavailable to Hick: *that God did not deliberately set out to create the circumstances of a fallen human existence*.

However, there are at least two difficulties with this response. The first concerns how RST's free will theodicy can explain the origin of evil. Any theodicy that relies on God not being the direct cause of humanity's capacity for moral evil must provide an answer, but Stump is not helpful here. Arguing that nothing in her project requires Christian doctrines concerning original sin and Adam's Fall, she suggests her theodicy is compatible with secular explanations for a human propensity for moral evil that is not attributable to God. Stump suggests Darwinian evolution as a candidate explanation, but she does not discuss how this account breaks the causal link between God's will and a flawed human nature (2010, p.154). As Hick's embrace of evolution implies, such natural laws are reasonably thought of as contrived by the designer of those laws, making an omniperfect God causally responsible for the results of their working out if divine omniscience is assumed to include perfect foreknowledge. Hick's Irenaean move to make God the direct cause of humanity's initially immature state is partly motivated by the failure of traditional Augustinian theodicy to explain the

self-creation of evil *ex nihilo* by human or angelic agents, and he seems correct on this point (2010, p.174). Whereas Hick attempts to explain why God deliberately set humanity in a state of epistemic distance, Stump's appeal to God's antecedent will leaves a gap in her theodicy concerning the origin of evil.[100]

Even if this problem were resolved, God's omniscience and foreknowledge is a difficulty for attempts to separate God's antecedent and consequent will. Although the Fall is supposed to be a contingent fact of human freedom, this event must have been a fact in God's foreknowledge before it actually happened, meaning that the decision to sustain the conditions of post-Fall humanity must have been taken beforehand. In other words, if no temporal distinction can be made between God's antecedent and consequent will, then God's omni-responsibility for contriving the conditions of a fallen world cannot be avoided. Therefore, as Stump's God does contrive the conditions of humanity's relationship with the divine, RST cannot evade the NRLAFE. I now turn Chapter's 2.1's two main questions concerning the NRLAFE.

Q1: Is there a difficulty in the particular way in which the conditions of the human-divine relationship have been contrived in RST? As in SMT, Stump's God is a sustainer and redeemer of human suffering for the purpose of bringing us into personal relationship with God. Therefore, the Munchausen syndrome by proxy and psychiatrist-alcoholic parallels discussed in 3.1.2 also apply to RST. Rather like the patient turned alcoholic, Stump equates the defects in our wills, which we have by virtue of a fallen nature, to a terminal brain disease that if untreated will destine us to "living death in hell" (1985, p.411). Only redemptive suffering can bring our wills into the state of acquiescence needed to allow God's grace to repair the defect in the will which prevents us from willing the good and entering into relationship with God. Yet, as there is no practical distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will *this fallen nature is in effect a God-made one*.

Why does RST's God choose to sustain humanity in a fallen condition essentially separated from God? That it is logically possible for a being to have free will and not sin at all suggests an omniperfect God has the option to relate to creatures without creating a fallen world. Indeed, Stump is committed to this possibility, since on her view the saved in heaven freely love God and will the good by *natural necessity* through their experience of the beatific vision. We may therefore wonder why RST's God did not reset the world after human beings had originated moral evil. As a remedy we could have been given the beatific vision straight away, rather than being sustained in a fallen existence so that we may be redeemed for the same outcome. In other words, the suffering involved in redemption from sin appears not to be necessary for beatific intimacy with God.

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[100] See Adam W. Willows (2014) for his formulation of what he considers to be Augustine's strongest position on the origin of evil, that it is fundamentally inexplicable.

The standard answer in Christian theology has been the *felix culpa* defence: that in permitting human sin and its consequences God intended to bring about the supreme good of redemption from sin through everlasting union with God that would not have been possible if free will and moral evil had never existed (Hick, 2010, p.176). The defence supposes that sin plus redemption has much greater value than a human innocence that permits neither. Like SMT, RST's explanation for why this is so relies on an appeal to the value of human beings having the freedom to accept or reject loving relationship with God. However, even if we assume that beatific intimacy is impossible without this free choice, we still must examine the specific features of RST's world and consider whether the human-divine relationship it supposes God to have contrived represents the highest form of love.

To look at this question, we can again adopt the position of the Rawlsian agent comparing a Stumpian world with two freedom-with-minimal-evil alternatives discussed in Chapter 3.1.2. Eden and Schellenberg variants of Hick's vale of soul-making show that it is not impossible for there to be other worlds where God's personal relationship with human beings is more supportive and less demanding, and therefore more supremely loving. Comparisons with these variants of RST's world of redemptive suffering yield a similar conclusion, albeit with different features. An Eden-type version of RST where human beings with the propensity for moral evil can undergo redemptive suffering but with no natural evils seems possible, since the existence of natural disasters and diseases is not entailed in the idea that humans are predisposed toward moral evil due to their innately defective wills. To the Rawlsian agent who might think the conditions of the relationship with God in Eden is more loving, Stump could object that without natural evils suffering would be less widely distributed in such a world, reducing opportunities for justification and a good afterlife. That Eden only contains one mortal existence, unlike the many afterlives of Hick's SMT, strengthens this point, since suffering would need to affect every fallen human within their mortal lives to give them a chance at redemption, and the distribution of moral evil alone is unlikely to do this work. In other words, without natural evils more people would end up in hell in an Eden variant of Stump's world.

However, the RST defender may be mistaken to rely on this objection. Draper (2011) rightly points out that suffering from major natural disasters such as famines and tsunamis is so widespread and indiscriminate that it does not appear targeted to the psychological needs of specific persons. If Stump's theodicy were true then such suffering should be taken as potentially good for people regardless of their individual differences. Yet this would mean that the theodicy envisages everyone suffering in the same indiscriminate way, making inexplicable the wide disparity between people in terms of how much and how badly they suffer (Draper, 2011, para.26). What are we to make, for example, of two victims of a tsunami, a man who is perhaps close to the point of justification who

loses his home and family, and a man who is far from justification whose only loss is that his favourite bike has been washed away? The first man's suffering seems excessive, the second not enough. Perhaps in the long run some other instance of suffering will benefit the second man, but what if he has a lucky life that evades all other natural calamities? It is not clear, therefore, whether suffering caused by such natural evils would prevent many more people from entering hell compared with an Eden version of RST.

The more significant difficulty with Stump's theodicy is that it explains human suffering as *universally the best means* by which God brings about the justification of faith. In other words, every mentally functioning adult must suffer in order to be redeemed. That Stump proposes such a singular, universal mechanism follows from her view that *all* human beings suffer from the same malady, the psychic fragmentation and defective will of a fallen condition. It is this anthropology which makes Stump's appeal to a medical analogy apt when answering the objection that it is immoral to cause someone to suffer as a means to an end. If the patient has a chronic disease, then medical treatment that causes pain to prevent the death of the patient is justified. For the fallen human with a chronically defective will, causing suffering to avoid the much greater harm of eternal life in hell is even more justified (Stump, 2018a, p.19). However, as an omnipotent God need not have caused or allowed human beings to have this chronic disease in the first place, such a God could have contrived the initial conditions of the world so that something more benign than suffering works just as well in bringing forth a relationship with God (Draper, 2011, para. 22, 29). The experience of suffering may be spiritually beneficial for many people, and this may be one of the ways a providential God brings the good out of the bad, but the world need not be structured so that suffering is universally the only means to our ultimate flourishing. If it is metaphysically unnecessary for an all-powerful God to use suffering in the way proposed by Stump, then her RST describes a human-divine relationship that is flawed and so cannot answer the NRLAFE.

To establish this point, we can compare RST with a possible Stumpian world where human beings have the sort of nature envisaged by J.L. Schellenberg, as discussed in section 3.1.2. This alternative world has two stages with a heaven and hell and an ante-mortem existence involving moral and natural evils, but the human inhabitants have more epistemic access to God's presence and more psychological receptivity to divine guidance in an environment where suffering is not a causal condition of having a good afterlife. In other words, this is a world where human beings are naturally open to forming a second order desire to have a will that wills the good, whereas in RST humans are naturally resistant to forming such a desire and if left to their own devices will choose eternal separation from God in hell.

Two examples are enough to demonstrate the problem for Stump's theodicy. In the Schellenberg-type world, a person can come to faith in God through a rational process of philosophical inquiry. Having weighed up the arguments for and against she forms a firm conviction that an all-powerful, perfectly good God exists. This might involve an awareness of the suffering that exists in the world and an imaginative empathy for the pain of others extrapolated from very minor incidents in her own life, but before the completion of her philosophical investigation she does not experience the kind of meaningful personal suffering that the Stumpian world needs to make a person's will acquiescent. After deciding to dedicate her life to God, she may experience deep suffering, such as a death of a loved one, which brings her closer to God, as in the process of sanctification, but in her initial acceptance of faith, the step analogous to justification, she was not caused to suffer.

The other example involves the loved child of a religiously committed family. After his formative years he reflects on an upbringing that was happy and spiritually rewarding and comes to the view that the universe is ultimately a rational and good place, and that the only explanation is that it was created by an all-powerful, all knowing and perfectly good God. This leads him to endorse the religious beliefs he was raised with and to form a deep internal commitment to devote his life to God. He lives a blessed life constantly open to God's providential guidance, but dies suddenly in a car accident in his twenties, experiencing no pain in doing so as a sleeping passenger. He achieves a good afterlife without having suffered meaningfully in mortal life.

These epistemically possible examples show how a good afterlife could be achievable without the kind of suffering Stump envisages is required for justification. Therefore, Stump's world is less preferable to the Rawlsian agent than the Schellenberg-type alternative. The latter provides a better answer to the NRLAFE, since a relationship with a God that contrives the conditions of human existence so that we can flourish in this life and the next without necessarily having to suffer first is one that is more loving and less morally flawed. There may be other conditions of the Schellenberg-type world that count against it, but in terms of this significant feature, the human-divine relationship in Stump's world is lacking and cannot be the most supreme kind of love.[101]

This conclusion is strengthened when human responses to horrendous evils are compared across the two worlds. A significant objection to RST is that some cases of horrific suffering cannot be construed as divine healing or medicine (Oppy, 2018a; Trakakis, 2018b). While Stump draws support for her view from evidence of post-traumatic growth, intense suffering is also frequently destructive and demoralizing. As Trakakis notes, Stump's reply that personal regeneration can only

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[101] An RST defender could attempt to show that it is true in all possible worlds that redemptive suffering is a necessary condition of personal relationship with God, but I suspect that any such modal argument would have to rely on very narrow assumptions concerning what counts as a possible world.

be freely willed calls into the question the value of free will in cases of horrendous evil, inviting the criticism that Stump's appeal to it in this context essentially blames the sufferer for her failure to flourish (Trakakis, 2018b).

However, comparison with a Schellenberg-type world raises a further objection. In RST it would be unsurprising for someone with a chronically defective will to respond to horrendous suffering in a self-destructive way, since on Stump's account they do not have the desire for a will that wills the good. By contrast, a negative response is more surprising in a Schellenberg-type world where people have greater awareness of and receptivity to God's presence and guidance. Analogously, a chronically ill person is less able to fight off a new disease without suffering longer term damage than a generally healthy person who has more physiological resources to absorb a new illness and recover fully. Moreover, a fallen nature puts the self-destructive victim of horrendous evil in the invidious position of not being responsible for being created with a defective will and being responsible for her failure to grow because she has one. The Rawlsian agent seems likely to choose the Schellenberg-type world, *because it provides better conditions for humans beings to respond constructively to deep suffering*.

Q2: *Is the ultimate good brought about through this relationship valuable enough to make the contriving of these conditions worthwhile?* As with SMT, RST's claim that personal relationship with God is supremely loving and the ultimate good is inconsistent with God's role as both sustainer and redeemer of human suffering, no matter how beneficial the outcome of our union with God. Comparisons with Schellenberg-type worlds further show that, whether it is by placing human beings at an epistemic distance from God or handicapping us with defective wills naturally resistant to relationship with God, that the Gods of SMT and RST are not as supportive as they could be, and so it is possible for them to be more loving in contriving the conditions of human-divine relationship.

Since personal relationship with God is the ultimate good in RST, these flaws in that relationship count against RST mounting a successful *felix culpa* defence in which our final redemption through union with God is valuable enough to make the creation of a fallen world worthwhile. Nevertheless, there are two points worth making here concerning one main advantage and one disadvantage Stump's RST has compared with Hick's theodicy. The radical discontinuity between embodied human existence and the immateriality of its final fulfilment envisaged by Hick is not a difficulty for Stump, as on her view the good of everlasting union with God shared with others is a physical existence with resurrected bodies. These bodies are glorified and the beatific vision conditions the human will to goodness by natural necessity, but this existence is a continuation and extension of mortal life, not a repudiation of it. Therefore, Stump's good afterlife has more scope than Hick's to make physical suffering a meaningful part of a good whole. If her premises about

human nature and its need for redemptive suffering are granted, then she can claim that for those who participate in it the good afterlife defeats this suffering, not just outweighs it, because the embodied experience it involves is intrinsic to our final fulfilment. However, as discussed above there are good reasons to doubt these premises.

The main disadvantage for Stump's account is highlighted by Hick in his discussion of the *felix culpa* defence of God's permission of the Fall (2010, pp.176-177). He argues that theodicies like RST which suppose there is a hell directly work against the idea that God allows human sin to bring about the greater good of heavenly redemption, since allowing some or many to remain permanently fallen in hell frustrates this divine purpose. For Hick the redemption has to be universal if it is to be a great enough good to justify God's choice to permit human fallenness rather than preserve humanity in its initial state of innocence. In Stump's mild hell, the ante and post-mortem suffering of inhabitants is neither defeated nor outweighed. By contrast, Hick's universalism makes SMT's eschaton a greater good both in its entirety and from the perspective of each individual. Setting aside the problem with the disembodied nature of Hick's final state, it would seem the Rawlsian agent would choose the guarantee of having a good end rather than the risk of a bad one in Stump's hell. Therefore, the benefit of Hick's universal redemption seems to have more scope than Stump's afterlife to make the cost of creating a fallen world worthwhile.

Stump may object that, at least at the global level if not for the individual, this conclusion depends on how many choose hell. She can plausibly argue that these numbers are likely to be low in her world because it is less demanding than Hick's in only requiring justification by faith rather than sanctification or perfection to achieve the good afterlife. In principle, this means that anyone who responds to suffering with the quiescence needed to accept God's redemption can enter heaven. However, this answer faces a difficulty suggested by the Schellenberg-type variant of RST. If in Stump's world every human being has a defective will which is naturally resistant to God's salvation, and all mentally functioning adults are free to respond to suffering without acquiescence, then we can expect many more to remain separated from God in RST than would be the case in a Schellenberg-type world where humans are more aware of and receptive to divine presence and guidance. In other words, while RST's world is less demanding than Hick's in not requiring perfection to achieve the ultimate good, it is not only more demanding than SMT in requiring redemptive suffering to avoid life in hell, but it is also less supportive than it could otherwise be, since every human being need not be handicapped with a chronic disease of the will.[102]

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[102] Stump could argue that in her view humans innately desire union with God (Chapter 3.2.1). This is conceivably some vestige of Adam's original perfection before the Fall. However this possibility brings back the puzzle of evil's creation *ex nihilo*, as well as an apparent paradox: if justification and sanctification is needed to return us to a state of original perfection, then we are returning to the same state which led Adam to his fall.

3.2.3 Heavenly Freedom

On the *lack of value problem*, the argument that a heaven without morally significant freedom is not supremely valuable, Chapter 3.1.3 concluded that the SMT defender must rely on asserting the infinite value of Hick's eschaton, since any valuable kind of personal freedom, not just that with respect to morally significant choices, seemingly cannot exist in a disembodied corporate union with divine consciousness. Stump accepts a Thomist account of heaven where human beings love God by natural necessity in the beatific vision and the principle of alternative possibilities typically associated with libertarian freedom is false (Stump, 2005, cited in Noia, 2018, p.78). At the same time there is a continuity in the way freedom of will operates before and after death. This is implied by the embodied nature of personal existence in RST's afterlife, and the process of progressive sanctification, which begins in mortal life once a person is justified and then continues indefinitely in heaven, making a person's glory and depth of union with God dependent on the degree of good that a person freely wants to will in cooperation with the will of God (Stump, 2010, p.391).

Chapter 2.2 also noted how the lack of value problem may be addressed by non-choice based accounts of heavenly freedom which emphasise the value of being able to realise ones wants, having lower-order desires aligned with higher order desires, or removing internal obstacles to action. Stump appears to endorse this strategy in her description of the process of progressive sanctification. This focusses on the psychological dimension of free will, primarily by distinguishing between ordinary and strenuous modes of freedom, and ordinary and strenuous modes of love. For Stump, only a person with an undivided will has the strenuous freedom of being completely free from any internal obstacles to acting according to their desires, and only such a person can experience the mutual closeness and significant presence needed to strenuously love a beloved (2010, pp.135-138). As God is identified with goodness, and a loving relationship with God is the most valuable thing anyone could want, only the integration of a person's desires and volitions around the good will give them the strenuous freedom and love needed to experience this ultimate good. Moreover, as the depth of sanctification depends on the degree to which a person freely wants to will the good, Stump seemingly implies that a person has unlimited potential for glorification or deification, a heavenly good which might well be of worth the cost of creating a fallen world.

If heavenly sanctification depends on the continuing value of human freedom, how are we to understand the idea that the beatific vision necessitates inancaritability and impeccability? Perhaps the RST defender could argue that the vision of God permanently grounds the justification

of faith that qualifies a person for heavenly life, while the saved are free to choose how their sanctification builds on this by deepening their union with God. Impeccability would require that those with still partially corrupted wills do not introduce moral evil into heaven, and this seems possible. As a person's prior justification integrates their second order desires around the good, we can perhaps grant that for a justified person existing in paradisal conditions of beatific intimacy with God there would be no scope for any negative lower order desires left over in the make-up of their character to result in morally bad actions, at least of a serious nature.[103]

RST's explanation may therefore be thought to combine choice and non-choice based accounts of the value of libertarian freedom, as defined in Chapter 2.2. The earthly freedom to accept or reject God's redemption is part of a choice-based account of free will involving morally significant choices, which RST's heaven lacks because of the beatific vision, but which is supremely worthwhile nonetheless because of its non-choice based view of the value of strenuous freedom and love in the process of heavenly sanctification. In other words, by necessitating inancaritability and impeccability the beatific vision takes away a person's choice-based freedom with respect to loving God and moral evil, but in doing so enables the conditions for their non-choice based freedom to flourish through the progressive integration of their divided wills around the good.

Nevertheless, it seems an internal focus on the psychology of how divided wills become increasingly integrated can only go so far in describing the value of heavenly freedom. We could suppose that there is no limit to this process of integration, but it seems more reasonable to expect the harmonisation of lower and higher order desires and volitions to be completed within a definite period, and perhaps rather quickly in a paradisal environment. Can we also grasp how a person increases their glory through an ever-deepening relationship with God without reference to the actions it might involve? The extent of such freedom, whether it concerns a limited range of choices or a wide variety, is not made clear by Stump because she does not discuss the sorts of choices the saved might participate in to progress their sanctification. Moreover, this account of the value of heavenly freedom comes at a cost for the internal consistency of RST. Stump has argued that in mortal life the positive benefit of sanctification or deeper union with God justifies earthly suffering that is involuntary *secundum quid,* only partly unwilling**.** Yet supposing that sanctification is possible in a heavenly environment without suffering makes the evils involved in the earthly stage of that process gratuitous.

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[103] Draper interprets this integration to include the elimination of first order desires to engage in wrong-doing and adding new such desires for goods that fit the higher order desires and volitions integrated around the good (2011, para.13).

How does RST address the argument from heaven and its claim that a perfectly good God would create only a heaven with no morally significant freedom without also creating our world and the evils it contains? RST is a weak free will theodicy where earthly freedom with respect to a morally significant choice, whether to acquiesce to God's saving grace in moments of suffering, is a necessary condition for another good which justifies created evils, the ultimate flourishing of our heavenly union with God. The RST defender will argue that without redemptive suffering the fallen individual cannot acquire the will to be good-willed needed for our union with God. However, might not exposure to some limited form of the beatific vision have a similar, redemptive effect on the unjustified without coercing their wills? Moreover, as noted in discussion of the NRLAFE, human beings need not have been created in a fallen condition in need of redemptive suffering. The possibility of a Schellenberg-type world shows that there are other ways to make a world for human beings to freely relate with God. For example, could not RST's God create human beings in a justified state already possessing a will to be good-willed to exist in a heaven where the beatific vision helps us to freely complete the integration of our wills around the good and perfect our relationship with God? Stump implies this possibility by envisaging heavenly sanctification progressing in an environment without moral and natural evils.

To explain why an earthly existence with moral evil is necessary for a heaven without it, the RST defender could employ a proposal by Richard Tamburro (2017). He suggests that the knowledge of having sinned, and the experience of shame and guilt this involves, is a necessary condition of heavenly impeccability. Unlike Adam, who in his innocence lacked this knowledge, only post-Fall human beings who have been redeemed and who have a memory of sin and the desire to avoid it can exist freely and without moral evil in heaven (2017, pp.313-314). The are two main difficulties with this response. Since a continuous state of beatific intimacy necessitates heavenly inancaritability and impeccability, earthly experience of sin would seemingly be superfluous on Stump's view of heaven. Secondly, even if knowledge of sin were part of the necessary and sufficient conditions for a heaven that lacks moral evil, it is not clear how a fallen person who lacks a will that wills the good would respond to sin with guilt and shame. Being good-willed seems a necessary condition of being aware of sin and desiring to avoid it, but human beings innately lack goodness of will on Stump's view of human fallenness. Stump could respond that our ordinary reason can grasp right from wrong, but it seems that at the emotional or psychological level our responses to sin are conditioned be the nature of our wills, not what is graspable by the intellect. If this point is granted would not any shame concerning wrongdoing be more sharply felt by someone without the defective will of a fallen human being? In other words, an earthly existence that endows every human being with the innate goodness of will of Adam before the Fall, rather than in a fallen state

with a corrupted will, would make impeccability more explicable on Tamburro's account of heavenly freedom.

As Draper points out, the contribution of suffering to the process of justification and sanctification in RST is merely a causal, not a metaphysical necessity (2011, para. 22). Human beings need not have been created with a fallen nature that requires redemptive suffering for their justification, and natural and moral evils are not necessary for the heavenly stage of a person's sanctification. I see no reason why on Stump's own view an omniperfect God could not have created human beings in heaven with divided wills but in an already justified state, so that their experience of the beatific vision can complete the process of their sanctification in cooperation with the will of God. This great good would not require a mortal life of redemptive suffering. RST therefore fails to show how a heaven without morally significant choices is in some way dependent on an ante-mortem existence that lacks such freedom. Consequently, the proponent of the argument from heaven is free to conclude that Stump's God cannot exist, because such a deity would choose to create heaven only and not the world of our experience.

3.2.4 Hell and Post-Mortem Suffering

RST's choice-based account of hell is challenged by the *diminished capacities objection* outlined in Chapter 2.3: that a perfectly good God would not force a decision that could withhold a great benefit from individuals who are not in a position to make an informed choice regarding that benefit within their mortal lives (Buckareff and Plug, 2013, pp.137-138). The RST defender can claim that the objection is answered if the consequences of being withheld a benefit are not so bad for those who do not receive it, as with Stump's mild hell. Unlike the traditional grim hell of eternal punishment, mild hell preserves those who reject union with God in a state where they can live out the natural consequences of their choices and be the persons they have chosen to become for eternity. Despite the physical suffering and mental anguish of life in hell, its inhabitants experience some satisfactions, and through confining them to a place where they can no longer harm the innocent God restrains their evil. In this way God loves the damned by treating them according to their chosen natures and maximizing the goodness of their existence (Stump, 1986, pp.196-197).

This permanent separation from God involves the *issuant view of hell* endorsed by Jonathan Kvanvig (1993) and Andrei Buckareff and Allen Plug (2005, 2015). On this view, the existence of heaven and hell are both motivated by God's love for created persons, evading the inconsistency of those accounts of the afterlife that explain a retributive hell as the result of divine justice and flourishing in heaven as resulting from divine love. Nevertheless, Stump perhaps overlooks a

potential difficulty with her conception of how a person forms a character fit for hell. She suggests that God is loving to those in hell because they are treated "according to their second nature, the acquired nature they have chosen for themselves" (1986, p.196). By *second nature*, Stump refers to the state of a will that has been habituated to appetites for certain lesser or greater goods over the course of a mortal life (Worsley, 2019, p.268). However, another way to conceive of this idea is to relate this acquired nature to the universal nature with which we are all endowed, and consider whether the latter has been changed through our choices. On this view, it seems more consistent with RST's concept of human fallenness to claim that those in hell have endorsed their innately bad natures, and it is the inhabitants of heaven that have acquired a second nature to unify with God. David Efird and David Worsley understand Stump as likening the post-Fall defect in the human will to the germinating seed of an invasive weed that inevitably grows uncontrollably to damage everything around it, or to a hereditary viral infection that inexorably takes over the body to become a terminal disease (2015, pp.548-549). These analogies imply that life in hell is the default fate of the fallen human being, or as Efird and Worsley write, "the *natural* state of human beings is to reject God's gift of operative grace [emphasis added]" (2015, pp.549).[104]

Stump may argue that redeemed human beings have returned to the original perfection of our pre-Fall condition, and that paradisal union with God is our natural state and the fulfilment of our true human nature. This response coheres with the optimistic anthropology which Stump argues she endorses, where a person's intellect, will and desire can only ever be fully integrated around the good (2010, p.127).[105] Nevertheless, Stump clearly holds that the human propensity to evil is innate because of a defective will *within* that nature, which in my view is more consistent with supposing that redeemed individuals have acquired a condition they were not in before. In other words, Stump's anthropology is optimistic in the sense that human beings are *potentially* good, not innately so, and are only made good by virtue of the choices we make. This point concerning which nature is acquired is significant for the diminished capacities objection. If a perfectly good God would not force a decision that could withhold a great benefit from individuals who lack knowledge of the relevant consequences to make an informed choice concerning that benefit, then such a God would also not force a decision from those who innately lack the character and capability to decide in their own best interests *by virtue of their fallen nature*.

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[104] In her endorsement of Dante's view, Stump writes that "hell is the natural state…of those whose free wills are not in conformity with the divine will" (1985, p.402).

[105] See section 3.2.1, p.84.

Moreover, the RST defender cannot simply evade this objection by appealing to the mildness of its hell. Stump suggests that hell's inhabitants are confined to a place where they can no longer harm the innocent, but her hell does not preclude them from inflicting psychological and physical pain on themselves and each other. As Adams (1993b) argues, it seems implausible that such a hell would not eventually collapse into a grim hell. It may be true that some human beings are able to occupy themselves with vice and trivial distractions for long periods of their mortal lives, it is another thing to claim that this is possible in an everlasting hell. Stump has difficulty answering this point because she claims inconsistently that a person's intellect, will and desire can only ever be integrated around the good, while also implying that psychologically fragmented individuals existing in hell can have a vicious second nature that remains stable over an everlasting life (Adams, 1999, pp.46-47).

If the second nature of those in hell consisted of a thorough-going evilness, then its stable focus on bad ends might be plausible. However, on Stump's account anyone in a permanent condition of fallenness or separation from God must have an internally divided will, meaning that part of the self is aware of the evil it has embraced. We may suppose with David Worsley that Stump's view of how shame and guilt prevent the mutual closeness needed to love God strenuously may be extended to explain why the damned are psychologically incapable of uniting with God (2019, pp.265-267). Those resurrected for a life in hell must also be fully aware, in a way not possible in mortal life, that they have chosen to reject heavenly existence and its boundless possibilities for human flourishing (Worsley, 2019, p.272). It is easy to imagine that in an eternal life such knowledge would prey on the mind, leading to despair and an ultimate descent into madness and depravity. As Adams suggests, the vice and torment of the evil-willed seems likely to bring about a total dismantling of personality so ruinous that the suffering involved in worldly schizophrenia and depression would pale in comparison (1999, p.47). Worsley (2019) argues that God's minimal presence in the psychology of the damned could ward off their utter self-destruction, but this benefit seemingly does not justify sustaining their mental anguish indefinitely when annihilation might be preferable.

If Adams's view of eternal suffering is more psychologically plausible than Stump's, and the latter's mild hell is in fact a horrendous evil, then the RST defender must answer at least two objections to the existence of grim hell outlined in Chapter 2.3. On the merits of annihilation, Stump's Thomist identification of being with goodness means that to eradicate the damned is a greater evil than preserving their existence in hell, even with all its pain and suffering (1986, p.196). In the absence of an overriding good that could justify it, annihilation is therefore not an option for a good God in Stump's view. However, if Stump's mild hell collapses into a grim one, then according to

her own argument for suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter,* the overriding good of avoiding a fate worse than death provides an adequate justification for annihilation. To prevent this degeneration God could eternally constrain the freedom of hell's inhabitants, separating them from each other to avert further harm, but the permanent frustration of evil desires and unending solitude this might involve would seemingly be an unbearable torment from their internal point of view, bringing annihilation into consideration. As Kvanvig suggests, if the conditions of a prisoner's incarceration are relatively benign the death penalty is more severe than life imprisonment, but if those conditions are permanently tortuous then the death penalty seems preferable (1993, pp.68-71).

Secondly, a grim hell invites the argument for escapism discussed by Buckareff and Plug (2015). If a mild hell is an environment well suited to those with a stable second nature focussed on evil ends, then a just and loving God need not offer second chances to those who would reject them, but if hell is grim and inhabitants desperately desire escape then we might expect such a God to provide a way out. Yet Stump has argued those offered an escape from hell would have the wrong motive for union with God. Since anyone who has experienced grim hell would do whatever is necessary to avoid it, such persons would be willing the good not for its own sake but for the sake of avoiding hell, and so not be in conformity with God's will. Therefore, on Stump's view, even if her hell collapses into a grim one, it is not possible for anyone dammed to subsequently participate in a heavenly life of union with God (1985, p.402).

The difficulty with this reply is that Stump has proposed suffering as the causal mechanism by which the fragmented human psyche can begin the process of justification and sanctification that integrates the will around the good. As Stump's hell is full of suffering and psychologically fragmented individuals it is not clear why a similar mechanism could not also bring the wills of those in hell to the needed state of acquiescence. Moreover, her objection to escapism could apply equally to those who respond to earthly suffering with quiescence, since this surrender of the will could be motivated by the desire to avoid further suffering. The RST defender may wish to rely on the notion that the dammed person has a second nature which once acquired is fixed, but if in earthly life a fallen human being with a will naturally resistant to willing the good can acquire a nature fit for union with God, then it seems the same could also be true for the damned.

Finally, can RST answer objections concerning the quantity and distribution of suffering in hell? As discussed above in relation to the NRLAFE, Stump can argue that the numbers of the damned are not likely to be high because only justification by faith rather than sanctification is needed to attain a good afterlife. Stump also suggests that at death God may offer a last chance to those who are not Christians or theists (1985, p.412). Since these people may turn toward the good inwardly in a way not visible to external observers it is conceivable that the majority of people, or

very many, avoid hell in RST (Stump, 2010, p.408). If the notion of a last chance is plausible then it may address Draper's objection that if there were an eternal hell then we should expect the lives of unjustified individuals never be cut short and even to be extended, so that they are not denied the chance of a good afterlife, yet it seems a fact that not only good people die too early (2011, para.29). However, if such chances involve receiving knowledge one needs to choose salvation, why offer this opportunity at the point of death and not sooner? We could get the required information at any time, perhaps through a vivid dream or powerful vision. It seems a perfectly loving God who wants a relationship with human beings would want us to begin the process of justification and sanctification *during* our lives, not at its end. This would be much more beneficial to the unsaved and those in their life.

A last chance is an *ad hoc* way to resolve an inconsistency between the sort of soteriology we might expect from a perfectly loving God and the outcomes we should expect from the world contrived by the God of RST: human beings endowed with freedom but a diminished capacity to choose what is in their own good by virtue of their fallen nature; human lives universally destined for hell unless relationship with God is freely chosen; and opportunities for redemptive suffering not proportioned to the spiritual needs of individuals. Even if appearances are deceptive and many more do in fact turn to God at the end of life, these conditions strongly suggest that RST's world would send many more to hell than might otherwise be case.

3.2.5 The Fate of Creatures without Free Will

Stump intends her theodicy only to account for the suffering of mentally fully functional adult human beings and therefore RST provides no explanation for the suffering of children, the severely cognitively impaired and animals (2018a, p.13). In setting this constraint, Stump holds that there is no *a priori* reason for thinking that there is only one morally sufficient reason for God to allow or cause earthly suffering, or that only one kind of benefit justifies all suffering. Other reasons and ultimate goods may apply in the cases of children, mentally disabled humans and animals. She also suggests that it may be possible to extend her theodicy to cover such persons and beings (2018a, p.13; 2010, pp.4-5).

Two points should be noted before discussing the main difficulties outlined in Chapter 2.4. While Stump is correct that a theodicean need not restrict herself to proposing one reason for suffering, as discussed in Chapter 1.2, to propose various explanations for different types and cases of evil can count against a theodicy, since a theory's lack of *ad hoc-ness* is a criterion when evaluating its coherence (Holten, 2002, p.275). Moreover, there is good reason to think that extra

hypotheses would be needed to extend RST to cover these other groups of beings. Stump suggests that since her theodicy focusses on the nature of loving interpersonal relationships developing it to include other sentient creatures depends on the degree to which these creatures can participate in such relationships (2018a, p.13, n.3). Stump (2010, 2018a) does not provide such an account, but it is reasonable to suppose that on her view the nature of any relationship that God might have with mentally functioning adults will be different to divine relationships with animals, young children and the severely cognitively disabled. That these beings lack higher order volitions and a capacity to integrate their wills around the good, and that there is no pareschaton where these attributes might develop as with SMT, suggest that the mechanism by which they attain a good afterlife and the nature of this benefit will be different. To examine these possible differences and whether they cause any difficulties for RST this discussion will primarily focus on the suffering and death of infants and young children, and finish with brief remarks on animals and cognitively impaired humans.

On the post-mortem fate of children, Stump thinks the pain of children who die in their suffering can be justified if it is necessary in bringing about an outweighing good for these children, such as a "permanently blissful experience" with God in heaven (1985, p.411). However, she clarifies that this does not mean that suffering is the only way a child can be brought to God. This implies that a child can have a good afterlife without being caused to suffer in a process of justification and sanctification. Perhaps the RST defender can make use of an adaption of the traditional doctrine of *limbus infantium* proposed by Katherin Rogers (2008), who suggests that *all* infants and children who die prior to committing actual sin are saved by God's grace alone without any input from their own wills. For the sake of argument, I shall assume Rogers follows the traditional view of limbo in extending the period within which this is possible up until the age of reason around seven years of age, when moral agency begins and children become responsible for their actions. [106]

As Kevin Timpe rightly points out, the difficulty with this view is that if it is possible to save children through grace alone without the cooperation of their wills then why is this not the case for anyone else? (2015a, p.286). This would make the redemptive suffering of mentally functioning adults gratuitous. The RST defender may respond that the wills of children are naturally more quiescent, and so do not need an external cause such as suffering to make them receptive to God's grace. This response is supported by the seed germination and viral infection analogies discussed in the previous section. On this view of Stump's position, there is a period of time that elapses from infancy into childhood during which time the seed or initial infection of original sin has yet to grow to take over the host, within which it may be supposed that only grace is sufficient for salvation. In

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[106] In traditional doctrine God's grace saves baptised children only; other children are destined for hell due to original sin (Timpe, 2015a, p.284).

other words, our freely willed cooperation with God's redemption is only needed after the age of reason as the will becomes involved in moral agency and its latent defect becomes established, from which point we require redemptive suffering to make our wills quiescent to God's grace.

However, it seems implausible to suggest that all human beings by virtue of the fact they have reached the age of reason can only then be justified in faith if they are caused to suffer first. For example, it is conceivable that a loved child with a good upbringing in a flourishing community that supports family life and the moral and spiritual development of its members could stay free from any sort of moral evil well beyond the age of reason. This suggests that the threshold at which the will needs to acquiesce to God's grace is not the age of reason but varies from person to person depending on their context; but then this would mean having a naturally defective will is not the critical factor. For example, if the loved child stays free from moral evil and grows into his late teens only to die suddenly and painlessly in a car accident, should he be saved just as he would if he had died in the same way before the age of seven? A positive answer seems more consistent with belief in a perfectly good God, even though he will have lived for at least ten years with a defective free will, and could have continued to live a good life for another ten years. The RST defender must either claim that such cases are impossible, or that the latency of a person's chronically fallen condition can be prolonged to an extent that the importance of a person's redemption from it is called into question.

In RST infants and young children who die with or without suffering seemingly attain the same post-mortem fate as mentally functioning adults who have freely cooperated with God's will. Stump could instead have children experience a different, lower level of heavenly bliss, as in the traditional view of limbo (Timpe, 2015a, p.287). However, as Andrew Chignell points out, Stump is committed to the claim that a child's suffering is sufficiently outweighed by the good for the child which can result from that suffering, and that the only good which is valuable enough to outweigh a person's suffering is union with God (Chignell, 1998, pp.214). This means that if freely choosing relationship with God is impossible for infants and young children, the suffering they experience, especially in cases of horrendous evils, cannot be outweighed by an everlasting limbo state or some other good existence outside of union with God. If such a lesser good were to outweigh the suffering of infants, then it seems that it could do so for the suffering of others, making the higher level good of union with God, along with the redemptive suffering needed to attain it, superfluous. Moreover, it is not clear what this lesser good might look like. Perhaps it is an eternal nursery where children experience a degree of mutual closeness with God while their maturation is permanently stalled to keep them from developing defective wills. This seems a wasteful use of divine power, however, and

a God who denies these infants and children, through no fault of their own, the ultimate fulfilment of heavenly union with God would not be perfectly loving or just (Chignell, 1998, p.214).

To bring human children into the same union with God as justified adults RST's God could simply remove the defect in their wills in the process of their resurrection or translation into heaven, but then why could not this be done for any human being, justified or not? Alternatively, Stump could follow Walls (2002) and Timpe (2015a) in their suggestion that infants and young children must have the post-mortem opportunity to mature in limbo. This is so they can acquire the capacity to make the moral and spiritual choices needed for their justification. On Timpe's view, this opportunity must be a post-resurrection one, given the relationship between moral agency and having a body. Like traditional purgatory, this is an interim state that will eventually be emptied, but unlike purgatory where all suffer on the way to heaven, children who mature in Timpe's limbo may end up choosing heaven or hell (2015a, pp.284-285, 290).

However, if this post-resurrection existence happens in an environment without earthly evils and suffering, then the natural and moral evils involved in our earthly justification and sanctification is made gratuitous. If it happens in an earth-like environment, then Timpe's afterlife seems complicated and *ad hoc*. Indeed, alongside limbo he envisages a purgatorial existence for those who die in a merely justified state to make them fit for heavenly life. He even suggests that those children who emerge justified from limbo may have to undergo purgatory afterwards before they can exist in heaven, putting some children through both limbo and purgatory after their resurrection (2015a, p.285, n.16). Nevertheless, even if Timpe's proposal is coherent it is not clear that Stump's RST can accommodate a limbo where individuals can choose heaven and hell, because her theodicy fixes the post-mortem fate of individuals at the point of death. Her position is consistent with notions of purgatory from which all eventually go to heaven, but even if we were to suppose that unjustified children are brought into this interim state, the thought of them having to go through purgatorial suffering before heavenly life is incompatible with belief in a loving and perfectly good God.

Ultimately the RST defender cannot resolve these inconsistencies because of Stump's conceptions of human nature and our ultimate destiny. In her view, our redemption from sin and suffering is salvation from its specific cause, our separation from God. There can be no good of union with God without the evil of having a fallen nature. However, these ideas do not fit well with our ordinary view of children, nor our intuitions concerning what should happen to them on theism if they die prematurely, with or without suffering. We typically view infants and children as innocent, intrinsically valuable and worthy of unconditional love. Even a blank slate view of a human child as mere potential, with the capacity to become good in the future depending on the ideas and

behaviours she acquires, does not do justice to our intuitions about the intrinsic worth of a child's life.

Yet on Stump's view we must regard infants and young children as flawed and destined for hell unless saved by God. She explicitly justifies child suffering as a means to prevent the "living death in hell" that will come to them if the defect in their wills, which she likens to having a terminal brain disease, remains uncorrected or untreated (1985, p.411). If RST and other free will theodicies which work with the same concept of salvation are to be consistent, then children who die prematurely are at the very least permanently disqualified from ever experiencing the highest good of union with God. Therefore, such theodicies must use auxiliary hypotheses to account for the fate of children in a way that coheres with our intuitions about them and our expectations of what a loving God would do, but these *ad hoc* solutions create further difficulties that undermine their explanatory power.

A brief comment on the severely cognitively impaired and animals reinforces the point. Like infants and children they lack the moral agency to freely choose relationship with God. If upon death their cognitive capacities are transformed and their natures perfected so that they are instantly fit for union with God, then the earthly suffering of everyone else becomes gratuitous, since all could undergo a similar transformation to attain heavenly life without freely reconciling with God. If upon resurrection they are cognitively enhanced so that they can reconcile with God in the afterlife, as Timpe (2015a) suggests for the severely mentally impaired, and as Dougherty (2014) proposes for animals, then the suffering of their own ante-mortem lives is gratuitous, since they need not have had a mortal life in which they lacked the capacity to seek God's redemption. It seems RST must develop separate theodicies for animals and the severely cognitively disabled that rely on reasons other than redemptive suffering, but this not only complicates Stump's project, it collapses it into incoherence if those reasons could also be applied to mentally functioning adult human beings.

CHAPTER FOUR

ENHANCED AGENCY THEODICY

4.1 Overview

As outlined in the introduction to this study, this chapter constructs a theodicy with ideas entailed in, implied by, and inferred from the concept of an omniperfect God. It proposes a solution for the paradox of maximisation to show that such a God can and would have a *good-maximizing* purpose. It sets out a possible world analysis of an ideal environment this God might be expected to create: a *realm of enhanced agency* (REA) that maximises created goodness by fully realising the agency of self-aware embodied persons with goodness and freedom of will. I then explain why REA can only be brought about after a prior stage of existence that tests the morally significant choices of agents with *will-setting-freedom*, the freedom to set one's will toward good or evil. Central to this argument is a neuro-physical account of libertarian freedom proposed by Robert Kane (2011) and a dualistic holism that conceives of human beings as integral personal-spiritual-physical wholes (Cooper, 2018). I next set out five conditions of realisation by which a prior test of free will contributes to the maximal goodness of REA. These conditions also account for the fate of those who fail the test in a way consistent with a good-maximising view of God. I conclude by showing how the great good of REA defeats and outweighs the evils involved in its realisation. If the theodicy is true then the world of our experience is this test of will-setting freedom and the realm of enhanced agency is the good afterlife.

The sections of this chapter will discuss in turn each of the following premises of the argument for *enhanced agency theodicy* (EAT):

P1   A perfectly good, all powerful and all-knowing God would want to maximise *created goodness*, the good that results from God's creative activity.

P2	A *realm of enhanced agency* (REA), an everlasting existence that fully realises the agency of self-aware embodied persons with goodness and freedom of will, is a possible world that maximises created goodness.

P3	From 1 and 2, a good-maximising deity would want to bring about REA.

P4	A maximally good REA can only exist as the second part of a two-stage world following a prior test of *will-setting freedom*, the freedom of self-aware embodied persons to set their wills toward good or evil.

P5	REA is only maximally good if the prior test of will-setting freedom:

> i) tests persons with *ordinary agency* in an environment that randomly distributes conditions of flourishing and adversity.

> ii) tests persons who are *innately good-willed*.

> iii) measures goodness of will according to an *agent relative standard* which accounts for the circumstances of each person.

> iv) constrains the harmful influence of *systemic moral evil* by means of an ungovernable natural order that is beyond collective human control.

> v) results in evil-willed persons existing in a post-mortem *realm of restricted agency*.

P6	From 2 to 5, REA is a great good that defeats and outweighs all the necessary evils involved in its realisation.

4.2. A Good-Maximising God

P1	*A perfectly good, all powerful and all-knowing God would want to maximise created goodness, the good that results from God's creative activity.*

This section will argue that an omniperfect God is a good-maximising deity. This claim is foundational as the chapter as a whole will draw out its implications in constructing enhanced agency theodicy. In P1 "to maximise" expresses a quantity relation equivalent to the phrase "as much as possible" or "as many as possible"; and to say that God is "perfectly good" signifies goodness in an absolute sense, with no lack or flaw. The central objection to the idea of a good-maximising God is the *paradox of maximisation*, that however much good an omniperfect God creates, there would always be other goods that could be added to those that already exist, making

their maximisation impossible (Garcia, 2009, pp.222-223). I argue that this is not the case for freely chosen moral goods because of a *threshold argument,* that there is a limit to the amount of moral evil that a perfectly good God would bring about in realising such goods, and this in turn places a limit on the creation of non-moral goods.

Before developing this argument, it is worth illustrating the *prima facie* consistency of P1 with the notion of an omniperfect God. Compare three possible worlds which have the same size of population, offer the prospect of heavenly existence after death, and exclude some from attaining this state based on qualifying criteria. In world A, one in every thousand attains a heavenly life, in world B five hundred in every thousand do so, and in world C nine-hundred and ninety-nine in every thousand get to heaven. Given the choice of creating these worlds *ceteris paribus* a God who chooses world A would be less good than a God who chooses B, and a God that chooses world C, would be the most good. If in world C it is impossible for those excluded from heavenly existence to attain it, then the God who creates it is perfectly good. In other words, a perfectly good God is seemingly a good-maximising deity, desiring to bring about as much good as possible. This comparison also implies that the converse statement P1*, *An omniperfect God would want to minimise the goodness that results from its creative activity,* is self-contradictory and therefore unintelligible.

To examine whether the paradox of maximisation is resolvable, I first need to describe some features of a possible world that a good-maximising God might be expected to create. I do so by saying something about various *types* of goods that a perfectly good God could create, their relationships to each other, and their value. The two principal categories to focus on are *non-moral* and *moral goods*. Non-moral goods include those that are inanimate, such as the intrinsic beauty of the cosmos or a mountain scene; and those which are animate, such as plant life and pleasures that sentient animals experience with their senses. Conscious beings who are self-aware like us can experience inanimate non-moral goods such as appreciating the beauty of a mountain scene. If they are embodied, self-aware beings can experience animate non-moral goods such as the pleasure of physical sensations like taste and touch. As thinking and feeling beings, they can also participate in moral goods through an ability to distinguish right from wrong and good from bad. Together these inanimate and animate non-moral and moral goods constitute *created goods*:

> *Created goods* ^{df} = those goods which exist apart from God's being and which result from God's creative activity.

This picture is complicated by the relationships between different types of created goods. For example, non-moral goods have value apart from their intrinsic qualities through their

involvement in the experiences of self-aware minds. Without the presence of a mind that appreciates beauty, the intrinsic beauty of the mountain scene cannot be appreciated. Non-moral goods can also be attributed different instrumental values in moral choices. The intrinsic solidity of the mountain rock can be used by the shepherd as a seat after a long day, producing the non-moral good of experiencing rest. The same rock can be used as a foundation stone for a new family home, contributing positive moral value to a world in which shelter is needed to raise children in safety. Alternatively, the same rock could be used by the bandit to beat the shepherd on the head and steal his flock. In other words, there is a qualitative dimension to the use of non-moral goods that is linked to the experience and intentions of self-aware beings and the various possibilities of imagination available to them. Non-moral goods are therefore moral goods when they take on positive or negative moral value through their intended use by moral *agents*.

> *Agent* [df] = a being which acts with reason, will and intention to bring about or participate in changes in reality, others and the agent's self for which they have moral responsibility (Schweiker, 2008, p.8).[107]

It seems then that there is an array of created goods to which the maximising principle in P1 could be referring. Moreover, *this array of inanimate and animate non-moral goods and moral goods exist in a hierarchy.* For example, there is a possible world where a perfectly good God maximises a certain type of inanimate non-moral good, such as the beauty of mountain scenes. This might involve creating an infinite amount of such scenes the beauty of which is appreciated by one divine mind. However, this possible world seems less good in a qualitative sense than one with the same amount of mountain scenery but where there also exists plentiful sentient animal life able to participate in non-moral goods such as the pleasure of bird song or herbivorous eating. This world in turn seems less good than one where there are many other self-aware minds apart from the divine mind which can appreciate its beauty. This more complex world seems better both quantitatively and qualitatively. It contains more kinds of value than the simplest world with only mountains and God. It also contains greater amounts of higher goods since there are many more self-aware minds who can appreciate the beauty of mountains.[108]

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[107] Schweiker's definition of an agent is amended here to include the phrase "or participate in" to make the concept of agency compatible with the view that God is the ultimate creator and sustainer of all acts. On this view freedom in human agency primarily concerns having freedom over one's intentions.

[108] Rowe makes a similar point, arguing that worlds with a variety of creatures are qualitatively more valuable than a world in which only God exists (Rowe, 2004, cited in Garcia, 2009, pp.219-220).

It seems also that part of the hierarchy of goods that a good-maximising God would want to bring about are moral goods that are freely chosen rather than determined. Subsequent sections will develop an account of free will but here I will assume it to have two central features: self-determination or autonomy; and the availability of alternative possibilities (Ekstrom, 2011, p.367). The second of these components suggests that a large part of the value of moral goods comes from the difference between choosing A and not-A, between the value of making the right moral choice and the disvalue of not choosing rightly. For example, consider a scenario where a competent adult swimmer sees someone else's child drowning in a lake. If God were to always causally determine the wills of adults in these situations to save the drowning child such acts of rescue would seemingly have much less value compared with a rescue by an adult who is free to choose between saving the child and not doing so. In the first case, *ceteris paribus* there is no possible world in which the adult acts selfishly and the child drowns. In the second case, there is a possible world where the child drowns. In this world a further negative outcome is likely to be the damage caused to the character of the adult if she chooses not to act courageously and altruistically. Therefore, part of the value of a freely chosen moral good comes from the disvalue that is avoided by not making a bad moral choice, not just the value gained as in the case where God determines the will of the rescuer.

This view of the value that comes with the availability of alternative possibilities holds even if there is no actual choice involved. For example, even if God infallibly foreknows what an agent will choose at a future point in time, or infallibly knows what an agent chooses from an eternal present that exists simultaneously with the moment of her choice, the principle of alternative possibilities may only need to be hypothetical for human agency to have value. It may be eternally true that the woman rescued the drowning child that day, yet the sense of moral responsibility that comes from *believing* that one is choosing among alternative possibilities is perhaps the main source of the value of a moral act from the perspective of the moral agent. From an internal point of view we see ourselves as responsible for the choices we make, and in this way we feel ourselves to be directing the general pattern of our lives through the cumulative decisions of our wills. In other words, a *sense* of moral responsibility in moments of choice is an essential ingredient of character formation. Therefore, even if alternative possibilities are hypothetical, and an attempt to save the child was always going to be made, the perception that there are forks in the road which shape the direction in which a life will go has real consequence and value for the agent making these choices.[109]

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[109] Some argue that Frankfurt-type examples show that persons have libertarian freedom even when there are no actual possible alternatives, so long as their actions are not causally determined. This position bypasses the debate on human freedom and divine foreknowledge since if persons can have libertarian freedom without choosing between alternative possibilities such freedom cannot falsify the beliefs of God (Hasker, 2011, p.48).

Disembodied agents?

The types of higher goods discussed above assume that a good-maximising God would create a world where persons or agents who can appreciate beauty and act morally are embodied in some way. However, a world where *disembodied* persons or agents participate in such goods also seems possible. For example, an omniperfect God is an immaterial person on the view of theism endorsed in this study yet this deity has agency and acts with perfect goodness. For Robert Audi (2017) the idea of non-embodied personal existence is coherent and possible. Disembodied persons conceivably have *percipience*, the capacity to perceive things external to oneself, whether those things are physical or non-physical. Such beings may have a level of agency if as seems possible they can communicate with each other telepathically and exist in communities with other disembodied persons. In such environments, disembodied persons possibly make and preserve memories and retain a sense of identity over time (Audi, 2017, pp.198-201).

Nevertheless, while embodiment may not be necessary for percipience and agency, it does seem that embodiment facilitates these features of personal existence, especially in a material world. In such a world embodied persons seemingly have greater capacity for percipience. We have organs that enable us to see the beauty of mountain scenes, smell the fragrance of flowers, and hear the sound of birdsong. Embodied persons also have greater scope for agency, by having the capacity to realise possibilities of imagination and participate in chains of cause and effect involving other beings and objects. This ability to interact with a physical world also enlarges the scope for moral agency, for example to prevent or allow harms to others. If disembodied persons conceivably communicate telepathically, might not they also have telekinetic powers to move physical objects? If so, it is unclear what causal mechanism might be involved, or how telekinesis could effect anything but the simplest of actions. We may suppose then that the non-moral and moral goods that embodied persons are able to produce and participate in would have greater value than those goods that can be engaged in by disembodied persons in either a material or immaterial world. This is a reasonable supposition as it is itself *a good candidate for a reason why, on the theistic hypothesis, there is a material existence at all*.

It could be objected that if embodiment facilitates percipience and agency, then this implies a lack in God's knowledge and power as an immaterial person, since there are things an embodied person can do that God cannot. This objection is answered by distinguishing a disembodied person existing within a material world from the necessary existence of a God upon which the material world depends. Whereas the former lacks agency as an isolated non-physical form in a material environment, the latter could be thought to relate to the entirety of the world in a way analogous to

how an immaterial soul or mind may relate to a body.[110] This might involve a form of interpenetration of the immaterial and material which in God's case could be the means by which divine power sustains the material world in existence. It could also be the means through which God intervenes in the world to answer prayers, for example, or turn someone to faith through some providential act. This interpenetration would also enable an omnipresence that provides God with a total perception of the world. Therefore, the claim that embodied persons have greater percipience and agency than disembodied persons does not imply any lack in the power or knowledge of a non-embodied God.

Paradox of maximisation

From the forgoing discussion we can now suppose something about the kind of world that a good-maximising God might be expected to create. It is a possible world with the fullest array of different types of goods. These would include non-moral goods of both inanimate and animate kinds, and moral goods participated in by embodied persons who are self-aware beings and moral agents. On this view, some form of libertarian freedom is a first-order good. All other goods that come about through the agency of the will, such as exercising virtue, seeking knowledge, loving others and so forth are second-order goods that are only possible if one has the first-order good of freedom of will. Equally, embodied being is a first-order good without which numerous second-order goods are impossible. These may be understood to be what Adams terms *immanent goods*: sensory pleasures which cannot be experienced without a physical body, such as experiencing the beauty of nature and art, the joy of creativity and loving personal intimacy with others (1993a, pp.174-175).

That embodied agents are also persons suggests the good-maximising principle has a *subjective dimension*. As well as maximising the good of the universe as a whole, a divine agent would also want to maximise goodness for each created person.[111] It matters then that created goodness is maximised from the *internal point of view* of persons other than God, although this point must be qualified. If we suppose, for example, that embodied persons can misuse their freedom to become devoted to evil ends, then clearly such individuals cannot be the judge of what goodness is, since to them what is good is in fact bad. Therefore, it seems that maximising the good

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[110] There is no scope here to discuss the interaction problem for dualism, but I assume that in principle a form of causal influence between mental and physical events is possible.

[111] Adams distinguishes between divine excellence at the global and individual levels. While her theodicy prioritises the latter Adams allows for the possibility that a theodicy might integrate the two without subordinating one to the other (1993a, p.171).

of individual persons is conditioned by a *best interests criterion*, that which promotes best what is objectively the individual's own well-being.[112] We can assume that an omniscient God has such knowledge.

Significantly, it also seems a good-maximising God would want to create a world *weighted towards the production of higher goods*. For example, a world with an infinite amount of beautiful mountain vistas and only a few dozen self-aware beings able to enjoy their beauty would be less good than a world with much less than an infinite quantity of mountains and very many more self-aware beings. *In other words, lower goods would exist in proportion to higher goods in a good-maximised world.*

What then can be said about the paradox at the centre of the good-maximising view of God? The claim is that for any amount of created goods there could always be more goods that could be created, and so maximising the quantity of created goods is not logically possible even for an omniperfect God. For example, for any number of creatures and their pleasures and satisfactions, there could always be more creatures, more pleasures or more varieties of pleasure. This argument seems correct when only non-moral goods are considered, but does it, as Laura Garcia has argued (2009, p.222), also apply to moral goods? It may not be logically possible for God to always be able to bring about more moral goods by simply creating additional creatures with moral freedom. Our experience of free will suggests that non-moral and moral goods are different in one important way. Whereas non-moral goods are only contingently bad depending on the intentions and purposes of moral agents, the existence of freely chosen moral goods seems to entail that there are also moral evils, since agents who are able to choose among alternative possibilities may act wrongly. Therefore, unlike non-moral goods increasing the quantity of moral goods seemingly involves a cost which a perfectly good God would want to limit.

What of J.L Mackie's compatibilist objection to the free will defence? If an omnipotent God can create human beings so that they always choose good over evil of their own free will, then having free will does not entail the risk of moral evil (Mackie, 1982). As noted in Chapter 3.1.3's discussion of SMT and heavenly freedom, both Plantinga and Walls accept the principle that in all worlds where persons are either not free or have compatibilist freedom God could eliminate all moral evil (Goetz, 2009, pp.455-456). An answer depends on how free will is defined. An essential claim of the free will defence to which Mackie responds defines an action as free only if it has no antecedent sufficient *external* causes. Mackie concludes that God could have provided the

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[112] This definition of the best interests criterion is taken from Richard Swinburne who instead endorses an *overall interest criterion* concerning what benefits others *on balance*, not what is best or of most benefit (1998, p.227).

antecedent sufficient *internal* conditions for beings to always want to do good without having to externally prevent them from doing evil. In other words, freedom of will on Mackie's compatibilism entails the possibility to do evil, but not the possibility to *want* to do evil (Rodriguez, 2021, pp.1001-1002). However, the latter is plausibly a part of free will. We have the freedom to choose how we form our wills, to will to have a good will or not. Defining freedom to involve alternative possibilities not just in the action itself, but also in the domain of an agent's intentions, would entail the possibility that some agents will want to form evil wills and perform evil acts.

> *Will-setting freedom* ^{df} = the freedom of an agent to set their wills toward good or evil.

This kind of freedom will become central to the argument of enhanced agency theodicy. For the sake of discussion here, if this view of free will is granted, then it is logically impossible for an omnipotent God to create beings that are free to form good or bad wills and that freely always want to do good. The objection can be restated however: would it not be *better* to create only beings that always want to choose the good rather than beings that are potentially good or bad? For example, it might be preferable to create a realm of angelic creatures that always willingly obeyed God and where there is no possibility of moral evil.

What is needed then is a *value argument* to suggest how a possible world in which agents are free to form their wills is better than one where agents have compatibilist freedom. For example, Hick and Swinburne have proposed two greater goods that would not be possible if freedom of will did not entail the risk moral evil. For Hick (1981), the moral perfection of creatures with ready-made virtues is much less valuable than acquiring hard-won virtues in situations of real challenge and temptation and the knowledge and love of God that this struggle yields. Swinburne (1998) suggests the benefit and harm that moral agents can cause to themselves and others through their free choices involves a genuine responsibility that is immensely more valuable than the limited responsibility of an agent who is incapable of causing harm. I propose the following value claim for will-setting freedom which adopts a neuro-physical view of embodied agency:

> *Neuro-physical flexibility*: due to their transformative nature, participation in the full plurality and hierarchy of the goods created by a good-maximising God requires a capacity for neuro-physical change and growth that *ceteris paribus* is only developed while exercising will-setting freedom.

The idea is that this neuro-physical flexibility and capacity for change would make much higher goods and a greater range of goods available to the embodied agent than would be the case

if she were simply determined by her nature to want to do good. Forthcoming sections will develop this argument using a neuro-physical account of freedom of will proposed by Robert Kane (2011b), but if free will is defined as involving will-setting freedom, and participation in the full plurality and hierarchy of goods is not possible without it, then we may suppose the following about the task of maximising created goodness: *it involves contriving conditions that minimise the amount of moral evil which results from the existence of moral agents with will-setting freedom.* In other words, this sort of freedom brings into consideration a *least cost requirement* implicit in the good-maximising view of God:

> *Least cost requirement*: a good-maximising God would want to produce the most created goodness for the least cost.

There are two points to bear in mind about this least cost requirement. As outlined in Chapter 1.7, it must entail that any moral evil involved in maximising created goods is logically necessary to the realisation of those goods, not merely causally necessary. Evils would be gratuitous if merely causally necessary to realising greater goods, since an omnipotent God could use alternative means. In terms of the two senses, outweighing and defeat, in which greater goods win out over necessary evils when taken together as an overall package, producing the most good for the least cost also implies that those evils that are outweighed are minimised and those evils that are defeated are maximised. In other words, a world in which the greater proportion of necessary evils are merely outweighed and not defeated is less good than a world in which the greater proportion of such evils is defeated rather than merely outweighed.

The least cost requirement offers a way to answer the paradox of maximisation. Chapter 3.1.5 noted Tooley's claim that, where evils are necessary for greater goods, the conceiving of a series of worlds that are ever larger in size suggests that there is no upper limit on the quantity of evil that might be found in a world created by God (1991, p.92). In other words, when it comes to moral evil *no quantity is too large,* or when taken together with greater goods *no proportion is too large,* as long as greater goods outweigh or defeat evils. These principles if adopted lead to paradoxes of maximisation since an omniperfect God could conceivably create ever larger worlds with increasing numbers of moral agents without reaching a maximum.

However, Dougherty's objection to Tooley suggests the paradox may not apply to moral goods that entail the possibility of moral evils. In his view, ever larger worlds in which greater amounts of evil comprise a lower percentage of the whole may be less good than worlds with lower amounts of evil which comprise a higher percentage of the whole (2014, pp.32-34). If Dougherty is correct, and I think he is, then there is seemingly an optimal threshold for a possible world

containing moral goods and logically necessary moral evils at which two factors are weighed in the balance: *the proportion of moral evils to moral goods, and the total amount of moral goods.* In other words, it seems that there is a size of world or a total number of moral agents beyond which the cost of creating moral goods becomes prohibitive because of the amount of moral evil that is necessary to its realisation. What this threshold might be is not something which humans can possibly know, but an omniscient God would have that knowledge.

Crucially, if this answer to the paradox of maximisation is correct for moral goods, then there is reason to believe it is also true for non-moral goods. We noted above how non-moral goods can be attributed moral value by moral agents. The solidity of the mountain rock is an intrinsic non-moral good, which can be used as a foundation stone for the shepherd's family home or a weapon with which to steal the shepherd's flock. On theism, however, the stronger claim can be argued that *all non-moral goods have moral value.* This is because in a world created and sustained by God, it is morally appropriate for self-aware persons participating in any non-moral good to do so with gratitude toward the ultimate source of those goods. For example, on theism aesthetic appreciation of a mountain scene is a pleasure that *ought* to be accompanied with a feeling of gratitude toward God. This gratitude is an appropriate moral response in the same way that it is moral, not just courteous, to thank someone for the time, effort and money spent on the procurement of a thoughtful and valuable gift. *Ceteris paribus*, to feel and express no gratitude at all is morally bad behaviour that may denote the selfishness, greed and entitlement of a vicious character.[113]

In terms of the hierarchy of created goods a good-maximising God could create, we can say that the mountain scene is intrinsically valuable as something beautiful. It has greater value when its beauty is appreciated by self-aware persons. The scene has even greater value still when that appreciation is accompanied by morally appropriate gratitude towards the ultimate source of its beauty, and feelings of wonderment and love at being able to enjoy such a gift. The significance of this point is that if all non-moral goods are potentially moral goods, and they exist in proportion to the number of moral agents, and there is a limit to the total number of moral agents a good-maximising God would want to create because of the least cost requirement, *then this implies a limit to the quantity of non-moral goods a good-maximising God would want to produce*. The foregoing argument is summarised as follows:

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[113] To clarify, the *oughtness* in this context is not obligated or done out of duty but expresses the natural feelings and inclination of a virtuous character.

1) All non-moral goods are potentially moral goods in a world of moral agents, self-aware persons with libertarian free will.

2) A good-maximised world is weighted towards the production of higher goods involving moral agents.

3) From 1) and 2) a good-maximised world proportions the quantity of non-moral goods to the number of moral agents.

4) Moral goods produced through the choices of moral agents entail the risk of moral evil, where libertarian free will involves will-setting freedom.

5) Due to the least cost requirement of the good-maximising principle, there is a threshold at which the cost of producing moral goods becomes prohibitive.

6) From 4) and 5) there is a limit to the number of moral agents that can exist in a good-maximised world.

7) From 3) and 6) there is a limit to the quantity of non-moral goods that can exist in a good-maximised world.

8) Therefore, the claim that a perfectly good God can maximise created goods is coherent.

4.3 A Realm of Enhanced Agency

P2   A *realm of enhanced agency (REA), an everlasting existence for self-aware embodied persons with goodness and freedom of will and the greatest possible scope for agency, is a possible world that maximises created goodness.*

P3   *From P1 and P2 a good-maximising deity would want to bring about REA.*

To demonstrate the coherence of P1, *an omniperfect God would want to maximise the goodness that results from its creative activity*, the previous section proposed a solution to the paradox of maximisation using a possible world analysis of the kind of goods conceivably produced by a good-maximising God. This section builds on this analysis to develop a picture of an ideal environment that a good-maximising God might be expected to create: a *realm of enhanced agency* (REA) that fully realises the agency of self-aware embodied persons with freedom and goodness of will. While subsequent sections will show this realm to be a conception of heaven or paradise, here *REA is not presupposed to be the good afterlife of monotheistic tradition, but a stand-alone possible world*. As I will argue that REA cannot contain moral evil, it is also not simply the possible world discussed in the previous section to solve the paradox of maximisation, as that included will-setting freedom and the risk of moral evil. However, the solution to this paradox is consistent with taking

together as one world REA and a prior stage of existence that contains will-setting freedom, which section 4.4 will argue is a necessary condition for realising REA.

The intuition motivating P2 is that agency exists in degrees. Whether comparing children or the elderly with fully functioning adults, the chronically depressed with happy individuals, or factory workers and multi-billionaire philanthropists, we are accustomed to viewing the latter as having greater scope to act with reason, will and intention to effect changes reality. These examples further suggest that the number, quality and impact of our actions expand as our competence, emotional well-being and resources increase. As argued in the previous section, the hierarchy of goods within a maximally good environment would contain self-aware embodied persons with libertarian freedom. An implication of the good-maximising view of God is that such a deity would want these agents to be good-willed and to have the greatest possible scope for embodied agency, since fully realising such agents' capacity to do good would help to maximise created goodness.

As discussion of this ideal environment will inevitably rely on *a posteriori* knowledge of the kind of embodied agency we are familiar with in our world, the term *enhanced* is chosen to describe the higher level of agency in this possible realm. That is, it is enhanced relative to our own level of agency, but the terms *optimised* or *maximised* or *ultimate* could also be used. However, while I will take everyday experience as a frame of reference for discussion of enhanced agency, I will not assume REA contains the same material conditions we find in our world. For example, I am not supposing that agency is expanded in REA by making everyone incredibly wealthy and technologically advanced. Indeed, REA's embodied agents need not be human beings. Nevertheless, to simplify matters I will assume that this ideal environment primarily concerns creatures much like us. In other words, a resilient yet sensitive and physically vulnerable body, a mind with intelligence, will and emotion, and a social communicative nature grounded in the capacity for language are taken to be essential features of self-aware embodied persons involved in the production of REA's highest goods.[114] Consequently, if enhanced agency theodicy is true then the following statement is implied by P1-3:

> *P1-3* The divine purpose is to maximise created goodness in part by having human beings exist as enhanced agents in REA.*

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[114] For example, a hard exoskeleton conceivably makes an intelligent creature less sociable than creatures like us because its physical invulnerability removes the need for it to communicate and cooperate with other beings, a biological fact that may put certain goods beyond their reach.

This section will examine how agency might be enhanced with respect to two dimensions: *the internal capacities of embodied agents and the external constraints on their agency*. Since I will argue these optimal conditions preclude moral and natural evils, REA cannot contain the sort of moral goods found in a world like ours, such as actions to fairly distribute scarce resources, dispense justice for wrongdoing, alleviate suffering, protect people from harm, preserve liberty and promote the good government of society. Therefore, enhanced agency will be examined with respect to three categories of *non*-moral goods that we could expect to find in a world without moral and natural evils and which are taken to be inclusive of all goods in REA:

i) *learning*, the activity of acquiring knowledge of the true nature of reality and of oneself;

ii) *creativity*, the activity of turning new possibilities of intellect and imagination into reality;

iii) *relatedness*, the activity of closing the gap between subjective experiences of reality through personal relationships of love and friendship.

These constitute the created goods in REA brought about through the actions of enhanced agents. As discussed in the previous section, in a God-made world such non-moral goods acquire positive moral value when good-willed agents participate in them with gratitude towards the ultimate source of those goods. Enhanced agency therefore maximises created *moral* goodness by providing the greatest possible scope for participating in these types of goods.

Enhanced agency ^{df} = a state that fully realises the capacity of self-aware embodied persons with freedom and goodness of will to act with reason, will and intention to bring about or participate in changes in reality, others and the self through learning, creativity and relatedness goods.

The previous section argued that the principle of alternative possibilities is an important part of the value of moral freedom in the hierarchy of goods in a maximally good environment. To develop an account of REA, this chapter endorses an event causal theory of libertarian freedom proposed by Robert Kane (2011). There are other incompatibilist understandings of free will in the literature which I discount for a variety of reasons. *Non-causal* theories, which aim to show that actions or choices need not have causes and can be explicable only in terms of an agent's reasons and purposes, are too theoretically simple to account for the various ways reasons influence our

choices and actions (Clarke, 2011, pp.334-336).[115] *Agent causal* theories posit the existence of an ontologically primitive agent, such as an immaterial mind or noumenal self, which exercises control over which undetermined choices are made (Kane, 2011a, p.20).[116] Given that enhanced agency theodicy will suppose the self to have an immaterial dimension that survives death, it would perhaps be tempting to endorse agent causation with a form of substance dualism. However, positing the existence of an immaterial self as the ontological primitive in agent causation is not a good fit for another part of enhanced agency theodicy: *its account of the innate goodness of human beings*. This will depend on an immaterial dimension of the self being the source of the ontological goodness of human nature and our intuitive knowledge of what is good and true. Yet if this immaterial self is a substance which controls a person's choices and actions, then its innate goodness would seemingly always determine agents to act rightly and so eliminate alternative possibilities from moral decisions. Consequently, in EAT the spiritual dimension of embodied existence must be one *influence* among others on a person's intentional agency, rather than its controller.[117]

This idea is a better fit with an *event-causal* theory of libertarian freedom, where decisions and actions are probabilistically or indeterministically caused by prior states or psychological events, such as beliefs, desires and intentions, not determined by them as in compatibilism and hard determinism (Clarke, 2011, p.337). Of the two types of event causation theories, *centred* and *deliberative*, this study endorses a centred view. Deliberative theories focus on the way considerations become inputs in the evaluative process leading to an act (Kane, 2011a, p.22), and therefore require a rationality that is a specifically adult human trait. For example, the deliberative event causal theory of Laura Ekstrom (2011) locates indeterminism in the way preferences are formed as a person critically reflects on their reasons, desires and goals. By contrast a centred theory places indeterminism in the moment of choice itself, and so in principle may provide for an inclusive definition of free will as something possessed to varying degrees by all conscious beings with intentional agency. If psychological events such as desires are taken to have an indeterministic causal role in the behaviours of many creatures, then the deliberative rationality of adult human being could be extra features in a broad spectrum of intentional agency involving other sentient beings. The scope to extend some aspects of a centred theory to persons and creatures without the cognitive faculties needed for rational deliberation potentially adds to the theoretical economy of

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[115] For a notable non-causal theory see Stewart Goetz (2008).

[116] Rowe and Swinburne, among others, endorse an agent causation view (O'Connor, 2011, p.311).

[117] Kane quotes P.F Strawson referring to agent causation as involving "panicky metaphysics" (Strawson, 1962, quoted in 2011b, pp.381, 386). For other objections to agent causation see Clarke (2011) and Goetz (2008).

enhanced agency theodicy, since a single account of intentional agency could embrace a great array of embodied creatures that make up a good-maximising environment.

Robert Kane's event causal theory

Robert Kane's centred event causal theory provides a neuro-physical account of free will that is empirically plausible and suggests a way to understand how libertarian choices might contribute to maximally good environment without moral evil. Kane defines incompatibilist freedom as "the power to be the ultimate creator and sustainer of one's own ends or purposes" (2011b, pp.382-383). Purposes are the contents of the intentions by which we make choices and decisions. Such purposes are sustained by making *efforts of will*. Agents have *ultimate responsibility* for anything that is a sufficient reason for an action occurring. This means that if a choice can be sufficiently explained by a person's character and motives, together with background conditions, then an agent is ultimately responsible by virtue of making voluntary choices in the past that form the character and motives she now has. For agents to be ultimately responsible, such *self-forming actions* must involve *alternative possibilities* (Kane, 2011b, p.384).

Self-forming actions are freely done when agents could have done otherwise willingly (voluntarily), intentionally and rationally. In other words, if agents act unwillingly, unintentionally or irrationally, agents are neither free nor responsible.[118] Such actions are also *will-setting* in that they concern those choices where the wills of agents are not already set one way on doing something before they act. Rather, these actions set their wills one way or the other, voluntarily and intentionally, in the act of choosing (Kane, 2011b, p.385). These choices are indeterminate because agents have competing motivations concerning a possible act and have to make an effort of the will to resist the temptation to do something else they also strongly want. The indeterminacy of a self-forming action arises from each conflicting motivation becoming an obstacle to the realization of either goal. The resulting uncertainty stirs up a chaotic disequilibrium in the neural processes of the brain, which Kane suggests opens up "a window of opportunity that screens off complete determination by influences of the past" (2011b, p.387). Will-setting situations are therefore ones in which the will is not yet set on doing either of the things one is trying to do, but where one has strong reasons for doing each, and neither set of reasons is as yet decisive (Kane, 2011b, p.393). When agents decide in such circumstances they make one set of competing reasons or motives prevail over the others by deciding (2011b, p.387). The outcome is not determined because of the preceding indeterminacy, yet it is willed, and therefore rational and voluntary, since whichever way

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[118] Kane refers to these three features as *plurality conditions* for free will (2011b, pp.384-385).

is chosen the agent will have succeeded in doing one of the actions they were simultaneously endeavouring to make (2011b, p.390).

In Kane's account of the neuro-physical mechanism involved, such choices arise when two independent neural networks represent competing efforts of the will which he calls *volitional streams*, goal-directed cognitive activities aimed at setting one's will in a certain way. For example, one stream may want to act on a moral conviction, while the other is motivated by a personal ambition. Yet in such moments of choice a person can be striving to do two competing things at once without being disassociated from either task because the brain is a *parallel processor*. It can use different neural pathways to simultaneously process various kinds of information that is relevant to certain tasks. For example, in visual perception different features of one integrated scene, such as object and background, are separately processed by the brain and in a way that we are introspectively unaware of it doing so. However, unlike the distributed perceptual pathways involved in vision, which are complementary, the volitional streams in self-forming actions are mutually exclusive, with only one stream attaining its goal. Yet Kane theorizes, plausibly I think, that this parallel processing capacity is essential to the kind of complex choice-making involved in self-forming actions (2011b, pp.390, 392).

As the agent is an *information-responsive complex dynamical system*, such choices give rise to emergent capacities, by stirring up a chaotic state which causes the system as whole to replace existing constraints on the behaviour of its parts with novel constraints suited to the new relationship between the whole and its parts (Kane, 2011b, p.396). For Kane it is this sort of reciprocal causal influence of wholes to parts and parts to wholes which characterises the interaction between conflicting volitional streams within an agent's larger motivational system, or the *self-network* as he terms it, and the setting of the will of that network though self-forming actions.

I interpret Kane's view to mean that the self-aware "I" that we experience in a self-forming choice, the part of ourselves that asks, "Do I really want this?", is the phenomenon of a prevailing volitional stream becoming aware of itself in the presence of a competing stream in the same self-network. It is not clear whether it then makes sense to think of this self-aware "I" switching from one stream to another. Perhaps it is some form of epiphenomenon of volition bubbling up to our conscious awareness in moments of choice only to disappear again once a certain stream prevails. This possibility is consistent with the view that our conscious experience of intentional agency ordinarily lacks this self-awareness, for example when we perform simultaneous tasks automatically, such as when driving a car.[119]

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[119] For discussion of the automaticity of most decision-making see Inwagen (1989).

However, for Kane's theory to be wholly satisfactory we perhaps need some account of what the "I" is that chooses between competing volitional streams. Kane himself suggests his neuro-physical description of free will need not preclude the existence of a continuing substance or agent that is the subject of action, as in AC theories (2011b, p.396). Alternatively this "I" could be identified with the self-network as a whole communicating with itself, or an enduring part of that network which becomes a central reference point whenever choices are made. A third possibility is suggested by the dualistic holism account of human nature discussed in forthcoming sections. If, as this view states, human beings are integral personal-spiritual-physical unities, the choosing "I" could be a synthetic point of subjective conscious awareness existing at the intersection of the immaterial and physical dimensions of our being. Usually submerged in a prevailing volitional stream, it comes into awareness temporarily when streams conflict in order to exert agential control in moments of choice. The direction of that control would in part depend on the cumulative influence of past self-forming actions. Nevertheless, this synthetic self might be associated with a neuro-physical space outside the determination of pre-existing parts of the self-network, free to add weight or effort to one or other volitional stream.

Maximising internal capacities

Taking the neuro-physical and systems theory view of free will outlined above, I now turn to the supposed nature of a realm of enhanced agency. Reflection on the world of our experience suggests that the internal capacities of enhanced agents to participate in changes in reality in REA would depend on features of their biological constitution, a few of which I touch upon here. Existence in a good-maximised environment would not involve disease, aging and death, which are clearly constraints on embodied agency in our lives. The desirability of everlasting life will be discussed below but clearly unlimited time would maximise the quantity of created goods produced through the choices of agents, since a finite life would contain less of those choices. This suggests that biological systems in REA would somehow be regenerative to sustain a person's life indefinitely.

Conceivably, the genetic potential of creatures in REA is also fully realised in terms of both physical and mental attributes. Relative to our lives these might include higher levels of emotional as well as cognitive intelligence, more perfectly proportioned physical features, perfectly efficient metabolisms and digestive tracts that absorb nutrients without causing waste and tiredness, and consistently greater levels of fitness, strength and energy. If the optimal genetics of enhanced agents support high levels of cognitive functioning, then this would seem to expand the scope for the parallel processing. This increased potential is implied by studies of multitasking which show that cognitive performance is badly affected when even the simplest tasks are simultaneously executed

(Fischer and Plesso, 2015), and functional studies which correlate a person's intelligence with the efficiency of the brain's neural network (Heuval et al., 2009). Working memory is also positively associated with grey and white matter volume which is under genetic control (Marsman et al., 2017). These findings suggest that creatures which are genetically and biochemically conditioned to have consistently efficient neural networks and high working memory will be more effective at the parallel processing involved in Kane's self-forming actions.

The potential complexity of choices in REA will be discussed below, but it is possible that the execution of even complex choices in this environment feels immediate or intuitive, seeming to connect intention and action with effortless ease. In other words, the parallel processing involved might be much more like the brain's seamless integration of a visual scene using different neural pathways. One indication of what this might be like comes from cognitive studies of flow states experienced by high performing people. Flow states have been shown to be related to improved temporal and spatial visual processing which makes difficult tasks easier to perform (Sinnett et al., 2020). Enhanced agents may have the neuro-physiology to be always in a flow state or be able to enter one at will.

The capacity to make complex choices with ease would increase a person's agency in an environment where there are many choices to be made. REA would lack moral evils, but even without decisions between right and wrong actions its environment is conceivably one with a great array of choices open to the agent. In a God-made world where participation in non-moral goods takes on moral value when done in gratitude toward the divine source of those goods, the goal of becoming closer to God, the highest good of all, would promote best the objective well-being of every individual. Perhaps choices between good or better options, or taking an opportunity now or later, affect the shape and timing of an agent's progress towards this personal goal, with decisions that accelerate that growth having greater value than slower paths. Since the goal of becoming closer to God involves movement towards the highest possible good, such choices could make a difference to how the best interests of every agent are realised.

If such choices represent forks in the road, then they conceivably involve parallel processing, despite the complementarity of the volitional streams involved. Kane's conception of an agent as an information-responsive complex dynamical system is suggestive here. Moral and spiritual development in REA could be characterised as a process of neuro-physical complexification where profound choices periodically produce chaotic states in an agent's self-network that give rise to emergent capacities which change the relationship between the whole and parts of the system. A certain good, then, would have greater value when choosing it brings an agent closer to the threshold of a beneficial step-change in their neuro-physiology. Moreover, the upper bound of

choices available to enhanced agents would be set by an omniperfect God's interaction with the learning, relatedness and creativity goods of REA. Given the infinite nature of such a deity, there would potentially be unlimited opportunities for enhanced agents to acquire knowledge of God, relate to different aspects of God, and worship God in creative ways. This scope for agents to participate in ever higher goods, and a greater plurality of goods, through self-forming actions would be a necessary part of the maximal goodness of REA. In other words, enhanced agency is not a static state, but *essentially* dynamic and progressive.

It could be objected that the kinds of choices discussed above are not indeterministically free in the sense outlined by Kane because they do not involve conflicting volitional streams. If REA lacks moral evil then this implies an existence in which the wills of all agents are set one way, for example towards moral goodness and the goal of proximity to God. Kane's theory implies that such choices should be easy to make, since the neural networks involved can be expected to be in harmony with one other. Nevertheless, it is not clear that good or better, and now or later choices between alternative goods would not be cognitively taxing even if goals were complementary and parallel processing more effortless. For example, because of the way our emotions are bound up with the things we take to be goods, giving up a present good for a higher one is not always easy. Fond attachments to present goods can be significant barriers to change, involving lengthy periods of reflection before the requisite willingness arises.

Life in REA could be replete with similar choices between competing goods if these decisions involve the widest possible scope for what Simon Kittle terms *implementation control*, the freedom to choose how to bring about already settled-upon goals (2020, p.461). On this view the ultimate aim is set, maximising created goodness and increasing proximity to God, but the intermediate goals that advance this purpose would be open-ended. In such an environment, the agent is conceivably free to form volitional streams around many and various intermediate goals linked to innumerable competing goods, resulting in the kind of indeterministic self-forming actions envisaged in Kane's theory, actions which are transformative in bringing about step-changes in the neuro-physical make-up of agents.

Minimising external constraints

To discuss this dimension of embodied agency in REA I shall refer to the three second-order goods of learning, creativity and relatedness defined earlier. I propose four main ways by which external constraints on participation in these created goods could be minimised in REA:

i)   an everlasting environment;

ii)   the highest possible number and diversity of agents;

iii)   the four-dimensionality of space-time;

iv)   and the absence of malevolent agents.

The first two of these can be taken together as they have mutual implications concerning the desirability of immortal life. If sustaining the lives of enhanced agents indefinitely maximises the goods they participate in, then REA's environment would seemingly also have to last indefinitely so that time is not a constraint on the amount of created goodness it produces. This implies that the material environment would in some way be non-entropic or regenerative. Moreover, as there is no death and disease in REA, its environment would not contain destructive natural processes, such as deadly pathogens, extreme weather, or geological dangers.

The number of inhabitants also seems a potential constraint, since *ceteris paribus* the fewer agents there are then the less opportunities exist to participate in created goods, the more limited is the range of those goods and the lower are the quantities produced. If REA's population includes a range of different sorts of people then larger numbers also increases the quality, as well as quantity, of created goods, if diversity of experience is a criterion of quality. The goods of learning, creativity and relatedness exemplify this point about numbers and diversity. Given the mental and interpersonal natures of these goods, it is reasonable to suppose that the more minds there are and the greater the number and diversity of experiencing subjects are involved, the more opportunities there are for every individual to participate in created goods. For example, in a maximally populated environment with the widest diversity of inhabitants there would be more opportunities and stimuli to learn new things, be creative and form new friendships than in a maximally populated environment where everyone held the same beliefs, spoke the same language, and lived a similar sort of life.[120]

These features of REA suggest ways to address the objection of Bernard Williams (1973) that an immortal life would be undesirable. Williams argued that when the fundamental desires, interests, purposes, and projects that make up a person's character remain the same over time, then their finite number would mean they will eventually be satisfied or fulfilled and boredom will ensue. Responses to Williams suggest why the numbers and variety of goods matter. Martin Fischer categorizes pleasure into *self-exhausting* and *repeatable* kinds, the former associated with an activity which when performed ends any further need to do it again, while the latter are highly

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[120] This assumes that complementarity and difference rather than sameness are important ingredients in the best or most fruitful kinds of friendships.

fulfilling and completely satisfying every time they are experienced (1994, cited in Goetz, 2009, p.464). In Fischer's view, Williams assumes that all pleasures are self-exhausting, precluding the possibility that everlasting life can be sustained by repeatable pleasures which are enjoyed indefinitely. Stewart Goetz adds that even if there were only self-exhausting pleasures, the idea of everlasting happiness is still intelligible, since all that would be required is a limitless number of unrepeatable activities (2009, p.464).

It would seem there may be endless scope for repeatable pleasures in REA where physical bodies are perfectly formed, eternally rejuvenated and permanently youthful. In such conditions loving physical intimacy with a significant other is a relatedness good which is conceivably a repeatable pleasure. The repeatability of other kinds of goods, however, would seem to depend on their inexhaustibility. Like loving physical intimacy, eating may be a repeatable pleasure in bodies with perfectly sensitive taste buds, palates and olfactory nerves, and as speculated above, digestive systems that absorb all nutrients without producing waste and tiredness. Lovers of vanilla ice cream, for example, may never tire of the taste, but for others the pleasure of taste involves the flood of sensations that comes with discovering new smells and flavours. For them the repeatability of experiencing the pleasure of discovering new flavours of ice creams would depend on the availability of limitless varieties of ice creams.

This seems to be the case for all learning, creativity and relatedness goods. The activity of learning is itself a pleasure that is only repeatable if there is always something novel to learn, such as a new art, language, skill or place, or new knowledge concerning the nature of reality. Flows of creative activity are highly fulfilling and completely satisfying every time they are experienced, but their endless repeatability depends on being in conditions that continually stimulate the imagination and supply endless opportunities to act on these inspirations. Likewise, the pleasures of befriending someone for the first time or reacquainting with old friends after long intervals are relatedness goods that may be repeated indefinitely if there are always new individuals to meet and endless time over which to cultivate friendships.

Learning, creativity and relatedness goods can also exist interdependently in a matrix of causal relations that conceivably could sustain itself indefinitely. A relatedness good, a musician's chance non-verbal encounter with a beautiful stranger who speaks another language, could motivate a learning good, his desire to know her language to communicate with her, that inspires a creativity good, his composing of a song in the new language, which in turn leads to the relatedness good of performing the song to her. In a finite temporal environment, the musician's choices would have an opportunity cost. What else could be done with the time it takes to learn the stranger's language? If other goods are valuable enough then the musician will be dissuaded from this course

of action. In the everlasting environment of REA, however, each inspiration can be acted on without the fear of losing time, enabling every motive to learn, create and relate in the causal web of created goods.

The goods participated in by the musician are repeatable and self-exhausting at two levels. At the particular level, the knowledge good of learning a language and the creativity good of composing a song are self-exhausting, since there is no further need to do them again once they are done. The relatedness good of performing the song is potentially a repeatable pleasure, as the musician and his audience may experience pleasure every time the song is performed. At the general level, each new act of learning, creativity and relatedness is in principle a repeatable pleasure for the musician, if there are always more languages to learn, different songs to compose, and other audiences to perform to. We can see then that an everlasting environment containing an enormously large and diverse population would expand the range of opportunities for a matrix of learning, creativity and relatedness goods to develop, involving both repeatable and self-exhausting pleasures. Whereas it seems that an everlasting environment inhabited by very few people or a highly populous monoculture would be a constraint on those opportunities.[121]

Turning to the third way constraints on agency could be minimised, the linearity of time is a further external limit on agency that might not exist in REA. In our temporal existence we are free to move through the three dimensions of space but are locked into a linear relationship with time. In other words, we live as if *presentism* were true, where the temporal realm is a moving point of objective becoming in which events come into being in the present moment, the past ceases to be and the future is yet to exist (Hasker, 2011, p.42). However, what if movement through time as well as space were also possible, and the past and future were somehow traversable by the agent? An additional co-ordinate by which to act, i.e. time as well as space, would seem to contribute to the maximal goodness of REA by accelerating the frequency of activities undertaken by embodied agents and increasing their amount.

For example, consider spatial and temporal constraints on our participation in learning goods. In the pre-modern era, travelling to learn from a renowned scholar living on another continent involved a considerable amount of time and resources, perhaps limiting a student to seeking out only one or two teachers in a lifetime. In the age of air travel, or indeed zoom conferences, a student can access a much greater array of teachers in one life. We can further imagine a time machine enabling a student to learn directly from Aristotle, Al-Ghazali and Leibniz from one month to the next. If REA facilitates something analogous to this sort of agency enhancing

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[121] Exploring the interdependency of repeatable and inexhaustible goods develops the discussion of Fischer and Goetz who consider these types of pleasures separately.

effect, it would seem to imply a view of the universe as a *four dimensional* space-time manifold or block, in which the past, present and future within REA exist as equally real parts of the whole like spatially distant objects (Rea, 2010, p.246).[122] If the past, present, and future all exist as realities then they are in principle accessible to the embodied agent in a way they cannot be on a presentist view of time.

That agency could be enhanced in this way is suggested by a debate concerning the relationship between God's omnipotence and time. William Lane Craig (2008) endorses presentism and the idea that God has a temporal existence and exists with us in the same present moment of temporal becoming. Yet, it seems that a God that experiences the now as we do and is bound by time in the same way that we are is less powerful and free than a God that can interact with any temporal point that exists in a four-dimensional universe. If this point is granted, then something similar is perhaps true for other kinds of agents. If REA were a realm where past, present and future are in some way accessible to embodied beings, it would seemingly be an environment that enhances their agency.[123]

There are at least two significant objections to this possibility. A four-dimensional universe where all temporal points are navigable would be too chaotic and unpredictable. Agents would be unable to expect effects to follow from causes. Reliable knowledge would be difficult to obtain and moral responsibility for the consequences of actions undermined. An incoherent experience of reality would therefore be a serious constraint on embodied agency. Secondly, even if the concept of a four-dimensional universe were coherent it does not by itself suggest how space-time points might be navigable by an enhanced agent.

Both objections are conceivably addressed by supposing that REA is a *multi-layered spatial-temporal environment*. If REA were to consist of numerous discrete yet inter-penetrable space-time dimensions, then it may allow movement between them so that an agent in one realm can enter another at any temporal point within it. In other words, the parallelism of these overlapping dimensions would make the past, present and future of one realm accessible to an agent in another. The inspiration for this idea comes from stories in monotheistic scriptures describing the exaltation of prophets and the mysterious arrival of angels as if from nowhere. The suggestion is that someone entering one dimension from another would be seen by the observer to be popping into or out of existence, moving instantaneously and as if no spatial distance had been travelled.

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[122] Michael Rea uses the term *four-dimensionalism* minimally to refer to the view that presentism, that there are no actual non-present objects, is false. For Rea, eternalism and several varieties of growing block theories of time are all types of four-dimensionalism (2010, pp.247-248).

[123] A four-dimensionalist view may offer a way to understand God's existence as both temporal and atemporal, both inside and outside of space-time, and both immanent and transcendent.

This supposition perhaps addresses the first objection above, since it implies that existence in a single dimension would not be chaotic if agents are precluded from multi-directional temporal movements *within* that dimension, just as we are in the world of our experience. In other words, the integrity of a discrete space-time order is preserved by restricting temporal movements to those moving *between* dimensions. These are plausibly not the kind of occurrences that disrupt the ordinary course of events within a certain temporal reality. This possibility also implies that events in other parallel dimensions are generally invisible to the agents within each dimension, otherwise the experience of their co-existing realities would be utterly incoherent.

What the mechanism might be for movements between dimensions is less clear. That these parallel realities might overlap does not by itself suggest how such movements might be made. Perhaps thinking about how they might be linked to the goals of agents and the overall purpose of a multi-dimensional REA suggests part of an answer. These multiple realities may be hierarchically ordered, with dimensions existing in increasing levels of proximity to God. This layered structure could then provide the arena for a personal adventure from lower to higher levels. In this supposition, making now or later and good or better choices involving various learning, creativity and relatedness goods may result in step-changes in an agent's neuro-physiology, giving rise to emergent capacities that make possible transitions to higher levels of REA and participation in an ever-greater plurality of goods across a fuller range of its space-time dimensions. On this view, closeness to God, the ultimate knowledge and relatedness good, is not a destination that is arrived at or a perfect endpoint, but part of an everlasting process of good maximisation.[124]

This possibility suggests that the primary task of those who have become closer to God in REA might involve moving across parallel dimensions to raise others up to higher ones. This possibility fits REA's good-maximising purpose, since developing the capacities of others would enhance their agency to produce created goods. It also implies that agents in lower realms would ordinarily not be able to see higher realms, while lower realms would somehow be visible to those in higher ones so that an entry-point at a particular space and time could be chosen. Perhaps, crossing over could be enabled by an emotional connection forged with someone from an earlier encounter, which opens up a window through which it is possible to see when and where to establish a beneficial re-acquaintance. These speculations aside, if the idea of a REA with multiple inter-penetrable layers of existence is coherent, and I think it is, then it is reasonable to suppose it to be a feature of a good-maximising environment. Embodied agency would not be confined within linear

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[124] This progressive conception of the highest good is consistent with Immanuel Kant's view in the *Second Critique of Pure Reason* that our progress *toward* rather than possession of perfection is enough in God's eyes to make us worthy of the highest good. He rejects the "hoped-for full acquisition of holiness of will" as an unattainable "*theosophical* dream" (Kant, 1781, quoted in Pasternack and Fugate, 2022, 3.6.2).

time and movement between parallel dimensions could be instantaneous and effortless, intensifying and accelerating the production of learning, creativity and relatedness goods.

The fourth factor which minimises external constraints on agency in REA is the absence of malevolent agents. The foregoing discussion has assumed that embodied agents are good-willed, but if REA is a maximally good environment then this must be the case. Even if only some agents were evil-willed then REA would be filled with innumerable bad states of affairs, since their internal capacities for agency would be maximised and external constraints on their actions minimised. Learning, creativity and relatedness activities would be devoted to destructive ends by agents with much greater scope to exploit the vulnerabilities of others and to spread fear and suffering. Rather than nurturing the self-confidence and emotional openness involved in giving, sharing and exploration, a REA with a mix of good and evil-willed agents would divert energies toward competition, survival and self-protection. Consequently, enhancing the agency of the malevolent would be a serious external constraint on the production of created goods in REA. If a maximally good REA must preclude the evil-willed, and the experience of will-setting freedom is necessary to participate in its highest goods, as I shall argue in the next section, then enhanced agents must have already set their wills on goodness to exist in REA. This implies the need for a prior stage of existence where agents set their wills for a life of enhanced agency.

4.4 A Prior Test of Free will

P4   *A maximally good REA can only exist as the second part of a two-stage world following a prior test of will-setting freedom, the freedom of self-aware embodied persons to set their wills toward good or evil.*

If REA cannot contain will-setting freedom because enhancing the agency of those who choose to become malevolent would make this realm a kind of hell, then agents with will-setting freedom can only exist outside of REA. However, why is it necessary for agents to have such freedom at all? The answer concerns two seemingly contradictory attributes which agents need in order to flourish in REA given the previous section's account of the nature of this realm: *neuro-physical flexibility* and *stability of good will*. REA's environment is *dynamic*. It engages agents in self-forming actions concerning an interdependent web of learning, creativity and relatedness goods involving now or later or good or better choices that determine how they become closer to God. Moreover, God's involvement in REA's created goods conceivably extends their upper bounds indefinitely,

making them continually transformative for agents for whom there would always be some other aspect of an infinite God to know about, relate to, and inspire creativity. These opportunities plausibly require a capacity for neuro-physical change, increasing agents' scope to participate in an ever-greater plurality of goods.

Life in REA would therefore not involve the endlessly recurring participation in the same repeatable goods, nor the continuous passive experience of a single state, like a vision of God for example, both of which imply an unchanging existence. Rather its landscape of varied opportunities and choices would make REA an arena for personal development and *increasing capacity for agency*, analogous to the growth in agency that comes with the maturation of children into adulthood in earthly life.[125] I now develop a suggestion made in section 4.2 concerning the value of will-setting freedom and introduce it here as a central premise of P4:

> *Neuro-physical flexibility:* due to the transformative and dynamic nature of its environment, complete flourishing in REA requires a capacity for neuro-physical change and growth of a kind that *ceteris paribus* is only developed while exercising will-setting freedom in self-forming actions involving morally significant choices.[126]

On Kane's account of libertarian freedom, agents exercising will-setting freedom in self-forming actions have a capacity for neuro-physical change and growth. Specifically, I interpret his theory to imply that part of this developmental potential comes from the polarity between options in morally significant choices. When a dilemma between personal ambition and moral conviction, for example, gives rise to a conflict between competing volitional streams, it opens up a spread of possibility in the development of a person's self-network. In section 4.5.2, I will suggest how it might be the case that only the morally good choice produces a beneficial step-change in the complexity of that network. The point to note here is that on Kane's view endorsing one or other neural network associated with competing volitional streams in a morally significant choice produces a change in the agent's overall self-network as it achieves a new equilibrium in the relationship between the whole and parts of the system. It is then reasonable to suppose that making the moral choice strengthens the neural network associated with its volitional stream as it deepens its integration with the system as a whole. *On this view, participation in the plurality if REA's created goods and the self-forming choices they involve requires this capacity for beneficial neuro-physical change.*

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[125] With this analogy I am referring to the capacity for agency in the world, not to physiological changes.

[126] *Ceteris paribus* because there are exceptions which I will discuss in section 4.6.

This link between moral agency and neuro-physical development is made plausible by functional neuroimaging studies which show a correlation between moral judgment making and changes in neuro-physiology as adolescents mature into adults (Harenski et al., 2012). Moreover, it seems that the more meaningful the range of morally significant choices, the more they involve decisions concerning matters of life and death or justice for example, the greater is the scope for personal development. For example, the parent who constantly makes decisions that affect the safety, happiness and flourishing of their child, and who takes responsibility for those choices, is an individual who is in a continual state of moral growth, unlike a parent who delegates the major decisions concerning the raising of their child to others, for example to state authorities or private carers.[127]

The good-maximising God therefore faces a dilemma. A maximally good REA cannot contain will-setting freedom because the agency of those who choose evil would be amplified, making REA a hell. Yet the scope for neuro-physical change and growth of the kind developed through such freedom makes participation in REA's transformative goods possible. The dilemma is seemingly only resolved *if REA is preceded by a prior stage of existence where agents exercise will-setting freedom involving morally significant choices.*

Suppose there are three kinds of agents existing in REA: the first kind have no capacity to grow in neuro-physical complexity through will-setting freedom, the second have this potential but no personal experience of will-setting freedom before coming to exist in REA, and the third have both the capacity for and prior experience of such neuro-physical development. It seems the highest goods of REA would be beyond the reach of the first and second kinds of agents, but not the third. The first would lack any scope to make step-changes in the complexity of their self-networks and would not develop this capacity in this or any other environment. Perhaps they have a type of angelic existence with implementation control over a narrow range of choices, concerning whether to praise God by singing in a choir or playing the harp. Lacking any impetus for personal growth such angelic agency is consistent with a view of heavenly life as essentially static because its perfection precludes any need for change.[128]

The second group of agents have this potential for neuro-physical change but have no experience of it. Given they have will-setting freedom, granting them unlimited opportunities to participate in the full range of learning, creativity and relatedness goods in REA would entail the risk that their development as embodied agents might go wrong. For example, inserting these agents

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[127] Swinburne similarly links the value of free will to having responsibility over a range of choices (1998, Chapter 8).

[128] For discussion for static and dynamic views of heaven see Eric J. Silverman (2017).

into REA might be like putting a child's mind in an adult's body. They could start out good-willed but being an enhanced agent may be too empowering, leading to over-confidence and arrogance. Such agents would likely lack the self-control and experience needed to act in way that is not harmful to themselves and others. Perhaps they could exist in a REA which only offered implementation control over a narrow range of choices. However, since fewer choices would limit their scope for personal development their innate capacity for such growth would likely atrophy in this scenario. Just as the under-used muscles of an athlete who trains inadequately for her sport sets a limit on her performance, the agent's capacity for neuro-physical change and growth may never be used, putting REA's highest goods beyond their reach.

An agent from the third group who has experienced will-setting freedom involving morally significant choices would likely be unsatisfied with a life choosing between singing God's praises and playing the harp. Having previously developed the complexity of her self-network, such choices would fall too far within the present range of her neuro-physiology. This might motivate her to seek out new ways of worshipping God that make full use of her potential for change and growth. Indeed, she may want to carry forward the personal development of her mortal life and extend her capabilities through continual self-forming actions. In other words, her experience of neuro-physical development through will-setting freedom would be a poor fit for a static existence that only offered implementation control over a limited range of choices. It would seem, however, to be a good fit for a dynamic realm of enhanced agency where the highest goods bring about similar step-changes in a person's self-network. Just as an untrained amateur runner will not have the physiology to complete a marathon, participating in the transformative goods of REA would be impossible without first training the capacity to grow in neuro-physical complexity through self-forming actions involving morally significant choices.

To clarify, I am not claiming here that will-setting freedom and morally significant choices are essential parts of the experience of REA's transformative goods. Rather, I am suggesting that the capacity for and experience of making beneficial step-changes in neuro-physical complexity give an agent the potential to make other transitions in their self-network involving the kinds of choices between competing goods in REA's environment. Specifically, it is the *degree* of change and growth that can occur when self-forming actions involve morally significant choices that gives agents the scope to undergo similar degrees of neuro-physical change when experiencing transformative goods in REA.

Moreover, I am not suggesting that this change or scope for personal development in REA concerns the nature of anyone's wills, as all agents must be good-willed for REA to be maximally good. What changes or develops on this view is not the will but a person's capacity for good-willed embodied

agency, where goodness of will is just one of the inputs, alongside intellect, imagination, knowledge, memory, emotion and physical desire, of a person's neuro-physical make-up as an agent. For example, we can reasonably suppose that these interconnected powers deepen their integration with one another with each step-change in neuro-physical complexity, enhancing agency in the process. REA, therefore, is progressive in the sense that it is *agency expanding*, in contrast to SMT's soul-making pareschaton or RST's heavenly sanctification, which are progressive in the sense that they increasingly perfect *wills* for union with God.

Nevertheless, the claim that enhanced agents have neuro-physical flexibility and previous experience of will-setting freedom does not by itself entail that their personal development in REA will not go wrong. It seems that their progressive potential requires that the wills of enhanced agents will need to be firmly and durably good. The second reason REA is only realisable after a prior stage of existence concerns how it contributes to the stability of a will's goodness:

> *Stability of will*: having a durably good will is *ceteris paribus* not possible in REA without an agent first having freely set their will on goodness through self-forming actions and sustained those choices through efforts of will.[129]

It could be objected that an omnipotent God can simply create agents for REA who are ready-made with the neuro-physiology of persons with durably good wills. The dynamic and progressive nature of REA I think precludes this possibility. An agent ready-made with this neuro-physical make-up would not have the personal experience of setting their will through self-forming actions, and taking responsibility for those choices by making efforts of will to sustain them. Despite REA's benign conditions, it would seem unsurprising if the personal development of such agents were to go wrong somehow when chaotic brain states give rise to emergent capacities in their self-networks, like the analogy earlier of putting a child's mind in an adult's body. By contrast, an agent that had set their wills on goodness through self-forming actions and freely sustained those choices through efforts of will could be expected to continue on that path when making self-forming choices in the dynamic yet wholly good environment of REA.

This appeal to experience and memory echoes in non-religious terms Tamburro's argument, discussed in chapter 3.2.3, concerning heavenly impeccability. Unlike Adam before the Fall who lacked any knowledge of sin and the shame and guilt it involves, he supposes that post-Fall human beings with a memory of sin and the desire to avoid it can exist freely in heaven without moral evil (2017, pp.313-314). However, I will argue that this possibility is made more plausible in enhanced agency

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[129] *Ceteris paribus* because there are exceptions which I will discussion in section 4.6.

theodicy by its positive view of human nature. As forthcoming sections will discuss, a good-maximising God would create human beings with innately good wills. In other words, *to have a good will is our natural state.* The individual who builds on a foundation of goodness *and strives to preserve it in the face of challenges* seems better placed to remain durably good-willed than an inherently bad-willed individual who must acquire a good will as part of a second nature. In dynamic situations of transformative personal change, the first agent would have their innate goodness to fall back on, whereas reversion to type might be a concern with the second agent. Moreover, for the second agent we would have to consider whether the will that is acquired is fully good, or only partially so, inviting the problem of how on death or sometime afterwards any gaps in character might be filled to make the idea of heavenly impeccability plausible.[130]

It seems, then, that for enhanced agents to have the neuro-physical flexibility to participate in REA's transformative goods, and to have durably good wills while doing so, *ceteris paribus* they must have experience of will-setting freedom involving morally significant choices. As REA cannot contain will-setting freedom enhanced agents must then undergo a prior stage of existence that gives them this experience and *tests their capacity to remain durably good-willed while undergoing neuro-physical change*. I will refer to this prior test of free will as happening in a *will-setting environment*:

> *Will-setting environment* ^{df} = a world where the freedom of self-aware embodied persons to set their wills toward good or evil is tested.

If the proposed theodicy is true and the world of our experience is not a realm of enhanced agency, then it must be this will-setting environment. Taken as such, there are many senses in which our world fits the description of a *test* of free will. Like all tests ours has a time limit, the length of a mortal life within which we must set our wills one way or the other. Just as tests have consequences, for example screening out unsuitable candidates from certain vocations or careers, our test of free will excludes malevolent agents from life in REA. Tests prepare for what comes afterwards, or in some way qualify the person being tested to do something that she has not done before. As a will-setting environment the evaluative question our world would be designed to answer is "can human beings exist and flourish as enhanced agents?" Section 4.5.2's account of human nature as essentially good yet potentially bad due to free will suggests there is a sense in which our knowledge is tested, for example an innate knowledge of right and wrong. Section 4.5.3 discusses how performance is also measured, to discern if an agent falls below a disqualifying threshold for

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[130] As noted in Chapter 2.2, Sennet (1999) and Pawl and Timpe (2009, 2013) attempt to address this gap filling problem.

goodness of will. Moreover, if our world is such a test, it seems that a good-maximising God would put in place conditions that ensure as many as possible pass, and which minimise the overall cost involved in running the test, a point developed by all sections of Chapter 4.5.

A Two-Stage World?

The foregoing discussion assumes that REA and its prior test of free will are parts of a two-stage world, but why suppose only two stages? REA might also be the culmination of multiple stages of existence, as with Hick's succession of afterlives. However, recall the least cost requirement of the good-maximising principle discussed in section 4.2:

> *Least cost requirement*: a good-maximising God would want to produce *the most created moral goodness for the least cost.*

This implies that if a multi-stage world is necessary then a good-maximising God would want it to involve the fewest number of stages. I objected in Chapter 3.1.4 that Hick's pareschaton extends the risk of serious suffering over multiple lives; the same would be true for multiple will-setting environments. At some point the cost becomes prohibitive for a good-maximising God wanting to produce the most created goodness for the least cost. Therefore, a two-stage world, containing REA and a prior test of free will, would be consistent with the least cost requirement, *as long as the conditions in both stages maximise the overall goodness of the world.*

If the world of our experience is a will-setting environment, then death, an indisputable fact of our world, both sets a time limit for its test of free will and separates the two stages of existence. However, what mechanism could possibly account for the transition from one life to the next? Two aspects require explanation: how a person might survive the destruction of the mortal body and become re-embodied after the death; and how the re-embodied person is enhanced in the ways outlined in the previous section. As noted in Chapter 1.5, this mechanism would seem to have to involve an immaterial part of the self surviving death in some form to account for personal survival after the destruction of the body. As REA maximises created moral goodness through the activities of embodied agents, it follows that this immaterial self must be re-embodied sometime after death. For ante and post-mortem persons to be identical the immaterial self must retain a person's memories and character and preserve their consciousness or at least a part of the conscious self that does not

involve bodily experience. This seems the only way to explain the continuity of personhood between the two embodiments.[131]

Nevertheless, that REA fully realises a life of embodied agency implies that the immaterial self is an integral part of a physical being. In other words, existence of the immaterial self is radically incomplete apart from a body. This counts against a *strong substance dualism* which identifies the immaterial self with the mind or consciousness as a distinct and independent entity from the body (Rodrigues, 2014, p.202). In principle, this view is consistent with a purely disembodied afterlife, since this immaterial substance may be identified as the actual or true self and so need not be embodied.[132] Rather, the form of dualism which is most consistent with EAT's embodied agency view of the highest human good is *dualistic holism.* This affirms holism, the functional unity and integrity of human life, without implying monism, because it rejects the claim that it is made from one metaphysical constituent nor precludes a part surviving the dissolution of the whole (Cooper, 2018, p.416). On this view, human beings are essentially "integral personal-spiritual-physical wholes" for whom any type of disembodied existence after death would be a reduced form of life (Cooper, 2009, p.35).[133]

A further difference between holistic and strong views of dualism suggests a possible mechanism for re-embodiment. The holistic view implies that the immaterial self is only complete when it is united with the *particular* body of which it is an integral part. In other words, *every person has a unique physical or biological identity*. On the strong view, by contrast, an immaterial self could conceivably be united with any body, since it is the essential or whole self irrespective of the body it inhabits or whether it is embodied at all. Consequently, dualistic holism seems to provide the more plausible account of a person. Taking the good of relatedness for example, personhood is inextricably bound up with interpersonal embodied experience. Our feelings towards others and our memories of their personal histories seem to require their association in our minds with a unique face and voice. If it were possible for someone's consciousness to be transferred secretly into the body of another person, then their external appearance seems likely to determine how they are treated by others. If my consciousness were transferred into the body of a murderer, for example,

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[131] Stephen T. Davis (1989) argues that the idea that a temporarily disembodied thing may be identified with a previously existing human person is coherent. The memory criterion alone suffices to establish personal identity, since it would be irrational to deny that the memories of a disembodied person are genuine if they fit together, confirm each other, and form a coherent picture.

[132] Jose Gusmao Rodrigues terms this view *pure dualism* (2014, p.203).

[133] John W. Cooper considers *Augustinian dualism*, which holds that we are a composite of two distinct substances, and *Thomist dualism*, that affirms we are one being not a conjunction of things, to be varieties of dualistic holism (2009, p.33). However, I interpret Cooper to take the latter to be more consistent with biblical anthropology.

and all the evidence pointed toward my guilt, I could expect to be tried and convicted for that murder despite my protestations of innocence. Moreover, it is not clear that personal identity, and therefore the goods of relatedness, would be possible if everyone had exactly the same physical appearance and voice.

Granting dualistic holism we can suppose the following about the role of the immaterial self in post-mortem survival and re-embodiment. I have already suggested it has to retain essential ingredients of a person's *psychological* nature. It could also be that this immaterial self retains information essential to the survival of its *biological* nature. For example, *it could be imprinted with a person's unique genetic profile*. This is a possibility if we suppose that the immaterial dimension of being forms an integral part of the physical body from the early stages of its biological development in the womb. Moreover, if we think of this immaterial dimension as coextensive with an important part of our consciousness, and suppose that this immaterial part of the self has a data storage capacity that records both psychological and biological information, it is conceivable that our consciousness has awareness all the way down, so to speak, to the molecular level. Just as consciousness at the mental level is aware of events in our environment, the same consciousness at the molecular level may be aware of the structure of a person's unique genotype.

Quantum theories of consciousness may provide a mechanism for this possibility. Quantum processes have been shown to be involved in biological processes, including photosynthesis and the navigation of migratory birds (Al-Khalili and McFadden, 2014). Theorists have also distinguished the phenomenon of experiential consciousness from deeper levels that might underlie ordinary awareness (Baruss, 2008, pp.258-260). As quantum physical explanations concern the behaviours of subatomic particles, a person's field of consciousness conceivably might include the molecular level and carry information about their genome.[134]

This suggests an intriguing possibility: that the genetic information retained within the immaterial self can provide for the physical reconstitution of the person after the destruction of the original body. It could contain the biological instructions needed to recreate a person with a genetically identical body using new material. Supposing this were possible, re-embodiment could be like cloning stories in science fiction or the creation of Adam and Eve in biblical tradition in forming individuals as adult beings without the process of physical maturation. On this view, the person would be revived as if waking up from sleep but in a new body. Those who die as adults would be reconstituted as adults, since there is no need for a mature consciousness to go through childhood again to become an enhanced agent, but lack of experience with embodied agency could

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[134] The behaviours of subatomic particles in quantum physical explanations include their *nonlocality* and *entanglement*, where communication between distant particles is instantaneous (Goerztel, 1992, pp.32-33).

mean that children who die young would be re-created as children.[135] In any event, the immaterial self would be infused into a new physical body in the process of its recreation, so that both dimensions, material and immaterial, are integral to each other, in the same that they were in mortal life. In other words, as forthcoming sections will discuss, the complete human being is a *spiritual-physical unity and* will remain so despite the interruption of death.

There seems no reason to believe that a person re-embodied in this way would not be essentially the same person that experienced mortal life. The same subjective consciousness survives death and continues in the reconstituted body. Constructed with its unique genotype, the re-embodied self would be recognisably the same physical person to themselves and to others. If the replacement of the physical constituents of a person's body over the course of a mortal lifetime does not make the grandfather a different individual from his younger self, then it seems the same would be true for the person re-constituted in this way.

Moreover, the notion that a person may be re-formed according to their unique genetic profile also suggests how the re-embodied self might be enhanced. Conceivably, when the person is reconstituted there is an opportunity to form the new body to the maximum potential of their given genotype, in terms of both physical and mental attributes. These might include features already discussed: extremely efficient neural networks and high working memory needed for effortless parallel processing, more perfectly proportioned physical features that enhance beauty, more effective metabolisms and digestive tracts that absorb nutrients without causing waste and tiredness, and an optimal physical age for being an enhanced agent with an adult body.

Perhaps a mechanism for this possibility exists in what has been termed *junk DNA*. It is generally accepted that a substantial percentage of DNA in the human genome lacks any function at the level of the organism and that only a small fraction of the genome is made up of protein-coding sequences that have a role in human development and physiology (Palazzo and Gregory, 2014). Some noncoding DNA has been found to have important biological functions but very little is known about why the majority of the genome exists. It could be that some of the capacity for protein coding is lying dormant in these non-coding genes, and that this is activated during re-embodiment to realise the full potential of the genotype retained within the deep consciousness of the immaterial self that survives death.

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[135] Section 4.6 and Chapter 5.4 will develop this point on the post-mortem fate of children.

4.5 Conditions for Realising a Realm of Enhanced Agency

Section 4.2 established the coherence of the good-maximising view of an omniperfect God. Section 4.3 argued that this God would create a realm of enhanced agency to maximise created moral goodness. Section 4.4 explained why its realisation requires a test of will-setting freedom in a prior stage of existence. This section will discuss in turn five conditions of REA's realisation that are implied by the good-maximising view of God. The first concerns necessary constraints on the level of agency in a will-setting environment and their implications for the nature of its test of free will.

4.5.1 A Realm of Ordinary Agency

P5 i)   *REA is only maximally good if the prior test of will-setting freedom tests persons with ordinary agency in an environment that randomly distributes conditions of flourishing and adversity.*

If the existence of malevolent agents with enhanced agency would make REA a hell, then a good-maximising God would create a will-setting environment with lower levels of agency than in REA. This follows from *the least cost requirement*, which implies that the overall level of agency of those with will-setting freedom must be constrained to limit the harm caused by those with malevolent wills. Not to do so would increase the cost of realising REA. In other words, would-be enhanced agents have their free will tested in a realm of *ordinary agency*.

> *Ordinary agency*: the level of agency of self-aware embodied persons in a will-setting environment that constrains moral evil.

If we take our world to be a will-setting environment with ordinary agency, then aging and death is perhaps the most important constraint that differentiates ordinary from enhanced agency. A finite mortal life restricts the time we have to make choices, thereby limiting their quantity. The risk of death also limits the range of choices open to us: an agent devoted to bad ends would be much more destructive if he were invulnerable and did not fear harm. Moreover, death is part of the natural constraint on the influence of *systemic moral evil*, as will be discussed in section 4.5.4. In an environment where will-setting freedom entails the risk of moral evil, aging and mortality minimise the overall amount of evil involved in bringing about REA.[136]

Some features of enhanced agency outlined in the previous section suggest further constraints. Inefficient metabolisms and digestive tracts that produce waste and tiredness generally retard the levels of fitness, strength and energy that all ordinary agents, including the evil-willed, can channel into their activities. The flow states of ordinary agency are also harder to come by, not as long lasting and less productive than in REA because parallel processing is more costly neuro-physically. Consequently, complex decision-making processes can involve feats of concentration for ordinary agents, an effort which is a barrier to some of our intentions becoming actions, including those of the evil-willed.

It could be objected that if our realm of ordinary agency is one of struggle and effort, then it constrains morally good agents also and is an obstacle to them attaining REA. Part of the answer, which the next section on human nature will develop, is that self-aware embodied persons are created innately good-willed, but potentially bad because of will-setting freedom. This means that in a realm of ordinary agency *they need not acquire a good will, they merely need to preserve one.* Consequently, while REA is a great good because it maximises the created goodness produced through the agency of embodied beings, this does not entail that the capacity to do ever more good things with ordinary agency is a pre-requisite for attaining life in REA.

For example, in a society dominated by the influence of the evil-willed, an agent may be better able to preserve goodness of will by not acting, or by acting to minimise his activity. He could do so by removing himself from that society. If agents were inherently imperfect and needed soul-making experiences to perfect themselves, as in Hick's view, then constraining opportunities for agency in general would retard this sort of personal development. This would not be a problem for Hick since he does not have a good-maximising view of God wanting to produce the most amount of created goodness for the least cost, so soul-making can continue across multiple embodied lives. In enhanced agency theodicy, by contrast, general conditions which limit the overall agency of the malevolent in a will-setting environment do not prejudice the task of preserving the goodness of will needed to flourish in REA.

That a test of will-setting freedom prepares agents for existence in REA implies there are important continuities between realms of ordinary and enhanced agency. Recall Chapter 1.6's discussion of *continuity of value* and the unintelligibility of training an astronaut in jungle survival for the end of existing on a planet that is entirely a water world.[137] In EAT *embodied agency* is the core

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[136] Swinburne similarly argues that mortality is a constraint on overall levels of suffering (1998, pp.213-214).

[137] Chapter 1.6, p.42.

good that unites both realms. While the scope for agency is not the same, and different sets of conditions obtain, free will and embodied being are first order goods in both environments. The will is free in relation to choices in the same way in both stages of existences, consisting of undetermined self-forming actions and freely motivated efforts of the will. Learning, creativity, relatedness are goods in both realms, as is proximity to God, although these are amplified in REA. In other words, if a person knows how to participate in these types of goods in a realm of ordinary agency, they will know how to do so in REA to the fullest possible extent. These features plausibly make a realm of ordinary agency a preparation for existence in REA.

That agency in a prior test of free will must be ordinary on the good-maximising view also suggests why morally significant freedom is a necessary part of preparation for life in REA. The previous section argued that the degree of neuro-physical change and growth that can occur when self-forming actions involve morally significant choices gives agents scope to undergo similar degrees of change when experiencing transformative goods in REA. Conceivably, self-forming actions involving unlimited freedom with respect to good and evil choices is the only way the requisite capacity for beneficial neuro-physical change is developed and tested in conditions of ordinary agency *absent REA's transformative goods*. In other words, there is a possible world that has the same conditions of ordinary agency and where agents have less moral freedom, for example exercising a form of compatibilist free will, but it seems the scope for neuro-physical change would be much less in this environment, and so it would not prepare agents for life in REA. The objector will have to show that a plausibly sufficient capacity for neuro-physical change is possible with less moral freedom in conditions of ordinary agency.

Ordinary agency has two significant implications for the nature of the test of will-setting freedom. Firstly, the mortality of ordinary agents suggests that the material conditions which test goodness of will must be *ubiquitous,* involving all ordinary agents before their deaths. For example, goodness of will may be tested in an agent's response to deep suffering, presenting a morally significant choice between revenge and forgiveness, or anger and patience. Nevertheless, if goodness of will could *only* be tested in conditions of deep suffering, then it seems not everyone would have their wills tested within mortal life. Either the test of will-setting freedom would have to continue after death, or agent's mortal lives are extended until they are tested with deep suffering. However, resurrecting agents or extending their lives only so that they can suffer seems inconsistent with the least cost requirement, since it would add to rather minimise overall levels of suffering. For the test of will-setting freedom to be both finite and ubiquitous, goodness of will must be tested in *all* conditions, not just those of suffering. The two main categories of *flourishing* and *adversity* seem to be inclusive of all conditions which might test moral behaviour.

Ubiquity of test conditions: testing will-setting freedom in conditions of flourishing and adversity *ceteris paribus* involves all ordinary agents within a single mortal life.

For example, in an affluent part of the world a young man of leisure and his neighbour's wife and mother of two children may be tempted to have an affair. In another part of the world, the starving refugee trying to flee a war zone faces the choice of whether to help an injured neighbour escape. The anxiety and soul searching that the young man and the neighbour's wife may experience cannot be equated with the emotional and physical suffering of the refugee in the war zone, but both choices have potentially serious consequences for themselves and others. They are both morally significant choices which may set wills one way or another, whether these self-forming actions are made in conditions of flourishing or adversity.

However, it also seems that conditions of flourishing and adversity cannot be fixed and predictable features of a will-setting environment. Rather, such conditions would have to at least appear randomly distributed, *since genuine tests are intrinsically unpredictable*. For example, if a history exam involves three questions, one for each of three historical events, and students are given these questions in advance, the exam would be predictable. It will be even more so if the exam asks closed questions concerning a narrow set of facts about these events. Testing a limited skillset, such as memorisation and writing speed, it would not require the student to revise the subject in depth. However, if students were asked various questions on any three of ten historical events, and these were open questions requiring discussion of different theories and perspectives concerning these events, then the exam would require in-depth subject knowledge to pass. In other words, the unpredictability of a test is a feature of the degree to which it is a real measure of students' knowledge and performance.

It seems also that for a test of will-setting freedom to be unpredictable, it cannot involve conditions only of flourishing or only of adversity. Consider a futuristic society where every individual has an artificial intelligence advisor that is wirelessly connected to a global surveillance grid via cloud computing and which communicates verbally to its owner via an earpiece, as well as visually through spectacles fitted with an augmented reality interface. The A.I. advisor can make probabilistic predictions of their owner's actions in the immediate future and anticipate their reactions to events it monitors through the surveillance grid. Consequently, it can guide owners to activities that satisfy their pre-existing preferences, further their goals and ward off any harms wherever they go. The only choices the owner would make concern whether to follow the guidance of the A.I. advisor.

Would this person ever make will-setting choices and experience the neuro-physical changes they involve? For example, the businesswoman happening upon an alleyway mugging on the way to a career changing interview would not be torn between personal ambition and moral conviction if her A.I. helper screens her off from seeing the incident by directing her to look the other way at the crucial moment. This example suggests there is a situational dimension to moral life in which the nature of a person's will or character is revealed or formed in moments of real choice as they arise in the unfolding of events that are unforeseen and beyond our immediate control. What will the career woman do when she learns of her unplanned pregnancy? How will an athlete respond to becoming physically disabled after a serious road accident? It seems that true tests of moral character are intrinsically unpredictable, at least to a certain degree. Just as an element of unpredictability makes an exam a real test of students' performances, the unpredictability of a will-setting environment contributes to making it a genuine test of our capacity to preserve goodness of will while undergoing neuro-physical change and growth.

> *Unpredictability of test conditions*: the random distribution of conditions of flourishing and adversity contribute to making a realm of ordinary agency a genuine test of will-setting freedom.

These features of a will-setting environment, ordinary agency, the ubiquity of conditions of flourishing and adversity and their apparently random distribution, are a good fit for an explanation of our world as a test of free will. The possibility of will-setting in conditions of both flourishing and adversity also has an important theoretical implication which was discussed in Chapter 1.5. It both expands the scope of EAT by not keying its explanation only to data concerning suffering, while also simplifying the overall theistic hypothesis by bringing this broader set of data into a single explanation.[138]

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[138] See Chapter 1.5, pp.39-40.

4.5.2 Innate Human Goodness

P5 ii)   *REA is only maximally good if the prior test of will-setting freedom tests persons who are*
innately good-willed.

This section considers three main questions. Q1: Why is the innate goodness of human
nature a necessary condition of REA's maximal goodness? Q2: How might this view of human nature
be true? Q3: If human nature is innately good, why and how are human beings potentially bad? The
answer to the first question relies on two premises of 5ii) concerning the numbers of ordinary agents
that pass the test of will-setting freedom and the supportive nature of that test:

Agent numbers: REA is maximally good *iff* as many as ordinary agents as possible become
enhanced agents from their test of will-setting freedom.

Supportive test: the innate goodness of ordinary agents contributes to as few as possible
failing their test of will-setting freedom because it equips every person with the resources they
need to succeed.

The *agent numbers* premise is implicit in the argument for a good-maximising God set out in
section 4.2, so I need not discuss this here. To discuss the *supportive test* premise the concept of
innate goodness needs definition. In the following I assume that EAT's will-setting environment is the
world of our experience and that the persons referred to in P5 ii) are human beings. Given that, I take
the innate goodness of human nature to include ontic and epistemic aspects. Ontologically, human
beings are innately good creations, meaning that they are born good. This implies human nature is not
radically imperfect or needs to be perfected in order to be made good or complete. Rather, on this
view *all human beings begin life good-willed*. Two epistemic implications follow from this view. If
human beings are inherently good-willed then it seems they must be born with an innate sense of
right and wrong, rather than one that is acquired through some rational process of learning and
reflection. This further implies that at least a basic sense of right and wrong is knowable through our
moral intuitions quite apart from any deliberative faculties we may develop.

A desire for truth or a true understanding of reality is a concomitant of possessing intuitive
moral knowledge. Moral convictions are bound up with what one believes to be true about moral
situations. Deceiving oneself and others is also morally bad and choosing to live inside an illusion is a
form of mental derangement that is self-destructive. Moreover, truth seeking is an unsurprising
attribute of a God-made world, since *ceteris paribus* the existence of an immaterial God would be the

biggest truth to know about a world that is seemingly only material. We can say therefore that God's creation of human beings with an innately good nature entails that we have *an intuitive knowledge of what is good and right, and a desire to know what is true*.

Consequently, a will-setting environment with innately good human beings is somewhat like the Schellenberg-type world discussed in Chapter Three, where people have a greater background awareness of and receptivity to God's presence and guidance than envisioned in Hick's notion of epistemic distance. There is one important difference, however, between EAT and Schellenberg's own model for a world where humans exist in an intermediate state between epistemic distance and immediacy. EAT envisages something like this as property of all human beings at the *beginning* of life, rather than a general feature of existence as Schellenberg proposes. This allows for the possibility that epistemic openness to God might fade over time, depending on the social and environmental conditions that influence the maturation of individuals. Consequently, EAT's view of human nature is epistemically possible, whereas it would be implausible to claim that the world of our experience is exactly like a Schellenberg-type world where all human beings are in a strong epistemic situation in relation to theism (Schellenberg, 1993, pp.48-52).

I will outline an ontology for EAT's view of human nature below, but to substantiate the *supportive test* claim we can return to the exam analogy. Suppose there are two different exams, the first of which involves students who have the subject knowledge required to pass the test, and who have a natural capacity to perform well under pressure with the mental acuity, emotional balance and high concentration levels needed to succeed. In addition, they are well rested and have no physical injuries that will hinder performance. The second exam involves students who have little or no subject knowledge and have no capacity to perform well because they are ill and deprived of sleep and food. In these two exams, many more would pass the first exam, because unlike in the second exam students possess the resources they need to succeed.

The two exam scenarios are analogous to God choosing to make a will-setting environment with either innately good human beings or innately bad human beings. A good-maximising God making an environment fit for the purpose of testing the goodness of will needed to flourish in REA would at least create human beings with a natural capacity to know right from wrong and good from bad, so that this knowledge can be tested. Otherwise, the creator of the test could be accused of making a fundamental design mistake, since a human being without such a capacity would be like a student who had wandered into the wrong exam. Moreover, a good-maximising God who wanted as many as possible to pass this test could be expected to give all human beings wills that are able to act on the moral knowledge they possess. By contrast innately bad and evil-willed human beings may lack the knowledge and will even to participate in the test. Handicapped, they would be set up to fail. The first

will-setting environment would yield a much greater quantity of agents for existence in REA, the second environment would produce much less.

We can extend the exam analogy to compare innately good human beings with those that are merely potentially good. On this neutral or blank slate view of human nature our behavioural traits, whether good or bad, develop almost exclusively from environmental influences. Moral instincts and desires are not innate but are acquired as parts of systems of habits or dispositions that are moulded and shaped through processes of stimulus and response and the reinforcement of rewarding responses. In the exam, they may have good health and a natural capacity to perform well under pressure, but they have no subject knowledge to pass the exam and whatever performance they could muster would almost entirely depend on the nature of exam conditions. In optimal conditions a blank slate student would perhaps fare better than innately bad students. Through a rational process of induction they might acquire an understanding of the purpose of the exam and a sense of the meaning of its questions by the time the exam ended, but perhaps not very much more. However, if the exam room were dark and freezing cold with loud music blaring in the background, the blank slate student would be hopelessly lost. By contrast a good student in these conditions who has the subject knowledge to pass the exam would likely find a way to muddle through and answer enough questions to succeed.

Suppose also that a fire alarm interrupts the exam halfway through and resitting the test is impossible for students. Examiners may be able to pass students if they can assess the subject knowledge that students had before the test so that they can estimate a projected result based on this background knowledge. In this scenario, examiners would have little reason to pass the bad student or the student who had just enlisted on the course and had no subject knowledge at all. By analogy, the innately bad and blank slate views of human nature seem to imply that human beings would fail the test of free will if their lives were cut short, in their childhoods, twenties or thirties, for example. Whereas creating human beings with an innately good nature would not preclude the success of these individuals. If they die prematurely, then they may lack the neuro-physical complexity of those with more experience, but they would still have the goodness of will to become enhanced agents.[139]

An innately good human nature, then, sets up the ante-mortem test of will-setting freedom with an in-built-bias towards success. On this view, existence in REA is the default outcome of all human beings *by virtue of being human*, unless our actions disqualify us from becoming enhanced agents. The good afterlife is therefore like an inheritance, which is not earned but is an heir's by right unless written out of the will. The good-maximising implications of this possibility are apparent if we consider exclusivist religious claims. Clearly, to maximise numbers in REA it cannot be the case that

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[139] Section 4.6 will discuss this point further.

how humans enter this realm is determined by a person's membership of a particular ethnic group or social caste, or by holding certain religious beliefs the awareness of which is contingent on living in certain cultures or historical eras. However, if every human being is innately good-willed, or at least begins life in this state, then all would have the capacity to pass the test of free will despite whichever beliefs may be prevalent in their cultural context, like the good student finding a way to muddle through despite being in the dark and freezing exam room with loud music blaring outside. We may even suppose that any individual irrespective of their worldview may in principle become an enhanced agent *as long as their beliefs have the practical effect of preserving the innate goodness of their wills*. It seems, then, that many more would end up existing in REA if human beings have an essentially good nature, rather than one which is innately bad or merely potentially good.

If a good-maximising God would create human beings with innately good wills, how might this view of human nature be true? Some will argue that Augustinian, Hobbesian and Darwinian views of human nature as fundamentally sinful, greedy and selfish are a better fit with reality. There are good reasons to believe otherwise, however. It is likely to be closer to most of our intuitions to think of infants and very young children as being innately good or having intrinsic positive value. There is something unloving or inhumane about seeing such life as innately bad, or even merely potentially good depending on what they could become in the future with the right training. It seems right to treat infants and toddlers as little persons in their own right and interact with them on that basis as deserving of love, care and attention for who they are.

For example, it would seem incredible to claim that the children who became Hitler youth were born made for the militarism and racism of Nazi ideology. If their environment made them Nazis, then this may suggest the blank slate view is correct, but it could also be argued that a systemic programme of indoctrination was needed to orient their beliefs and dispositions away from an essentially good nature. How soldiers are trained to kill strongly suggests this possibility. A U.S. military study of World War Two veterans found that only fifteen to twenty percent of soldiers who experienced combat fired their weapons and an even smaller percentage fired to kill. That figure increased to fifty-five percent in the Korean War and ninety-five per cent in Vietnam after the army reformed combat training to desensitize soldiers to the humanity of the enemy (Bateson, 2015, p.87). In neuroscience, brain imaging studies comparing participants' responses to various *trolley dilemmas*, where five rail workers will be killed unless a bystander saves them by causing the death of an innocent person, also suggest that human beings typically have an emotional aversion to causing direct harm to others (Cohen, 2005).

Studies in developmental psychology show that it is fairly common for victims of childhood abuse to break the cycle of abuse with their own children (Egeland et. al., 1988). This is perhaps only

plausible on an innate goodness view of human nature. If the blank slate view were correct, or if human nature was innately bad, then it would be unsurprising to find that nearly all abuse victims become abusers in adulthood, as these views imply that the victim would be more receptive to normalising the abuser's behaviour and emulating it in their own lives. That the opposite is often the case suggests that innate human goodness may also be implicated in *resilience*, a research concept in psychology concerned with "the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences" (Rutter, 2006, quoted in Al-Issa, 2020, p.87). Sociological factors may partially explain this phenomenon, but it is not implausible to suggest that human beings are naturally resilient by virtue of the resources of an innately good nature.

If human inhibitions concerning killing and harming others arise out of an empathy we feel for other human beings, clinical studies in developmental psychology suggest this link between empathy and moral behaviour is present in the very young. For example, four-year-olds feel the idea of violating a moral constraint, for example causing a dog to be harmed or to become sad, is an impossibility for them , while the sense of having a choice over whether to do wrong develops at ages seven to eight (Closer to Truth, undated). Perspective taking is evident at an even earlier age. Eighteen-month-olds can understand that while they may like crackers and hate broccoli, for example, others might prefer broccoli, and so they are willing to give to others what would make them happy rather than themselves (Gopnik, 2010, p.78). It is the new-born's imitative brain, which is a unique capacity of human babies, that provides the neural mechanism by which infants develop the theories of mind involved in empathy (Meltzoff and Decety, 2003). These developmental and neurophysiological studies suggest that infants and very young children possess the empathy, altruism, and interpersonal understanding that are the building blocks of morality.

As well as an innate moral capacity, a predisposition for truth seeking is prefigured in the early abilities of infants. Young learners can infer unlikely or unusual abstract causal hypotheses from evidence and children as young as fifteen months can learn specific cause-effect relationships from statistical data (Gopnik, Griffiths and Lucas, 2015, p.87). Studies of infant brains show that they have far more connections between neurons than adult brains and have high levels of the chemicals that facilitate changes in neural connections, giving infants the flexibility to adapt, create, learn and explore. This research suggests that when young children play spontaneously they discover how the world works through experimenting with cause and effect relationships and unconsciously processing information in a way that parallels the methods of scientific discovery (Gopnik, 2010, pp.79-80).

The notion that human beings are innately good is therefore epistemically possible. Some will argue that negative or blank slate views of human nature are a better fit with the historical evidence of human evil. However, they would need to show that this counterfactual assertion is false: *if it were the*

case that human nature was not innately good, we could expect the world to be much worse than it is. Clinical studies of infant minds suggest it is reasonable to attribute the very possibility of social goods to innate characteristics of human nature. In other words, despite the evident existence of moral evil, it seems human nature makes possible the interpersonal trust and openness needed for individuals to form the friendships, families and communities that are features of flourishing human societies. The goodness of social order, on this view, is a bottom-up phenomenon, not imposed from above as in Hobbesian anthropology for example. A world without innately good human beings is conceivably one that would contain more chaos and suffering than the world of our experience.

Turning now to the third main question, if human nature is innately good, why and how are human beings potentially bad? The *neuro-physical flexibility* premise discussed in section 4.4 offers an explanation for why human beings must be created with will-setting freedom. As a matter of definition, if the test of goodness of will involves the freedom to set one's will toward good or evil then this entails that human beings with free will are potentially bad. Yet if human beings are innately good how are we potentially bad if the source of moral evil is not in our natures? The innate goodness view seemingly implies an explanation focussed on the enculturation of individuals, for example in the way that acquiring the norms and values of a bad society may influence someone to form a vicious character.[140] Section 4.5.4 on *systemic moral evil* will say more on this, but it does not take us far concerning the origin of moral evil. Bad societies are at least in part formed by the decisions of individuals, so an aspect of human nature must somehow be implicated. A possible explanation for the potential badness of human beings concerns the dualistic holism outlined in section 4.4's discussion of a two-stage world, and our innocence as spiritual-physical beings:

> *Spiritual-physical innocence*: the potential badness of human beings with innately good wills and will-setting freedom is a consequence of our nature as spiritual-physical beings *existing for the first time in a material environment.*

To explain why this might be case, we need to define what having a good or evil will means in the dualistic holism of EAT's view of human nature. If the human being is an integral personal-spiritual-physical unity consisting of a material body and an immaterial self, both of which are essential to a person's experience of consciousness, then it is reasonable to suppose that the latter is the source of the ontological goodness of human nature. Neither good nor bad, the material body is plausibly a neutral substance, more like the mountain rock discussed in section 4.2, which is given

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[140] The notion that the nature of societies influences the character of individuals has a long pedigree that includes Aristotle (Homiak, 2019, 2.4).

positive or negative moral value by the purposes of agents. The spiritual self, by contrast, may be identified with goodness if it is taken to be an extension of or connected to the same dimension of reality in which an immaterial and perfectly good God exists independently of the material universe.[141] If this is granted then the human being's link to this spiritual realm is conceivably the source of our moral intuitions, as well as a desire for truth which could in part be motivated by an innate sense that material existence is not the whole of reality.[142]

On this dualistic holism view, a human being is ontologically good when spirit and matter exist in harmonious unity, or when the physical body is successfully infused or integrated with the goodness of spirit. Nevertheless, if participation in REA's highest goods is *ceteris paribus* only possible for agents with experience of will-setting freedom, then this spiritual dimension cannot be the controller of the will, since if this were so agents would always choose to act with moral goodness. Rather, will-setting freedom entails that *the spiritual self can only be one influence on the decisions of the will, alongside those influences arising from the physical self.* For a human agent to have a good will, then, means that they have full epistemic access, through their intuitions, to the moral knowledge and desire for truth that are natural properties of the immaterial self.[143]

As spiritual-physical unities made for embodied existence in REA, a harmonious balance between the spiritual and physical influences on the will is therefore the optimal state for human beings. On this view, the challenge of the test of will-setting freedom is to *preserve our innate goodness by integrating the spiritual and material influences on the will in our neuro-physical make-up as embodied agents so that the union of spirit and matter may flourish in a realm of enhanced agency.* This anthropology implies that a fundamental disunity or disintegration of these spiritual and material dimensions of being would be a bad or evil state of affairs. We can therefore develop an account of the potential badness of human nature by defining an *evil act* and a *self-corrupting act* in relation to this spirit-matter ontology:

> *Evil act* ^{df} = any act by an agent that reduces themselves and others to merely their physical dimension of being.

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[141] My preference is to the view this immaterial self as a *created* thing that is connected to a dimension of reality in which God exists, rather than as an eternal part of God's immaterial being.

[142] For a scientific and philosophical case for the existence of a non-material or spiritual reality see Thomas Nagel (2012).

[143] Brain imaging studies show that personal moral dilemmas elicit emotions that influence moral intuitions (Cohen, 2015). If we suppose that the spiritual self is implicated in the generation of human emotions, then this is one way the immaterial dimension of being might influence moral behaviour.

Self-corrupting act ^{df} = an evil act that sets an agent's will toward forming a character that is excessively or solely identified with the physical influences on the will.

The definition of an evil act follows from identifying goodness with spirit. This means that an act which reduces a person to merely their physical dimension of being lacks any goodness and so is evil in a privative sense. Cases of rape, torture and exploitation where a person's body is used solely as means to satisfy the physical and emotional desires of others would involve evil acts. Self-corrupting acts are evil acts that are self-forming in freely setting a person's will and character toward evil. All self-corrupting acts are evil acts, but not all evil acts are self-corrupting since a person may be forced to perform an evil act against their will or may become aware of the badness of such acts or habits and subsequently seek to reintegrate the influence of the spirit into their lives. Evil acts, then, can either motivate repentance or result in a self-corrupted will that is irretrievably evil.

Self-corrupting acts are *corrupting* because they change the original state of the human agent, which is innate goodness. These will-setting actions may involve one-off life-changing situations, for example a pivotal choice between career ambition and moral conviction, or be part of a cumulative set of decisions that irrevocably corrupt the will. Epistemically, self-corrupting acts override or supress the moral intuitions arising from the spiritual influence on an agent's will. An evil-willed person, on this view, is someone who has completely closed themselves off from the moral sense and desire for truth carried within this spiritual influence. Ontologically, self-corrupting acts may result in an agent becoming an essentially divided being with spiritual and physical dimensions existing as conflicting parts of a whole. As the immaterial self is the bearer of a person's being and character after death, we may suppose that it acts like a mould to preserve whatever neuro-physiology is formed by a lifetime of self-forming actions, so that self-corrupted persons are resurrected with a neuro-physical make-up that reflects their excessive identification with the physical self and its alienation from the spiritual influence on their being.

Having outlined this account of evil acts and wills, how are we to understand the *spiritual-physical innocence* claim concerning the potential badness of human nature? For human beings to flourish as spiritual-physical unities in REA, it seems two conditions must be fulfilled. The immaterial self must be integrated successfully with the physical body. Since the immaterial and material dimensions of being form a holistic unity that does not subordinate one dimension to the other, the human being must be an open system in which both spiritual and physical influences make up the synthetic unity of the whole. Secondly, the human being must have experience of material existence, since an integration can only take hold with the sorting through of spiritual and physical influences

on the will in moments of action in a physical environment. In other words, *the material world exists because experience of embodied agency is necessary for spiritual-physical integration.*

Two factors, then, explain the potential badness of human beings as spiritual-physical unities. Each human person embodies a new combination of spirit and matter existing for the first time in a material environment. This inexperience with embodied agency seems likely to lead to mistakes in a will-setting environment. In first encounters with choices between moral conviction and personal ambition, for example, an inexperienced agent may lack the knowledge or foresight concerning the bad effects of acting immorally to want to avoid self-corrupting acts. Secondly, this possibility is made probable by the fact that the spiritual dimension of being, by virtue of its immaterial nature, is not an evident part of material reality. It seems likely that *immersion in material existence* would be a powerful temptation for human beings to prioritise the physical dimension of being, or become overly preoccupied with it, causing them to forget or supress the spiritual influence on their wills. For the evil-willed such self-corrupting choices ultimately lead to the disintegration rather than preservation of the innate unity of their beings.

Conceivably, there is also a candidate brain mechanism for this account of potential human badness. Earlier we noted that infants and very young children possess the empathy, altruism, and interpersonal understanding which are the building blocks of morality. The neural and chemical make-up of their brains also gives infants the flexibility and openness to experience to be highly adaptive and creative learners and explorers (Gopnik, 2010, p.81). These capacities flourish in early childhood because of the lack of control by an undeveloped prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain that organises behaviour in time and context, associated with adult capacities for focus, planning and efficient agency, including the automatic processing needed to swiftly screen out irrelevant thoughts or actions. Distinctive to human beings, the neural circuitry of the prefrontal cortex completes its development sometime in a person's mid-twenties (Gopnik, 2010, p.81) (Gopnik, 2010, p.81).

The basic circuitry that shapes future brain development is laid down during infancy and early childhood when there is an overproduction of neurons and their connections (Kolb et al., 2012, p.17186).[144] On EAT's account of dualistic holism, the immaterial self conceivably has an excitatory impact on the production of neurons in the immature infant brain, suggesting a possible explanation for this early explosion of neural growth. It could also be that during this period the innate goodness of the spiritual dimension of being is a dominant influence on the brain's neural architecture. In other words, the infant mind is not only responsive to external stimuli from the environment, but to

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[144] In the human brain the peak of synaptic density is reached between one and five years of age, and dendritic spine density, a surrogate for the number of excitatory synapses on a neuron, is two to threefold greater in childhood than in adulthood (Kolb et al., 2012, p.17187).

the internal influence of the immaterial self which expresses itself neuro-physically in the early structure of the brain. This influence could explain the absolute moral convictions of very young children and the nonstop "why?" questioning of truth-seeking toddlers.[145] As the child becomes more independent the prefrontal cortex develops. New neural networks form that are primarily focussed on the experience of being an embodied agent in the world, involving the formulation of intentions, goals and plans motivated by physical and psychological influences on the will.

On this account of neuro-physical development, there may then be two main stages of growth, an earlier stage open to the internal influence of an innately good immaterial self, the later more externally directed as the prefrontal cortex increases its capacity for focus, planning and agency. Both of these patterns of neural development would be necessary for enhanced agency. However, the interplay between them could be implicated in the conflicting volitional streams of Robert Kane's self-forming actions. In the businesswoman's dilemma between moral conviction and personal ambition, the neural network formed under the earlier dominant influence of the immaterial self may be the locus of her moral intuitions and willingness to do what is right. Her prefrontal cortex and its capacities for planning and agency could be the main source of practical thoughts concerning her will for career advancement. In this way, the businesswoman's volitional conflict may express a struggle between the innate goodness of the neural substrate she inherits from the earlier spiritual influence on her neuro-physical make-up and the neural networks she has developed in adult life.

Interestingly, the prefrontal cortex is involved in inhibiting thoughts and actions that make agency inefficient by pruning the brain network of unused neural connections and strengthening useful ones (Gopnik, 2010, p.81; Kolb et al., 2012, p.17187). It could be that the prefrontal area is implicated in overriding or bypassing earlier neural networks in the substrate of a person's neuro-physiology. On this view, we are responsive to our moral intuitions when the prefrontal region is directly guided by connections with this substrate. A self-forming action preserves goodness of will when it strengthens the connections between these earlier neural networks and the total system. In this way, endorsing the moral choice in her dilemma may be thought to increase the businesswoman's neuro-physical complexity by integrating past and present parts of her neuro-physical make-up. In an evil act, by contrast, the chosen volitional stream conceivably bypasses the earlier substrate, while a self-corrupting choice permanently prunes out connections with this part of the neural system. Opting for the immoral choice in her dilemma may therefore be thought to reduce the businesswoman to her material dimension of being by prioritising neural networks

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[145] Perhaps infant emotions also derive their intensity and orientation from the immaterial self's excitant effect on early neurophysiology.

concerned only with her agency in the external world, and associated physical and psychological satisfactions, at the expense of those brain patterns that reflect the internal spiritual influence of the immaterial self.[146]

On this view, every situation, an unexpected financial windfall, a stubbed toe, a horrific car accident, is a test of our efforts to preserve goodness of will in our neuro-physical make-up as embodied agents. For example, responding with gratitude to conditions of flourishing or with patience at times of adversity conceivably strengthens neural pathways devoted to virtuous actions and purposes by deepening their integration into a person's neuro-physiology. Whereas goodness of will may be eroded by reacting in the opposite ways, as habitually responding with impatience in times of adversity or greediness in conditions of flourishing prioritises neural networks linked to short-term psychological and physical needs, such as anger and lust, weakening and potentially pruning out pathways to the neural substrate formed under the influence of the spiritual self. For some such individuals serious adversities may occasion the kind of post-traumatic growth discussed by Stump (2010, 2018). In the neuro-physical view outlined above, these experiences may be thought of as jolting the self out of self-destructive volitional streams that supress pathways to more beneficial neural networks, once again opening the person up to the underlying influence of the spiritual dimension of their being in a new phase of personal growth.

4.5.3 Agent Relative Standards

P 5iii   *REA is only maximally good if the prior test of will-setting freedom measures goodness of will according to an agent relative standard, accounting for the circumstances of each person.*

The previous section argued that the good-maximising view of God implies that such a deity would create human beings with an innately good nature as a necessary condition of maximising the numbers that become enhanced agents. This anthropology sets up the test of will-setting freedom with an in-built-bias towards success, where existence in REA is the default outcome of all human beings by virtue of being human, unless we disqualify ourselves through self-corrupting actions. This section will argue that the measuring of the goodness of our wills according to agent relative standards is also a necessary condition of ensuring that as few as possible are disqualified from life

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[146] Pruning is a key element of neuro-physical development since having overly dense neural circuitry is functionally detrimental (Kolb et al., 2012, p.17187). However, the *way* neural networks are pruned by activity in the pre-frontal cortex possibly involves risks for moral development.

in REA. The *agent relative principle* in P 5iii) relies on two claims about two types of uniform standards:

> *Demanding standard*: a disqualifying standard that is uniformly too high would exclude some good-willed agents from REA, which is not compossible with the maximal goodness of REA.

> *Undemanding standard*: A disqualifying standard that is uniformly too low would include some evil-willed agents in REA, which is not compossible with the maximal goodness of REA.

The assumption underlying these premises is that the scope to preserve our innate goodness of will within our neuro-physical make-up as embodied agents varies depending on the circumstances of each individual. Returning to the exam analogy, students participating in an exam may have different backgrounds and capabilities. Some may have a chronic illness which affects their performance on exam day. Others may be intelligent but have a learning disability like dyslexia that affects skills involved in reading, spelling and writing. Perhaps others are healthy and ordinarily good learners but they are affected on the day by an emotionally disruptive family background. Still others may be very bright but the exam is not their first language. Setting a uniformly high pass threshold for this exam without taking account of these individual circumstances would likely fail these students despite their capacity to do well all other things being equal. Similarly, we could expect that setting the pass mark uniformly at too low a level would ensure that some very bad students would succeed. Perhaps the smart student who does not care about the subject, or the bully that has always gotten someone else to do his homework, would pass despite their bad characters. It seems that examiners who wanted as many participants as possible to pass while screening out very bad students would try to ensure these personal factors do not determine success or failure. For example, they may put in place special arrangements to give good students with learning difficulties and language problems every chance to perform according to their abilities.

The implications of this analogy for measuring goodness of will are clear. If the disqualifying standard is uniformly too high, then everyone other than prophets and saints, for example, would be excluded from REA, limiting the numbers that become enhanced agents. If the standard is uniformly too low, where everyone including genocidal totalitarian dictators pass the test, then the success of many evil-willed persons would not make REA a maximally good environment. *It seems that a good-maximising God would take account of the specific circumstances of each individual agent.*

For example, the poor man sharing his last piece of bread with a hungry stranger may have greater goodness of will than the multi-millionaire giving a tax-deductible donation of thousands of

pounds to charity. The sharing of bread is the most that the poor man can do in his situation, whereas the rich man's donation is perhaps the least he can do. The gang member who chooses not to use his strength to steal from the weak is good-willed in a way that is not the case with the philanthropist who gives lavishly to the poor to acquire the social influence needed to advance a self-serving agenda. The gang member restrains his power to benefit others at the expense of his own his material interests, while the philanthropist benefits others to promote his own power and interests. Similarly, the prostitute who feeds starving stray cats and dogs with her spare income may be more good-willed than the businesswoman who is a faithful wife but emotionally cold with her children.

Specifically, both the internal and external dimensions of an act matter when measuring goodness of will according to agent relative standards. The content of a person's intentions matters, alongside their scope to act in the circumstances in which they find themselves.[147] The importance of the internal dimension of agent relative situations is brought out by the example of the victim of childhood abuse. The victim in adulthood may become an introvert and recluse, appearing anti-social and ungenerous to others. The long-term trauma from the abuse has seriously restricted her capacity to act and develop certain social virtues. Nevertheless, she may be good-willed if these behaviours reflect her motivation to avoid becoming an abuser herself. In doing so she struggles to prevent making her personal well-being dependent on satisfying psychological and physical needs that will cause harm to others. Understood in terms of the dualistic holism set out in the previous section, her act of self-denial expresses something of the spiritual influence on her will, and her refusal to reduce herself and others to merely their physical dimension of being.

The example of the gang member illustrates the external dimension of the agent relative principle. A young man may be born into a social context in which criminal groups exercise power over communities and neighbourhoods. He may have participated in the murder of individuals from rival gangs in internecine struggles for territorial control. Yet his love and respect for his own parents inform his protective behaviour toward elderly people in the neighbourhoods under his gang's control, to the extent that he intervenes to prevent others in his gang molesting them in any way. Whereas killing members of rival gangs is a necessary evil in the struggle for control, for him stealing from his community's older residents would be a gratuitous use of his power. In other words, the young man effects his version of the least cost principle. He minimises harms caused to others by only participating in those evils involved in bringing about what is for him in his personal context the

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[147] Kane argues that a comprehensive account of freedom involves the internal and external dimensions of acts, stressing that his theory concerns both freedom of the *will* and of *action*, not just the latter. He attributes the conventional focus on freedom from external constraints to the influence of Hobbes and Locke on debates in the philosophy of action (2011b, p.384).

greater good of his gang's control of territory. In doing so, he seems more good-willed than a wealthy senator who has never murdered anyone but who nonetheless consistently lobbies for his country's military involvement in overseas conflicts because of his financial ties to arms manufacturers.

How might a good-maximising God have the knowledge to take these agent relative factors into account? We could simply suppose that an omniscient God has this knowledge but perhaps two mechanisms suggest themselves. If a God-made world is part of a four-dimensional universe, as discussed in section 4.3, then every point of its past, present and future is observable to a God that is both omnipresent within the world and exists eternally outside it. This would mean that the external circumstances of an agent's actions throughout his or her life are always reviewable and knowable to God.

For an act's internal dimension, we can suppose that the immaterial self may somehow provide God with knowledge of an agent's intentions. We have already suggested that the part of the self which survives death may store a person's consciousness and memories. It may also be that it preserves a memory of the internal content of all significant acts, including the *actual* intentions with which they were carried out. This is the sort of truth which is ordinarily accessible to us when our consciences make us reflect on what we have done or intend to do. If this immaterial self possesses knowledge of the internal reality of our actions, then in principle this knowledge is shareable with other immaterial minds, including the mind of God.

We can see from these examples how the premises concerning uniformly demanding and undemanding standards might be true. Since REA can only exist if all its agents are good-willed, the agent relative principle makes its realisation possible by ensuring that all genuinely evil-willed agents are excluded from REA, and all those who have preserved their innate goodness of will, irrespective of their circumstances, are included in REA. It could be objected that a world where all human beings are provided with broadly the same external conditions would result in more passing the test, in the same way that an exam is generally set up so that all students experience the same supportive environment, rather than placing some students in a darkened room for example, while others have adequate light. The discussion of unpredictability in section 4.5.1 suggests one response, that uniform conditions would make life too predictable, and therefore less of a genuine test of free will. A variety of social and cultural conditions would also be instrumental in making the population of REA as diverse as possible. In section 4.3, I argued that the repeatability and inexhaustibility of REA's web of learning, creativity and relatedness goods in part depends on the diversity of these goods. A more persuasive answer, however, is that the variability of conditions is an unsurprising feature of a will-setting environment because the social fabric of this world is partly created by the cumulative

choices of agents. Since these agents are free to devote their wills to good or bad ends and they lack perfect knowledge of the consequences of their actions, social conditions will inevitably vary depending on the positive and negative impacts of different decisions.

The inevitable variability of social conditions in a will-setting environment provides a further reason why its test of goodness of will requires agent relative standards. The material circumstances of the poor man may be created by a powerful elite that concentrates wealth in the hands of a few, creating scarcity for the many. Nevertheless, all it takes for the poor man to be good-willed is to share the bread that he has. He need not have the power to do more. He need not become a politician or a philanthropist, a philosopher or a theologian. Rather, the agent relative principle is inclusive because it is undemanding, tasking us to do what we can whatever our circumstances. By contrast, uniformly requiring all of us to attain spiritual perfection, for example, as a condition of our experiencing the greatest good would likely be too demanding and less achievable for some rather than others in a variable will-setting environment.

4.5.4 Systemic Moral Evil and the Ungovernability of Nature

P5 iv)   *REA is only maximally good if the prior test of will-setting freedom constrains the harmful influence of systemic moral evil through an ungovernable natural order that is beyond collective human control.*

In previous sections I have argued that the use of will-setting freedom in self-forming actions is a necessary condition of human beings developing the neuro-physical capacity for change and growth required to participate in the highest kinds of goods and the full plurality of goods in REA. Section 4.5.2 endorsed a dualistic holism account of human beings as spiritual-physical unities that identifies the innate goodness of human nature with the spiritual or immaterial dimension of being. The section also defined a self-corrupting act as one which sets an agent's will toward forming a character that is excessively or solely identified with the physical influences on the will. Section 4.5.3 argued that the social fabric of a will-setting environment is partly created by the cumulative choices of agents and since these agents are free to form good or evil wills and lack perfect knowledge of the consequences of their actions, social conditions will depend on the positive and negative impacts of different decisions. From these premises I argue in this section that constraining the influence of *systemic moral evil* is a necessary condition of maximising the numbers who become enhanced agents, and that the *ungovernability of the natural order* is a necessary macro-level constraint on this source of evil.

Systemic moral evil [df] = any collective activity of evil-willed agents organised to exercise influential power over large numbers of people.

Systematic moral evil (SME), then, is evil that comes about through the corporate activities of groups of individuals who control institutions of power. As it can shape the social fabric of an environment in which agents are free to set their wills toward good or evil ends, SME has the capacity to influence large numbers of people to corrupt their innately good natures by promoting certain ideas, values and norms or through coercing behaviour. In other words, if evil acts reduce spiritual-physical beings to merely their physical natures, then SME enables and replicates such activities as widely as possible within the societies under its control. It follows from this that if SME arises in the world and its power remains unchecked, then fewer human beings would preserve the innate goodness of their natures and so succeed in becoming enhanced agents.

Nazi Germany is a paradigm case of systemic moral evil. Quite apart from the harm caused through war and genocide, the totalitarian use of state power by the Nazi government may be thought to have corrupted the German people. It normalised an ideology that reduced human beings to the physical characteristic of race to justify German superiority over and domination of inferior races.[148] Chattel slavery in the Americas and the transatlantic trade in African slaves that facilitated it may be taken as another example of this kind of moral evil. Chattel slavery reduced a person, against their will, to the status of property owned by another person who had absolute control over their life and labour, depriving them of rights to freedom, wealth and family.[149]

The transatlantic slave trade makes the institutional and corporate nature of SME evident. Financed by European banks, government-backed slave trading corporations in Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Great Britain procured, sold and transferred Africans to the Americas for the exploitation of their labour in agricultural production. Operating under international treaties these corporations paid import taxes, duties and licensing fees to whichever monarch held monopoly rights over the transatlantic trade. To raise capital and distribute profits, they offered stock options and shares to merchants, bankers, aristocrats and monarchs. Institutions of law, commerce, finance and diplomacy sustained the commodification of human beings based on race for nearly four centuries (Muhammad, 2019, pp.214-225).

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[148] See David Welch (2004) for an account of how the Nazi state propagandised the German population.

[149] Chattel slavery may be contrasted with forms of pre-modern slavery in which slaves could own property, marry and raise free children, pass on an inheritance, and buy their freedom (Brown and Ali, 2017).

The dualistic holism of EAT's concept of human nature provides a possible explanation for these historical examples of systemic moral evil. Since evils reduce a person to their physical self, they act against the person's whole or complete nature by denying the existence or importance of the immaterial dimension of their being. Since we may suppose that, *ceteris paribus*, a person prefers to act in accord with their complete nature, a person will only do otherwise unwillingly or without independent motivation. This in turn implies that an evil act involves some exercise of control over others. In other words, by reducing a person to their physical dimension of being, the evil agent uses power to force or influence them to participate in an act against their whole natures. We can see this coercive dimension of evil in the example of chattel slavery, where one human being has absolute power over another.

On this view, systemic moral evil is an extension of the agency of the evil-willed. There is a limit to the control that a single individual can have over another. For example, the physical vulnerability of the body to attack is a significant constraint on an individual's use of power in the world. However, if a group of agents pool their resources and act collectively, they can exercise much greater control over others, giving them more scope to do evil, as with the corporate endeavour of the transatlantic slave trade. In other words, just as the agency of the good-willed is enhanced in REA, *systemic moral evil enhances the agency of the evil-willed in a will-setting environment.*

The definitions of evil and self-corrupting acts in section 4.5.2 suggests a psychological motivation for the development of SME. In acting to reduce another person to their physical natures the malevolent agent must override or supress the good influence on their own will from the spiritual dimension of their being, and the moral knowledge and desire for truth it possesses. The evil act therefore reduces both victim and perpetrator to their physical natures. In reducing themselves in this way, evil agents oppress a part of themselves, allowing their physical natures to dominate their spiritual selves. On this view, the will to control others as part of an evil act is a projection out into the world of the perpetrator's own internal oppression of the spiritual influence on their will. Systemic moral evil is the same projection writ large, involving the oppression of peoples and societies.

If systemic moral evil is a possibility in a will-setting environment populated by innately good yet potentially bad human beings, how might its corrupting influence on individuals be checked? In enhanced agency theodicy, a good-maximising God logically cannot both test goodness of will and interfere with the free wills of evil persons to prevent them from participating in SME. Returning to our exam analogy, there is no test of the knowledge and performance of students if the examiner hands out earpieces to every student so that she can dictate the correct answers to them during the

exam. What the examiner can do is put in place conditions to limit the influence that bad students may have on others. She can enforce policies to prevent cheating and minimise disruptions by ensuring silence. These conditions are macro-level constraints on the exam environment that externally limit the behaviour of bad students so that others have the chance to succeed.

Section 4.5.1 suggested mortality in a will-setting environment contributed to producing the most created moral goodness for the least cost by limiting the lifespans of individual agents and thereby constraining their scope for moral evil. This section supposes that the ungovernability of the natural order is a macro-level constraint on the scope that groups of individuals have to participate in SME. As suggested above, the ability to control people and environments is an essential feature of this kind of evil. The possibility considered here is that the power and unpredictability of natural events like volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, plagues and climate changes ultimately put the world beyond the institutional control of any one person or group of human beings. For example, if this control is exercised by a single individual like the Egyptian pharaoh in the biblical story of Moses, we can imagine that the claim to divinity that justified his absolute power and religious authority would have been seriously undermined by the plagues of Egypt demonstrating the limits of his earthly power. Alternatively, if this control is exercised by a consortium of wealthy slave trading merchants through the social influence their wealth and prestige gives them, we can imagine that their control would evaporate if they were to become suddenly bankrupt after losing their fleet of ships at sea.

The fundamental ungovernability of the natural order is a structural feature of the world that makes ephemeral any human claim to authority and power based on control of the material environment. In terms of the good-maximising God, what is being suggested here is a reframing of the traditional religious conviction that natural disasters are divine punishments for sins. Rather, the conjecture is that the scope and unpredictability of natural disasters work to impede the *social reproduction* of systemic moral evil, the process by which societies reproduce themselves from one generation to the next and within generations (Burton, 2014, pp.1802-1804). This may be expected on the good maximising view because constraining the growth and activity of systemically evil societies limits their power to corrupt an innately good human nature through their controlling influence, and thereby maximises the numbers that become enhanced agents.

For example, DNA evidence recovered from Mexican burial sites suggests that the sixteenth century collapse of Aztec society was caused by a deadly strain of salmonella from Europe. Two major epidemics beginning in 1545 and 1576 killed an estimated seven to eighteen million people, up to eighty percent of the country's twenty-five million native inhabitants (Callaway, 2017). Archaeological research also shows that in the decades leading up to the Spanish conquest in the

1520s, the Aztecs ritually sacrificed between one to twenty thousand people annually, with the dedication of the Temple Mayor in Tenochtitlan in 1487 estimated to have involved the sacrifice of around twenty thousand victims (Pennock, 2012, pp.280, 284). If the ritual practice of human sacrifice is a case of systemic moral evil, we can suppose that the epidemic of European salmonella was a natural disaster that prevented the social reproduction of this form of evil. Materially, the epidemic drastically reduced the population that participated in this religious system. At the psychological level, the collapse most likely demoralised those who had put their faith in the priestly class that had failed to protect them, fatally undermining the legitimacy of Aztec religious authorities.[150]

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 is another possible case study of our ungovernable natural order constraining systemic moral evil. The 8.5Mw magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami and firestorm killed approximately 10,000 of Lisbon's residents, and injured a third of its 150,000 inhabitants (Chester, 2008, p.79). Religious commentators viewed the earthquake as divine punishment for Lisbon's sins during the Inquisition (Chester, 2008, p.80) while Voltaire famously questioned whether any such punishment could ever be the work of a just and benevolent God (Voltaire and Fleming, 2005). However, one candidate reason for supposing the earthquake to be a case of providential constraint on SME is the pivotal role of the African slave trade in Portugal's rise to power as a European state and its worldwide colonial expansion (Viotti da Costa, 1985). Portugal pioneered the transatlantic slave trade from the mid-fifteenth century onwards as an early holder of the *Asiento*, a monopoly over the trade granted by the papacy (Muhammad, 2009, p.179). Growth in the trade led to the shipping of an estimated 4,441,900 slaves from Western Africa to the Americas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, primarily from Portuguese controlled Angola (Domingues da Silva, 2013, p.105). Given the brutal and dehumanising nature of chattel slavery and the transatlantic trade it seems reasonable to suggest that Portugal was a centre of systemic moral evil during this period.

I am not aware of a study of the effect of the Lisbon earthquake on the decline of Portugal's empire, but it is reasonable to assume that it had a devastating impact on the country's power to compete with European rivals. The earthquake cost Portugal between thirty-two and forty-eight percent of its gross domestic product, financially probably the greatest natural catastrophe to have affected western Europe.[151] Portugal's transatlantic slave trade continued for a time after the Lisbon

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[150] For the religious nature of Aztec ritual sacrifice see Pennock (2012, pp.285-287).

[151] Apart from the Maldives no country affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 had losses exceeding six percent of their GDP (Chester, 2008, p.79).

earthquake, peaking between 1800 and 1825 (Domingues da Silva, 2013, p.113). However, it seems that in the fifty years after the earthquake Portugal's relative power had declined to such an extent that it could provide little political or institutional resistance to the international abolition movements of the 1800s. After three centuries of ever-increasing shipments of slaves by Portugal and other European powers, might not the Lisbon earthquake have contributed to the demise of the trade? An interesting historical fact is highly suggestive about the timing of the natural disaster. It occurred in the middle of the Guarani War of 1754 to 1756, in which Portugal fought against indigenous Guarani Indians to enforce its claim on the lands of seven Jesuit missions, which under the patronage of Spain had offered the Guaranis protection from enslavement by Portuguese traders (Owens, 1993).

Objection 1. *What about the post-mortem fate of innocent victims of natural disasters?* One difficulty for the traditional Christian theist is that the doctrine of original sin should mean that any individual who is not baptised or who has not yet redeemed themselves by professing Christian faith is destined for hell if a natural disaster were to take their life. In enhanced agency theodicy the universal goodness of human nature addresses this problem. To be excluded from REA an individual would need to have lived to an age at which they had made enough life decisions to irrevocably corrupt their innately good natures. This means that infants, children and young people, whose lives are for example taken in an earthquake, would become enhanced agents by virtue of their innate human goodness, since they will not have lived long enough to have corrupted their natures. Moreover, among older age groups agent relative standards for measuring goodness of will would exclude only the genuinely evil-willed from existence in REA. These conditions would ensure that as many earthquake victims as possible become enhanced agents after death. It could be objected that if infants and the young automatically qualify for life in REA, then this implies that our prior test of will-setting freedom is unnecessary. I will address this point in the final section of this chapter.

Objection 2. *Why is it necessary to control systemic moral evil through an ungovernable natural order?* Might not a good-maximising God have other means that are less destructive than natural disasters? As discussed above, divine interference in the wills of agents to prevent them from participating in systemic moral evil is not possible. God logically cannot both test the free wills of agents and determine their wills to do one thing or another. It seems the only way SME can be controlled, other than through an ungovernable natural order, is through the good wills of human beings freely opposing its influence and power. However, from the account of human nature given above, it seems reasonable to suggest that good-willed human beings typically lack the desire to control and dominate others that is essential to the agency of evil, systemic or otherwise. This

implies that the desire of the good-willed to combine their efforts to exercise collective power in society tends to be less strong, *ceteris paribus*, than the same desire among evil-willed agents. Religious history provides counter examples to this claim concerning what might be termed systemic moral goodness. Under the leadership of Moses the Hebrews worked together to escape slavery in Egypt. Inspired by the life of Jesus Christ, his disciples and their followers formed a new religious movement that eventually converted the Roman Empire to the Christian faith. The Prophet Muhammad and his followers overcame the pagan establishment of Mecca to unite Arabia around the new monotheistic religion of Islam.

However, if these events or stories are taken as examples of the triumph of systemic moral goodness, they also suggest why they are exceptions to the rule rather than the norm. Each of these victories involved miraculous divine interventions and revelations that provided the supreme motivation for the individuals that experienced them. Even if in human history systemic moral goodness does succeed at much smaller scales to exercise power in the world without supernatural inspiration, it seems plausible to suggest that these cases arise in *response* to systemic moral evil, and that the evil-willed are generally more driven psychologically to form together in groups to gain power over others. Given these considerations, if our world has a structural constraint on the power of systemic moral evil it would seem to have to exist beyond the scope of human agency in the natural order in the way proposed in this section.

In summary, the argument for the ungovernability of the natural order as a macro constraint on systemic moral evil is as follows:

1) Systemic moral evil ^{df} = any collective activity of evil-willed agents organised to exercise influential power over large numbers of people.

2) In a will-setting environment where human beings are free to devote their wills to good or evil ends, the rise of systemic moral evil is possible.

3) In a will-setting environment systemic moral evil can reduce the numbers that become enhanced agents after death by corrupting the innately good natures of the people under its control and influence.

4) A good-maximising God cannot both test will-setting freedom and interfere with the free wills of persons to prevent them from participating in systemic moral evil.

5) *Ceteris paribus* good-willed individuals have a limited capacity to constrain systemic moral evil because they lack the desire to dominate and control others.

6) From 1 to 5, to maximise the numbers that become enhanced agents the will-setting environment must be structured in a way that provides a macro-level constraint on the growth and power of systemic moral evil.

7) Natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, plagues and climate changes satisfy 6) by putting the will-setting environment beyond collective human control, and thereby limiting the power of systemic moral evil to corrupt the natures of those under its influence.

8) Deaths caused by the ungovernability of the natural order do not result in fewer numbers becoming enhanced agents because of the innate goodness of human nature and agent relative standards for measuring goodness of will.

4.5.5 A Realm of Restricted Agency

P5 iv) *REA is only maximally good if the prior test of will-setting freedom results in evil-willed persons existing in a post-mortem realm of restricted agency.*

As agents in a will-setting environment are free to become evil-willed, the question of the post-mortem fate of these individuals must be addressed. If these agents are to have a life after death, then as section 4.3 argued this existence must be separate from REA, since a realm of enhanced agency containing the evil-willed would not be maximally good. Moreover, the good-maximising view implies that this separate existence must restrict the agency of the evil-willed in some way to minimise the amount of created moral evil it produces. Indeed, it seems that agency in this realm ought to be more restricted than the ordinary agency of individuals in a will-setting environment. Otherwise this post-mortem realm for the evil-willed would merely replicate and perpetuate the same levels of moral evil in a life after death without reducing it. In this section I will argue that just as a good-maximising God would want to fully realise the agency of the good-willed in REA, that such a deity would want to limit as much as possible the agency of the evil-willed in a post-mortem *realm of restricted agency* (RRA).

Various premises from earlier sections suggest how we can think about the nature of a realm of restricted agency. In section 4.2, the argument for a good-maximising God inferred that such a deity would promote best what is objectively the individual's own well-being and to bring about the most good for the least cost in evil, where the evil involved is necessary to realise greater goods. Moreover, since such a God would want to maximise the good for each created individual, this implies that the internal point of view of agents matters to the goodness of any afterlife. In other words, these objective and subjective considerations, what is objectively in the persons best interests and what they subjectively deem to be good, need to be weighed in the balance when considering the post-mortem fate of the evil-willed. In section 4.4's discussion of death and re-

embodiment, I also argued that the dualistic holism of EAT's view of human nature entails that the post-mortem survival of just the immaterial dimension of a person's being would be a radically reduced continuation of the life of that individual. In section 4.5.2's discussion of the potential badness of human nature I argued that self-corrupting acts tend toward the disintegration of the spiritual and material dimensions that make up a person's whole being, rather than their integration or harmony. These considerations suggest two possible realms of restricted agency which both complete this process of spiritual-physical disintegration. In one possible realm, only the physical dimension of a person's being has an afterlife, in the other only the immaterial self survives death. I shall refer to these possibilities as *zombie world* and *ghost world*.

Zombie world

Zombies are defined as resurrected individuals re-created with the bodies and neurophysiology of their ante-mortem selves, but without the immaterial dimension of their beings. In EAT's dualistic holism, zombies would be mere physical artefacts or husks of their former selves absent the immaterial part of consciousness that carries a person's memories and character. If this immaterial dimension also animates the life of an embodied being, and we suppose that it is possible for the physical body to exist without it, then it seemingly could only do so as a zombie at a radically reduced level of agency with the simplest movements involving great biomechanical difficulty. On this view, a zombie world would support an incomplete form of human existence that restricts the agency of the evil-willed. Consequently, such a world may satisfy the least cost principle, since zombies would have very limited scope to harm themselves and others and thereby perpetuate moral evil and suffering in a post-mortem environment.

However, it is not clear how on EAT's dualistic holism a person's body could be alive without the immaterial dimension of being. Perhaps some external impulse from the environment could interact with the neuro-physiology of a zombie brain to provide the motive force or energy needed to sustain minimal activity. Even if such a state were possible, and it restricted the post-mortem agency of the evil-willed, the best interests criterion noted above suggests that a good-maximising God would not create such a realm. Section 4.5.2 defined a self-corrupting act as one that sets an agent's will toward forming a character that is excessively or solely identified with the physical influences on the will. A God promoting what is objectively the well-being of individuals would not fulfil this orientation of the will by re-creating self-corrupted persons as only physical beings and sustain them, indefinitely or otherwise, in this evil state. Since it lacks the consciousness of the immaterial self we can also doubt if a zombie has an internal point of view from which it can judge whether such a life is preferable compared to annihilation, for example.

Moreover, sustaining a zombie world would not satisfy the least cost requirement of the good-maximising principle. Re-creating the evil-willed just so that they can live permanently as zombies reduces them to an evil state and perpetuates it indefinitely, adding to the overall cost of the evil involved in bringing about a realm of enhanced agency. Zombies could die off over time but then what would be the point of resurrecting persons for such a life. Perhaps a zombie world could be conceived of as a type of punishment, but without conscious awareness of moral responsibility for past actions such punishment would be meaningless. Therefore, a post-mortem zombie world that restricts the agency of the evil-willed seems unlikely on the good-maximising view of God.

Ghost world

Section 4.2 argued that embodied beings with free will have greater scope for personal agency then disembodied beings with free will. Embodied persons can produce and participate in non-moral and moral goods of much higher value and in greater quantities than disembodied persons, especially in a material world. Disembodied persons may possibly have a mental life that involves perceptions and experiences, and telepathic communication with other such beings through a temporary merger of minds. Nevertheless, they would have little or no ability to participate in chains of cause and effect involving physical beings and objects. It follows from this that a disembodied existence after death would restrict the agency of evil-willed persons and so minimise the harm that they can cause to themselves and others. Perhaps psychological harm is the most that could be experienced in communicative encounters between such beings.

A ghost world seems metaphysically possible in the dualistic holism of EAT's account of human nature. This could be brought about through the separation of their physical and immaterial dimensions at death, the permanent destruction of their physical bodies and the indefinite post-mortem continuation of personal existence through the immaterial self. If it is granted that the immaterial dimension of being is an essential part of a person's consciousness, including their memories and character, then a kind of personal survival without a body seems possible with the limited forms of agency noted above.

A ghost world would seemingly be a better fate for the evil-willed than a zombie world. A ghostly existence does not preclude the possibility that disembodied persons have a rich mental and social life. By contrast, in reducing persons to physical husks of their former selves, a zombie fate would remove nearly all scope for communication, perception, experience, and agency. Whereas merely continuing the same embodied existence that the malevolent had before death would perpetuate the self-destructive agency that corrupted their natures, a zombie life would end this agency entirely, but at the cost of removing all meaningful personal life. A ghostly existence would

preserve a personal life and a degree of agency, while restricting the capacity to cause harm with a physical body. Given these options, a ghost world would seemingly be in the best interests of the evil-willed.

The least cost principle is also satisfied by the creation of ghost world. By restricting the agency of the malevolent it would minimise the amount of suffering and evil involved in sustaining their lives after death. A zombie life would be a greater intrinsic evil according to this study's definition of evil, as it reduces individuals to their physical dimension of being only. The continuation of the same embodied life that the evil-willed had before death would produce more evil and suffering than a ghost world, increasing the overall cost involved in bringing about a realm of enhanced agency. In other words, embodied and zombie afterlives for the evil-willed both add more to the negative side of the ledger when thinking about how necessary evils are outweighed or defeated in the realisation of greater goods.

However, as discussed in section 4.2, a good-maximising God would also want to promote what is objectively in the best interests of every created person, and for this to be seen to be so from their internal point view. If a self-corrupted nature is a consequence of an agent's excessive identification with the physical dimension of their being, then would not a disembodied existence be an unbearable psychological torture for such individuals? It would be a life in which the evil agent desperately desired what they could never have. This possibility may cohere with a punishment view of hell, but it seems that from their point of view the malevolent would prefer annihilation to life as a ghost eternally craving bodily existence.

One answer to this difficulty is provided by a realm of restricted agency that has two stages, the first a temporary form of grim hell which is then followed by a ghost world.[152] As noted above, the evil-willed have completely identified themselves with the desires of the physical dimension of their being, to the extent that embodied life is destructive for themselves and for others. To address this problem the evil-willed might be re-embodied after death in order to undergo a temporary phase of intense physical suffering. Unlike traditional notions of hell, the purpose of this physical suffering would be coercive not punitive: *to disabuse the evil-willed of ever wanting embodied existence and produce a willingness to accept a permanent dissociation of their immaterial selves from their bodies.*

Bodily resurrection after death would be required because we may reasonably assume that negative physical experiences are necessary to alienate a person from embodied existence. Coercion would have to be used because the self-corrupted person is incapable of understanding what is in

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[152] Grim and mild versions of hell were defined and discussed in Chapters 2.3 and 3.2.4.

their own best interests: that their embodied lives must end. Therefore, external pressure on the will, through a period of intense physical suffering, is needed to bring about a willingness to reject bodily existence. In other words, rather like redemptive suffering in Stump's theodicy, this physical torment brings about an acquiescence in the will to a fate imposed on it from outside.[153] However, unlike Stump's process of justification, or indeed the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, this first stage of a realm of restricted agency is orientated in the opposite direction. Whereas in these Christian accounts the redemptive suffering of the soul purifies it for heavenly existence, suffering in EAT's temporary grim hell prepares the evil-willed for a disembodied life outside the great good of enhanced agency.

From the internal point of view of the malevolent agent the second part of this two-stage afterlife might be acceptable. As a temporary grim hell brings about a willing rejection of bodily existence in which the evil-willed no longer want anything to do with the physical self and its desires, these individuals would not view disembodied life in ghost world as an unbearable psychological torture. It might be objected that if these persons have memories of grim hell, then annihilation would be preferable to an eternal mental life tormented by these traumatic experiences. However, it could be that as they transition to an entirely new existence as disembodied persons these past experiences would become distant memories or may even be forgotten entirely, like waking up from a nightmare. What could remain instead is a general sense of relief for having been saved from grim hell and gratitude for no longer having a self-destructive nature. These individuals would be precluded from any possibility of achieving the highest good of free embodied existence in REA, but their continued life, albeit in reduced form, would be preferable to annihilation.[154]

This account of a realm of restricted agency implies that the evil-willed have no second chances after death. Once an individual has completely set their will on evil during the ante-mortem test of free will then the immaterial self is immutably configured with that bad character and so precluded from ever becoming an enhanced agent. This aspect of ghost world invites the vagueness objection outlined in Chapter 2.3. Might not there be individuals at the point of death who are partially evil-willed and partially good-willed? If so, it seems unfair to deny the former an embodied life in REA based on an arbitrary cut-off between these cases of individuals.

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[153] Recall that in EAT's dualistic holism the immaterial and material dimensions of being are integrated from the start of a person's life in the womb, therefore any process to separate the two permanently would have to overcome the deep integration of the spirit and body, quite apart from the evil will's excessive identification with the physical self.

[154] Note that ghost world turns gnostic cosmology on its head, making disembodied existence the lowest good, rather than part of the highest good.

One answer is that evil actions may have a compounding effect once a certain threshold is reached which leads to a radical divergence in the natures of good and evil-willed agents. In other words, self-corrupting acts tend towards the extreme in forming a person's character, so that there are no partially evil-willed characters. This seems epistemically possible. Addictions may be one mechanism by which the partially evil-willed become increasingly malevolent. Such changes could also manifest in an entirely internal way that may not be discernible from a person's outward appearance. This does not preclude the possibility of some form of purgatorial suffering for some partially good-willed persons before entering a realm of enhanced agency, perhaps in an intermediate state between death and resurrection. Ghost world, however, would only be for those who have gone past a point of no return in setting their wills on evil, and who would bring an irrevocably evil nature to an embodied existence in REA.

It seems then that a ghost world might maximise the goodness of a post-mortem realm of restricted agency for the evil-willed. An everlasting disembodied existence produces less overall evil than an embodied hell where the evil-willed have the same agency as they had in mortal life. Applying the agent relative and least cost principles to the temporary grim hell, we may further suppose that each individual only experiences the amount and duration of suffering which is necessary for that person to willingly acquiesce to separating from their bodies permanently.[155] In other words, there would be no gratuitous suffering involved in this process of separation. Following Stump's case for suffering that is involuntary *simpliciter*, we can also argue that the pain involved in bringing about a willing separation of the immaterial self from the physical body is justified because it averts much greater harms, such as an eternal grim hell or annihilation. Finally, their acquiescence to a disembodied life in ghost world means that the evil-willed would perceive it to be a relative good that promotes best their objective well-being, ensuring that this realm of restricted agency maximises the good for each created individual.

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[155] The suggestion here is that attachment to the physical dimension of being may vary from person to person, with some requiring more physical suffering to break this attachment.

4.6 Evil Outweighed and Defeated

P6   *From 2-5, REA is a great good that defeats and outweighs all the necessary evils involved in its realisation.*

This concluding section will argue that the theodicy proposed in this chapter provides an explanation of the world in which evils are defeated and outweighed by the great good of a realm of enhanced agency. This section summarises EAT's account of moral and natural evils and considers objections. Chapter 1.7 defined the notions of *outweighing* and *defeat* in the following way:

Outweighed evil df = a necessary part of a good whole where the net positive value of the whole is greater than the disvalue of the evil part.

Defeated evil df = a necessary part of a good whole that contributes to the goodness of the whole, where the positive value of the whole consists of both its good and evil parts. [156]

To show how moral and natural evils are defeated and outweighed in enhanced agency theodicy, its central claims with respect to these evils need re-stating:

Moral Evil:

1) A good-maximising God would want to create a *realm of enhanced agency* (REA), an everlasting existence that fully realises the agency of self-aware embodied persons with goodness and freedom of will.

2) REA is maximally good *iff* agents are good-willed, therefore it cannot contain *will-setting freedom*, the freedom to set one's will toward good or evil.

3) REA is maximally good *iff* its environment is dynamic and transformative, developing agents' scope to participate in an ever-expanding plurality of choices and goods.

4) Due to their transformative nature, participation in REA's goods requires a capacity to remain durably good-willed while undergoing neuro-physical change.

5) *Ceteris paribus*, the only way to develop this capacity is by exercising will-setting freedom involving morally significant choices.

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[156] Chapter 1.7, pp.48-49.

6) From 2-5, REA can only exist after a prior test of the goodness of will of agents with will-setting freedom in a separate environment involving morally significant choices.

7) From 1-6, moral evil is a foreseeable by-product of a good-maximising God creating a realm of enhanced agency.

Natural Evil:

8) A will-setting environment makes possible *systemic moral evil*, the collective activity of evil-willed agents to exercise influential power over large numbers of people.

9) *Ceteris paribus*, an ungovernable natural order of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, plagues and climate changes puts a will-setting environment beyond collective human control, and so limits the power of systemic moral evil to corrupt those under its influence and prevent them from passing the test of free will.

10) The distribution of conditions of flourishing and adversity, including natural goods and evils, contributes to the ubiquity of the test of free will within the finite lives of agents in a will-setting environment.

11) The unpredictability of a will-setting environment that randomly distributes conditions of flourishing and adversity, including natural goods and evils, contributes to making it a genuine test of free will.

From these statements I further claim the following concerning the defeat of moral and natural evils:

12) Any moral and natural evil involved in testing will-setting freedom is defeated for those persons who become enhanced agents.

The exam analogy suggests why 12) might be true. *Ceteris paribus*, there is no passing of an exam or graduation from an examined course that does not involve the stress and struggle involved in preparing for and undertaking the exam. There is a bad part, the stress of preparing for and participating in the exam, and a good part, the student's graduation from the course which together make up a good whole, the positive value of which consists of both its good and bad parts. Might not the same be true for the test of free will proposed in EAT? The disanalogy is that at the individual level suffering is not a logically necessary part of a person's test in EAT. As sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.3 discussed, goodness of will may be tested in all circumstances, including benign conditions of

flourishing. Those who experience suffering from moral or natural evils and who succeed in preserving their goodness of will to become enhanced agents have that evil defeated. Their existence in REA could not be achieved without their test of free will, and enhanced agency is a great good because of that test. Yet others may not be tested with hardship and suffering before their deaths. According to the agent relative principle what these individuals do with their good fortune would be part of their test.

Nevertheless, a global level explanation for the logical necessity of the possibility of suffering is provided by P10 and P11 above. If, as argued in section 4.5.1, the least cost principle requires the test of will-setting freedom to involve conditions of both flourishing and adversity to reach every agent within a mortal life, and the random distribution of these conditions of flourishing and adversity is essential to the unpredictable nature of a genuine test of free will, then the ubiquity and unpredictability of these conditions entails the possibility that *some* individuals will be tested with suffering and others will not. Since an ante-mortem test of free will is a necessary condition of bringing about a realm of enhanced agency the following can be claimed:

13) Any evil, natural or moral, involved in making the ante-mortem test of will-setting freedom ubiquitous and genuine through the random distribution of conditions of flourishing and adversity, is defeated for all persons who become enhanced agents.

Objection 1. *A realm of enhanced agency cannot defeat the undeserved suffering of human beings who die without having had their wills tested*. This difficulty concerns infants and small children and individuals with cognitive disabilities. As such persons are not free to set their wills toward good or evil, it is seemingly not possible to test their efforts to preserve goodness of will in their neuro-physical make-up as embodied agents. If children and the cognitively disabled die without having their wills tested in this way, then how as enhanced agents will they come to see any undeserved suffering they experience in a will-setting environment as a defeated part of a good whole?

However, the suffering experienced by such individuals need not be defeated. As set out in section 4.5.2, the innate goodness of human nature means that children and the cognitively disabled would enter REA by default without a test of their free will. In such cases, any suffering they experience would be *outweighed* by the goodness of existence in REA, rather than defeated. This assumes that like everyone else the congenitally disabled would be recreated for a realm of enhanced agency with perfected genotypes, and so without the congenital defects that gave rise to their ante-mortem disabilities. Supposing REA to be an outweighing good for such individuals would satisfy the *sufferer centred requirement*, that the undeserved suffering of an innocent person is permissible only if that person benefits from the good secured by the means that causes that suffering. The good in this

case is REA, the means is an ante-mortem test of will-setting freedom which randomly distributes conditions of flourishing and adversity as part of the unpredictability of that test, including whatever congenital or environmental factors might be the cause of any cognitive disability or premature death.

It could be objected that this does not explain why individuals with microcephaly, for example, and other similar congenital disorders have such lives. Their circumstances may test the goodness of will of their care givers and society at large, but how are they good from the internal point of view of such persons? Perhaps such a life is its own kind of test of the innate goodness of will of such persons. Section 4.3 suggested that freedom of will may be defined more inclusively so that human self-awareness and rationality are extra features in a broad spectrum of intentional agency involving other sentient beings, and that perhaps animals have their own test of free will relative to their capacity for intentional agency and cognition.

This possibility might also include human beings with severe cognitive disabilities. For example, a good-willed person may be expected to respond to negative circumstances with patience and positive events with gratitude, when we could react in the opposite ways. The scope to choose how to respond to situations may be extremely limited for someone with microcephaly, but their life to a degree might involve being grateful for the care they receive and having to be patient with the way that they are. For example, the frustration of not being able to communicate wants and needs is perhaps a major difficulty that such persons must learn to deal with. If such struggles are relative tests of free will at the lower end of the spectrum of intentional agency, then the severely cognitively disabled would pass their particular test by virtue of the innate goodness of their natures and their efforts of will. As this makes the earthly life of such persons part of the overall test of freedom and goodness of will without which REA would not be possible, any suffering that it may involve will be defeated, not just outweighed, by life in REA.

Objection 2. *If the innate goodness of human nature means that some individuals without free will, like children and the cognitively disabled, can exist in REA without having been tested, then the ante-mortem test of free will is unnecessary*. In other words, that human beings without free will have a good afterlife by virtue of their innately good natures reveals an apparent contradiction between two central claims of EAT:

> P 4) A maximally good REA can only exist as the second part of a two-stage world following a prior test of *will-setting freedom*, the freedom of self-aware embodied persons to set their wills toward good or evil (section 4.4).

> P 5ii) REA is only maximally good if the prior test of will-setting freedom involves persons who are innately good-willed (section 4.5.2).

This objection is answered if we suppose the following about the post-mortem fate of young human children and the cognitively disabled. To participate in REA's transformative goods they will need to gain experience of remaining durably good-willed while undergoing neuro-physical change, and can do so safely only under the tutelage of those who have such experience from exercising will-setting freedom in mortal life. In other words, children who are resurrected as they were at the age when they died *can only be raised to become enhanced agents by those with experience of freely preserving goodness of will in their neuro-physical development as embodied agents*. These persons could be their former parents or any other human guardians. By contrast, we may suppose that a disembodied being, like an angel for example, would lack the neuro-physiology and experience of embodied agency needed to fulfil this same guardianship role, leading to mistakes in the nurturing of such children that could result in their maldevelopment as enhanced agents.

The severely cognitively disabled might have a similar post-mortem fate. If their mental age is equivalent to that of someone at an immature stage of physical development, then we might suppose that they are recreated after death with a body of the physical age of someone with that level of cognition. They might then complete their tutelage as embodied agents in REA in the same way as children who died prematurely. Moreover, these persons need not have their agency fully enhanced straight away. As section 4.3 suggested, REA is conceivably a multi-dimensional environment consisting of numerous discrete levels of existence of ever closer proximity to God. One lower layer might serve as a sandbox that nurtures the neuro-physical development of children and the previously cognitively disabled, perhaps with lower levels of agency at first.

These possibilities resolve the apparent contradiction. A maximally good realm of enhanced agency is only possible following a prior stage of existence that tests will-setting freedom, as set out in premises 1-6 in the summary explanation for moral evil above. The earthly experience of enhanced agents is then necessary to nurture the neuro-physical development of other human beings who, without having exercised will-setting freedom, are granted life in REA by virtue of the universal goodness of human nature, which is one of the environmental conditions by which the prior test of free will maximises the numbers that become enhanced agents.

Objection 3. *A realm of enhanced agency is not the sort of good that defeats the undeserved suffering of participants in horrific evils.* To answer this objection I focus on Marilyn McCord Adams's conception of the problem. She defines horrific evils like traumatic cases of rape and violence as those that have the "capacity to devour the positive meaning of participants' lives" (1999, p.81), and which are so "out of proportion to created persons" that they are "sufficient by themselves to constitute the *prima facie* ruin of a person's life" (1988, p.235). She also makes two distinctions, the

first between God's goodness to creation as a whole and God's goodness to created persons, and the second between *immanent* and *transcendent* goods (1999, pp.29-31, 82-83; 1993a, pp.174-175).

Taking God's goodness to individuals who suffer deeply as the paramount problem of evil, she argues that no package of immanent goods, those sensory pleasures of embodied existence, such as experiencing the beauty of nature and art, the joy of creativity and loving personal intimacy with others is "big enough" to defeat the intensity of horrific evils (1999, pp.82-83). Only the incommensurable and transcendent good of intimate relationship with the persons of the Triune God can repair the damage caused by this suffering and make it a meaningful part of a good whole. The victim's self-identification with Christ's suffering or their view of temporal suffering as a mystical vision into the inner life of God are two of the ways Adams suggests such evils can be integrated into a beatific relationship with God (1999, pp.164-168).[157]

There are two main responses to objections that Adams would level against EAT. In her theodicy Adams does not offer a global reason for the existence of horrific suffering, preferring to focus on *how* it might be defeated at the individual level. Perhaps she could appeal to the *felix culpa* defence and argue that without a world that contains horrendous evil the great good of beatific intimacy with a suffering God would not be possible, however this move invites the NRLAFE. The global reason in EAT is stated in the summary argument above. The unpredictability of a will-setting environment that randomly distributes conditions of flourishing and adversity, including the risk of deep suffering, contributes to making the test of free will genuine and ubiquitous.

Alongside this global reason God's goodness to individuals is defensible in EAT. Deep suffering is not logically necessary for participation in REA's highest goods, as it appears to be for the *deepest* level of union with the God of Adams's theodicy.[158] Moreover, in EAT innate goodness of will equips individuals with internal resources with which to respond positively to bad environments and traumatic events. *Ceteris paribus* it seems more feasible for victims of horrific evils to preserve or hold on to an innately good will rather than try to acquire one through this suffering, as would be the case on Adams's view. This possibility is made plausible by the prevalence of phenomena such as resilience and the breaking of cycles of abuse, as discussed in section 4.5.2, since positive outcomes for victims seem more surprising on blank slate and innate badness views of human nature. Section 4.5.3 also outlined how the agent relative principle takes account of the specific circumstances and internal state of each individual agent when measuring goodness of will, to ensure that everyone

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[157] See Adams (1999, Chapter 8) for further options.

[158] Adams argues that horrors are not necessary for beatific intimacy with God, only partially constitutive of this relationship (1999, p.167). Nevertheless, her view does imply victims of horrors have a deeper level of intimacy with God compared with those who have not suffered like Christ.

who could possibly become an enhanced agent does so, irrespective of the damage caused to a person's life by horrific evils.

Adams would object that REA's goods are of the immanent type that she thinks cannot defeat such evils. In other words, the sufferer centred requirement is not satisfied because the great good secured by the means that causes suffering will not do in cases of horrendous evils. However, beatific intimacy with a suffering God does not seem to be the only possible defeating good for such evils. There is no space here to discuss cases of intense suffering with the sensitivity they deserve, nevertheless I suspect EAT's answer would involve the enhanced scope for relatedness goods in REA. The diversity of REA's inhabitants, which is a consequence of test conditions that bring as many people into REA as possible, conceivably provides victims of horrific suffering opportunities to form perfectly suitable therapeutic friendships with individuals of varied and complementary experiences that give them the emotional support they need to progress their flourishing as enhanced agents. As such victims would be recreated in REA with entirely new bodies, we can also suppose that the psychosomatic effects of any trauma would not affect their post-resurrection lives. Experiences of deep trauma might linger in the mind like vivid recurring dreams which fade over time, rather than persist as debilitating ever-present memories.

The task then for REA's therapeutic friendships would be to bring such individuals fully into the present by replacing old memories with new ones. Perhaps this is done by nurturing virtues necessary for their flourishing in REA that they were unable to develop in mortal life due to trauma, for example the courage and confidence involved in creativity goods, or the trust and openness needed for relatedness goods. As these therapeutic friendships are steps toward their full and everlasting participation in REA's goods, horrific evils are defeated because through these relationships the ante-mortem suffering of victims becomes a bad part of a good whole that contributes to the goodness of the whole. Perhaps further research into the phenomenon of resilience is needed to make this idea plausible, but I see no reason to conclude that an eschatological solution to the problem of horrendous suffering requires Adams's appeal to Chalcedonian Christology.

Objection 4. *The suffering experienced by the evil-willed remains undefeated by existence in a realm of restricted agency (RRA).* While any mortal suffering involved in EAT's test of free will is defeated for the good-willed by a life of enhanced agency, RRA seemingly does not do the same for those who fail this test. Perhaps it may if RRA is taken as a lesser or relative good which is only realised because of their self-corrupting choices. This seems incorrect, however, given that a life of restricted agency is a by-product of the test of will-setting freedom, not its purpose. It is more plausible to suggest that the mortal suffering of the evil-willed is outweighed by life in RRA, rather than defeated.

The previous section suggested that disembodied existence in RRA's ghost world has scope for a meaningful personal life, with communication, perception, experience and agency, which would be preferable to eternal grim hell or annihilation. These factors suggest that everlasting life in a ghost world could be a good that outweighs any finite suffering experienced by the evil-willed in mortal life.

What about the suffering that the evil-willed experience within RRA during its temporary grim hell? This suffering would be intense and may be lengthy, depending on a person's unwillingness to give up embodied existence. Therefore, it adds significantly to any disvalue that has to be outweighed by the relative good of RRA's ghost world. However, within the context of an evil person's complete afterlife their temporary suffering in grim hell would be a defeated evil. Life in ghost world would not be taken as a relative good by the evil-willed without their willing acceptance of disembodied existence, and the physical suffering of grim hell is necessary to bring about this acquiescence. The analogy is with examples of tough love. The suffering caused by withholding drinks from an alcoholic is part and parcel of the good of curing their addiction. Similarly, the suffering needed to cure the evil-willed of their self-destructive addiction to embodied existence is defeated by the relative good it makes possible.

Objection 5. *A realm of enhanced agency might not be a great enough good to outweigh any undefeated evil involved in its realisation.* For example, does it account for the enormous amount of suffering experienced by sentient animals throughout the history of the natural world? Moreover, if the much lesser good of a realm of restricted agency overall is taken to be an evil because it denies those within it the highest human good of enhanced agency, then the goodness of REA must outweigh the badness of RRA, but it is not clear that it does if RRA includes the horrendous suffering of a temporary grim hell.

Implied in the objection are the views of Marilyn McCord Adams (1993a, 1999) and William Alston (1996) discussed in Chapter 1.6. For Adams, *immanent goods* which are merely commensurate with worldly goods cannot be valuable enough to outweigh deep suffering, only incommensurate and transcendent goods could do so. Yet Alston points out that goods that are strongly disanalogous with experienced goods put us in a bad position to judge whether their value is such to make the evils involved in bringing them about worthwhile. Consequently, I suggested that immanent-type goods that are somewhat commensurate with and strongly analogous to experienced goods, but which are amplified or enhanced in terms of scope, quantity and quality, might provide a response to Adams that addresses the difficulty identified by Alston.[159]

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[159] Chapter 1.6, pp.43-44.

The account of EAT's realms of enhanced, ordinary and restricted agency provides for such a response to objection 5. In REA, created goodness is maximised through human beings with greater internal capacities for embodied agency and minimal external constraints on their everlasting participation in an interdependent web of repeatable and inexhaustible learning, creativity and relatedness goods. Conditions in a realm of ordinary agency, an innately good human nature, agent relative standards for measuring goodness of will, and an ungovernable natural order that constrains systemic moral evil, all work to bring about the success of as many human beings as possible in its test of will-setting freedom. The same conditions mean that the least possible number of human beings exists in a realm of restricted agency, where their capacity for evil is radically reduced in the disembodied life of a ghost world. The diagram below illustrates how suffering in EAT's will-setting environment and temporary grim hell would be outweighed by the total value of created goods brought about through these conditions.

The outweighing of evil
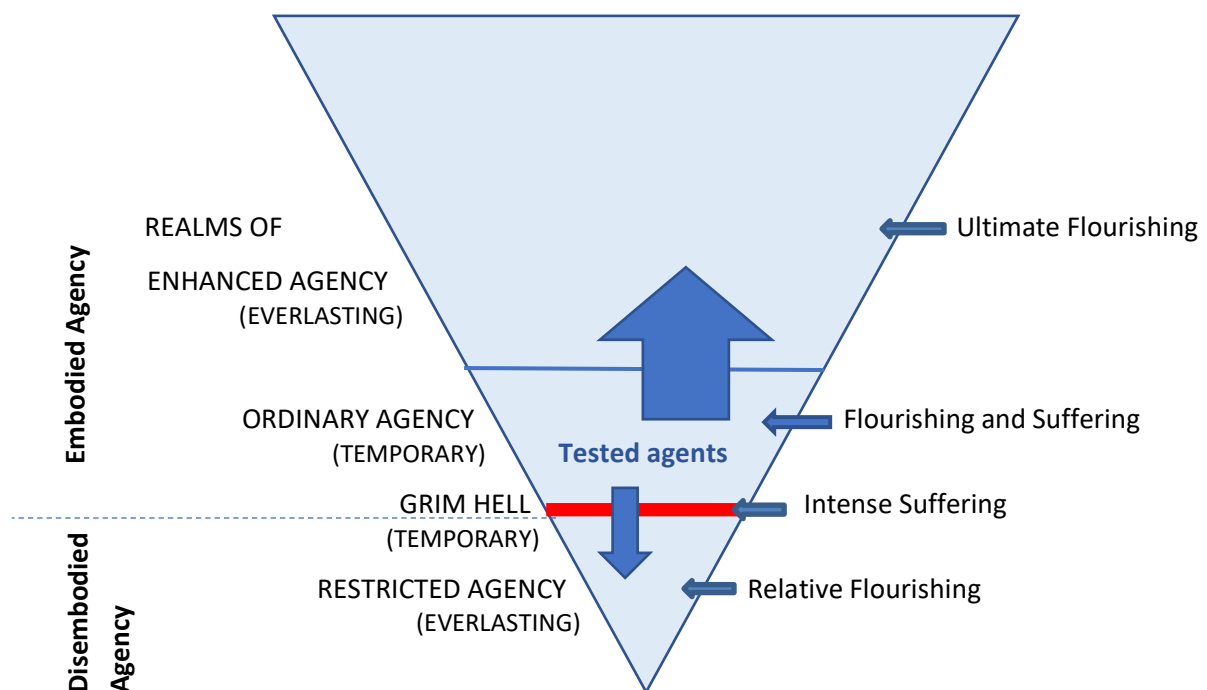
The realm of ordinary agency (ROA) is the world of our experience, where the conditions for realising REA consist of a mixed state of flourishing and suffering containing both moral and natural goods, and moral and natural evils. Most human beings in this will-setting environment succeed in preserving their innate goodness of will and so become enhanced agents, experiencing their ultimate flourishing as self-aware embodied persons with freedom and goodness of will. The minority whose

self-forming actions irrevocably corrupt their natures undergo the temporary experience of a grim hell as embodied persons, before existing in a state of relative flourishing as disembodied beings in an everlasting realm of restricted agency.

The relative sizes of each of the triangle segments illustrates the approximate magnitude of created goods and evils in these realms as a function of three variables: the *number* of agents, and the *level* and *duration* of their agency. The rough commensurability and strong analogy between created goods in realms of ordinary and enhanced agency make the proportions suggested above plausible. There are fewer agents in REA than in ROA, since some ordinary agents end up becoming restricted agents. Yet the capacity for embodied agency is far higher in REA than in ROA, and REA is everlasting whereas ROA is temporary, so the magnitude of created goodness in the former would be much greater than the created good and evil in the latter.[160] The grim hell stage of the realm of restricted agency contains the most intense suffering, but it is a temporary existence containing the least possible number of agents from ROA, and so is the smallest segment. The ghost world stage of RRA is larger than its grim hell because it contains the same number of agents but is everlasting.

The diagram illustrates the magnitude of human flourishing relative to human suffering in enhanced agency theodicy, but what about sentient animal life? To account for the additional suffering of animals throughout history, the segment for ROA would perhaps need to be bigger relative to REA. Nevertheless, for those who estimate the disvalue of this suffering to be high, the possibility that animals might also have an afterlife would address any concern about an underbalance in REA's outweighing of evil. Animals lack the neuro-physical complexity to become enhanced agents, but their participation in REA with ordinary levels of agency consistent with EAT. As section 4.2 argued, a maximally good world would contain a hierarchy of goods including lower non-moral goods involving sentient animal life. If the beauty of birdsong would make a world better, then an omniperfect God could conceivably resurrect birds for life in REA. It could be that all embodied creatures, not just human beings are created as spiritual-physical unities with an innately good nature, which presumptively qualifies certain animals for a good afterlife, perhaps existing without the need for predation in a lower level of a multi-dimensional REA. Chapter 5.4 will discuss the possibility of such an afterlife and whether it could outweigh or defeat the mortal suffering of animals.

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[160] REA's everlasting nature means that this diagram vastly underestimates the magnitude of created goods produced in REA.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOUL-MAKING, REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING,

OR ENHANCED AGENCY THEODICY?

Having discussed the eschatological theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump in Chapter

Three, and developed the main claims of *enhanced agency theodicy (*EAT) in Chapter Four, we can

now answer the study's main research question: *does EAT provide a better eschatological solution to

the problem of evil than the theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump?* This chapter will compare

the three theodicies with respect to each of the four problems outlined in Chapter Two,

summarising in the final section what this comparison means for their relative explanatory power.

5.1 The Normatively relativized logical argument from evil (NRLAFE)

The NRLAFE challenges belief in a perfectly loving God that contrives and sustains the

conditions in which humans suffer so that we may be saved by means of and for the sake of loving

personal relationship with this God (Bishop and Perszyk, 2011). The normative claim that such a

human-divine relationship is defective has force if the theist is committed to a theological ethic of

divine love, which defines God's goodness and motives solely in terms of the attribute of love and

the desire for union with the beloved, where love entails the notion of supremely good personal

relationship and everlasting union with God is the ultimate human good. Chapter Three showed that

SMT and RST endorse this ethic, and that both theodicies are committed to the sustainer-redeemer

God targeted by the NRLAFE. The Munchausen syndrome by proxy and psychiatrist-alcoholic

parallels therefore apply to SMT and RST, suggesting that heavenly union with this God is not a

supremely good personal relationship.[161] Chapter Three's comparisons with other possible worlds

modelling different *freedom-with-minimal-evil strategies* strengthened this objection. They showed

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[161] Chapter 2.1, p.51; Chapter 3.1.2, p.65; Chapter 3.2.2, p.88.

that the relationship contrived by the God of SMT and RST is either too demanding, too unsupportive, or both for humanity's salvation from a God-made nature and world to be considered perfectly loving. In other words, the nature of God's love is *oppressive*, requiring the beloved to suffer for the purpose of uniting with God, and in greater quantities than could otherwise be the case. Soul-making and redemptive suffering theodicies are therefore logically inconsistent with their theological ethic of divine love. As SMT and RST are both committed to a scale of value where separation from God is supremely bad and heavenly union with God is the ultimate human good, SMT and RST cannot evade the NRLAFE.

EAT does not take God to be revealed as love in the sense endorsed in RST and SMT, nor does it assume that God created the world for the purpose of entering into relationships with other personal beings. The ultimate human good in EAT is existence in a realm of enhanced agency (REA). In this good-maximising view of omniperfection, God's purpose is not to perfect us for union after having made us imperfect, nor rescue us from a divinely made predicament. Rather it is to test the goodness and freedom of will of human beings so that as enhanced agents we may maximise created moral goodness in REA**.** Nevertheless, the NRLAFE demands an answer from any theological ethic where the notion of right relationship is of central importance (Bishop and Perszyk, 2011, p.123). My proposal implies such an ethic, although it is not cashed out in terms of divine love or the supreme value of personal relationship with God. Before discussing EAT's response to the NRLAFE, some remarks are needed on the concept of right relationship implied in EAT and how it differs from the proposals of Hick and Stump.

As outlined in Chapter 2.1, the ethic of divine love entails that human-divine relationship is essentially *interpersonal*. A union with God which is a supremely good personal relationship seemingly must involve a mutuality and reciprocity in which both parties are enriched by their love for one another (Stump, 2010, pp.165-6; Hick, 2010, pp.272-4). J.L. Schellenberg (1993) clarifies this relational aspect of divine love by distinguishing it from the *benevolence* of a God who selflessly desires the good of others. It is not just that personal relationship with God would benefit human beings, such that we might expect a beneficent God concerned with our well-being to make such relationship possible for us for our own good. Rather, divine love for human beings implies that God values and wants such personal relationships not merely because they would be good for us *but for their own sakes as goods in themselves* (Schellenberg, 1993, pp.20-23)**.** Stump exemplifies an ethic of divine love with her focus on how we overcome psychological barriers to the mutual closeness and significant presence needed to strenuously reciprocate God's love, but it is also implied in Hick's hypnotist analogy, which justifies libertarian freedom as the only means to authentic relationship with God, and his view that union with God is only possible if in the soul-making process we

transcend the egoism that prevents us from fully realising our interpersonal natures. For both Hick and Stump, God's love for human beings would fail to achieve the fullness of love between persons if it were only motivated by benevolent altruism. In other words, both are committed to a theological of ethic where the rightness of human-divine relations is defined by those interpersonal features of loving relationships.

In EAT, an omniperfect God is understood to be too metaphysically different for humans beings to think of ourselves as being able to relate to God in such a way. On this view, mutual closeness is impossible, since while God can know human beings fully, human beings could only ever know a tiny fraction of the mind and being of an infinite God. This immense gap between humanity and the divine is seemingly only closed by altering the fundamental categories that define what it is to be human, as implied in Hick's disembodied corporate merger with ultimate reality. By contrast, in EAT the realm of enhanced agency, which constitutes the ultimate good for the type of creatures that we are, is ontologically separate from God. Consequently, forms of relatedness with God in REA's multiple levels of existence are described in terms of their increasing *proximity* to, not union with God. In other words, there is no need to account for how the ultimate good closes the incomprehensible metaphysical distance between finite humans and an infinite God. Therefore, while EAT affirms that there is a human-divine relationship it is more distant and unequal than in the theodicies targeted by the NRLAFE. The rightness of the relationship in EAT can be understood in terms of what might be expected of the best kind of relations between an immensely powerful benefactor and a wholly dependent beneficiary, where God is altruistically motivated to bring about the most good for the least cost and promote the objective well-being of created persons. *In other words, it is a better fit with a divine benevolence view of the relation between God and humanity*.

The human-divine relationship in EAT is analogous to the relations between a benevolent King and his subjects. Through his beneficent love a King can relate to his subjects in various ways. He can put in place policies that promote as much as possible their welfare and take pleasure in the fruitfulness and splendidness of his kingdom, deriving satisfaction from the flourishing of the subjects under his care. In return, subjects may relate to the King by petitioning him, attending celebrations, directing feelings of deep gratitude toward him, and relating to and emulating aspects of the King's persona. They may take immense pleasure in seeing his face when he addresses crowds, a pleasure that would intensify for those invited to the royal court to receive an acknowledging word or smile from their King.

However, these sorts of relations do not involve the degrees of interpersonal intimacy that characterise supremely good personal relationships. The King operates at too different a level from his subjects for such mutuality and reciprocity to obtain. Rather, the King's relations with his subjects

arise from a unilateral act of royal benevolence, motivated selflessly and not for the sake of personal relationship with the recipients of his love. If a King were to use all his statecraft and power to build a kingdom solely for the purpose of eliciting personal relations with individual subjects, his conduct would be questionable. The unseemliness of supposing this to be the goal of a headmistress in her relations with school pupils illustrates the point. However, by this King analogy I am not suggesting that an omniperfect God lacks the power or knowledge to experience forms of relationship with other personal beings. After all, a King may have loving relationships with certain intimate others. I am suggesting that the King's purpose in creating his kingdom *is to have that kingdom flourish*. Varieties of relations with his subjects may be part of the King's means and ends, but they are not *the* end. Similarly, the purpose of EAT's God is to bring about the flourishing of a realm of enhanced agency.

EAT's theological ethic, then, may be termed an *ethic of divine benevolence.* The God of EAT creates human beings for the purpose of maximising created goodness overall, but human and divine interests are aligned, since maximising created goodness consists in ultimate human flourishing in REA. The fact that this human-divine relationship has been contrived is no difficulty at all, since a beneficent King cannot but contrive the conditions for the growth of his kingdom. The relational gap between King and subject also licences the former to act in ways that would be unacceptable in supremely good personal relationships. For the good of the kingdom he can banish malcontents, impose entry criteria for anyone wishing to become subjects, punish and reward some, test the loyalty of others. Nevertheless, a king may have bad policies or lead his subjects toward bad or less than optimal ends, so to examine the rightness of the kind of human-divine relationship supposed by EAT this section must answer the two main questions concerning the NRLAFE discussed in Chapter Three.

Q1: Is there a difficulty in the particular way in which the conditions of the human-divine relationship have been contrived in EAT? Chapters 3.1.2 and 3.2.2 compared SMT and RST with two possible *freedom-with-minimal-evil* worlds: an Eden containing moral evil but no evils caused by natural processes such as pandemics, floods, earthquakes, and hereditary diseases (Trakakis, 2005); and a Schellenberg-type world where God's presence is neither overwhelmingly evident to us nor completely hidden, but where we have a sense of God's presence in our background awareness in a way that is persuasive without being coercive and so capable of being ignored (Schellenberg, 1993). It seems EAT fares better than SMT when considering these other possible worlds. Firstly, there can be no Eden version of EAT's will-setting environment, since natural evils are a necessary macro-level constraint on the influence of systemic moral evil. Without this constraint, the innately good natures of many more people would be corrupted, reducing the numbers that become enhanced agents

after death. Anyone objecting will have to show that it is logically possible for God to both test the will-setting freedom of agents and interfere with their wills to prevent the rise of systemic moral evil. They will also have to provide a psychologically plausible account of how the collective activities of the good-willed have the capacity to *always* control systemic moral evil and limit its power to corrupt human nature.[162]

Even If these objections are not forthcoming, the Rawlsian agent may prefer an Eden version of Hick's vale of soul-making to EAT's will-setting environment with natural evils. However, since opportunities for spiritual growth would be sparser in the less challenging environments of the Eden version of SMT, the soul-making process, and the suffering it involves, would seemingly require many more lives. Consequently, the Rawlsian agent would seemingly prefer the risk of experiencing natural evil within the single mortal life of EAT's will-setting environment. Moreover, if an ungovernable natural order is needed to constrain the influence of systemic moral evil, as I have argued, then soul-making careers in Eden-type worlds would be dominated by the unchecked power of collective human evil. This possibility seems just as likely to retard the soul-making of individuals as it would to provide opportunities for their moral and spiritual development.

These drawbacks of an Eden variant of SMT might be moderated if they were combined with a Schellenberg-type view of human nature, but it seems EAT would still compare favourably. Somewhat analogously to Schellenberg's supposition about human beings having a background awareness of and natural receptivity to God's presence, in EAT we have intuitive moral knowledge and a desire for truth by virtue of our nature as spiritual-physical beings. We can say that on both views our in-built bias towards God is more strongly felt than in Hick's epistemically distant condition. Yet whereas our innate goodness in EAT's will-setting environment contributes to as few as possible failing the test of free will by equipping us all with the resources needed to pass the test within a single lifetime, a Hickian Eden world with Schellenberg-type humans would seemingly still have to sustain soul-making suffering over multiple lifetimes because Hick's union with God requires our moral and spiritual perfection. By contrast, in EAT we need only preserve the goodness of will we already have, not acquire a good will and perfect it. In other words, even if a Schellenberg-type anthropology were to make Hick's world as supportive as EAT's, Hick's perfectionist soteriology would still make SMT's human-divine relationship too demanding, or more so than the relationship described in EAT.

Comparison with Hick's SMT and its Eden and Schellenberg variants suggests the human-divine relationship contrived by EAT's good-maximising God may be seen by the Rawlsian agent to be preferable to the one arranged by Hick's God of love. Stump's redemptive suffering theodicy

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[162] See Chapter 4.5.4, pp.167-168.

fares no better. The NRLAFE's objection to a God that rescues humanity from a God-made nature for the sake of having personal relationships with us has greater force against RST. Stump's God makes it so that all human beings are created with chronically defective wills which lack the willingness to be good-willed and that suffering is *universally the best means* by which God causes us to acquiesce to our rescue from this fallen condition. Moreover, unlike with Hick's universal salvation, the potential consequences of rejecting God's help are grave, since our natural state is to exist in an everlasting hell unless we allow ourselves to be saved. In other words, Stump's God has made our natures so that we must suffer to be rescued from even greater suffering in hell.

Yet the conceivability of a Schellenberg-type variant of RST shows that an omnipotent God need not have caused or allowed human beings to have a chronic disease of the will that requires redemptive suffering. Consequently, RST's God could have set the world in such a way that suffering is not the *only* means of realising our ultimate flourishing. For EAT's innately good-willed human beings, the good afterlife is like an inheritance which is an heir's by right unless we disqualify ourselves by corrupting our natures. At the global level of explanation the existence of suffering is a necessary part of the random distribution of conditions of flourishing and adversity which makes a will-setting environment unpredictable enough to be a genuine test of free will. However, at the level of the individual we are not required to suffer for this test, since goodness of will is also tested in conditions of earthly flourishing. Therefore the good-maximising God cannot be accused of contriving conditions in which every individual *must* suffer to bring them to their ultimate good.

Unlike with SMT, Eden variants of the worlds of EAT and RST seem impossible, although for different reasons. In EAT an ungovernable natural order is needed to constrain the influence of systemic moral evil. For RST, natural evils would seem to be necessary because fallen human beings require redemptive suffering and we only have one lifetime to find salvation. If Stump's world lacked natural evils then suffering would be less widely distributed and there would be fewer opportunities for the justification needed for a good afterlife. However, a world fit for the purpose of redemptive suffering would seem to have to proportion suffering from natural evils to the psychological needs of each individual, to bring their wills to the threshold required to accept God's salvation. Yet the indiscriminate effects of natural evils suggest that much of the suffering they cause in RST is gratuitous (Draper, 2011, para.26).[163] By contrast, in EAT there is no sense in which suffering ought to be proportioned to the psychological or spiritual needs of individuals. EAT's test of freedom and goodness and will is not designed to transform a universally fallen human nature. Therefore, no specific cause, like the suffering resulting from a natural evil, is required to produce a beneficial change, like the

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[163] See Chapter 3.2.2, pp.89-90.

justification of a person's faith, and so suffering need not to be proportioned to a desired effect, as one would expect it would have to be in RST if redemptive suffering is the only means to salvation.

The forgoing discussion suggests that EAT's good-maximising God is more supportive and less demanding than RST's God in contriving the conditions of ultimate human flourishing. EAT's human beings have innately good wills capable of passing the test of free will, rather than chronically defective wills naturally resistant to accepting God's salvation. EAT presumes we all have a good afterlife by virtue of being human, unless we disqualify ourselves through self-corrupting choices. RST presumes human beings are destined for everlasting hell unless we respond correctly to redemptive suffering. Moreover, that we might choose poorly seems likely on RST given the inherent defect in our wills. The Rawlsian agent would prefer the more supportive and less demanding world of EAT, where a good-maximising God wants as many as possible to pass the test of will-setting freedom, gives us the resources to do so through our innately good natures, and presumes a good afterlife for all. This would seemingly be the sort of world that a perfectly good God would choose to create.

It could be objected that the underlying conditions that EAT's God puts in place may be more supportive and less demanding than those contrived by the God of SMT and RST, but this does not explain the amount and intensity of evils that there are, nor particular cases of evils. Why would a good-maximising God want certain persons to suffer horrifically or to live with microcephaly, for example? As Adams notes about soul-making theodicy, a resurrected person would likely feel that they would have done better to have skipped such lives, which seemingly add little or nothing to a soul-making career (1999, p.52). Unlike RST, the SMT defender can offer a global reason: that this dysteleological suffering contributes to the epistemic distance needed for a soul-making world.[164] Yet SMT's comparison with the freedom-with-minimal worlds outlined in this study shows that Rowe is right to argue that dysteleological suffering happens in quantities far in excess of what is needed to make the world religiously ambiguous enough for our moral and spiritual growth (1991b, pp.119-122). This global reason is also undermined by the apparent redundancy of epistemic distance in the soul-making of resurrected persons who become aware that there is life after death, with all that this implies for belief in God.

There seems to be no such implication for the coherence of EAT's afterlife from its global explanation: that the random distribution of conditions of flourishing and adversity contributes to the unpredictability of a will-setting environment, making it a genuine test of free will. The objector may want to argue that EAT's God could realise a realm of enhanced agency with less quantities and degrees of suffering, whether overall or in the lives of individuals. However, EAT seems immune to

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[164] Suffering is *dysteleological* in its distribution, amount and intensity when it appears unnecessary for the purpose of soul-making (Hick, 1981, reproduced in Mesle, 1991, pp.xxviii-xxx).

this charge in a way RST and SMT cannot be, for the reason noted above concerning the proportioning of natural evils to the spiritual needs of individuals. SMT and RST must explain suffering as having a role in the transformation of an essentially fallen human nature to make it fit for union with God. Consequently, it is legitimate to ask whether this suffering is dysteleological, that it seemingly occurs in amounts and intensities beyond what is needed for this purpose. EAT, however, does not take suffering to have this goal. Rather, the EAT objector must show that suffering exists in degrees and quantities in excess of that required to make a will-setting environment a genuine test of free will through unpredictable distributions of conditions of flourishing and adversity. Yet it is not clear whether this objection is at all quantifiable or indeed if considerations of amount and degree are relevant to an assessment of this purpose.

The biblical story of the suffering of Job illustrates this point. Job is a man of sincere faith whose household flourishes before a series of calamities take away everything he has before the subsequent restoration of his health and wealth. On EAT he can therefore be taken as a paradigm case of a test of goodness of will in an unpredictable will-setting environment that randomly distributes conditions of flourishing and adversity. However, what quantities and intensities of suffering are too much or too little for the purpose of making the test of free will a genuine one? It seems a wide range of variability in degrees and amounts is intrinsic to making the distributions of goods and evils unpredictable. The narrower the variability, the more such distributions fall within normal expectations, and the less unpredictable they become. Moreover, on EAT the quantity and degree of Job's suffering is not relevant to his trial, except in so far that it is part of the unpredictability of life's test of free will. Whether one calamity befalls him or all of them or none, it is how Job responds in every circumstance in which he finds himself, bad or worse, good or better, that matters. Does he remain faithful, patient and grateful, or in the terms of EAT does he preserve goodness of will in his neuro-physical make-up as an embodied agent, in both good times and bad? By contrast, if SMT and RST were true we would have to assume that the quantity and intensity of Job's suffering is intended to bring about a desired *change* in his moral and spiritual development, as part of the perfecting of his will for personal relationship with God. Yet Job was already righteous and God-fearing before calamity struck, making his suffering excessive on both RST and SMT. The story of Job therefore shows that the amount and degree of suffering that exists is likely to remain inexplicable if we take the spiritual transformation of individuals as the sole or entire purpose of all suffering, yet this must be the focus of SMT and RST given their view of the spiritual status of human beings in a fallen condition.

Q2: Is the ultimate good brought about through human-divine relationship valuable enough to make the contrivance of these conditions worthwhile? It seems EAT must compare favourably with SMT and RST since they cannot coherently claim that eternal relationship with God is the most supreme kind of personal love if the conditions of relationship contrived by this God make that relationship less than perfectly loving. SMT and RST therefore cannot appeal to the *felix culpa* defence, that everlasting personal relationship with God is such a great good that it justifies the creation of a redeemable humanity, since that relationship is fundamentally flawed as an outweighing or defeating good. The relationship is essentially *tainted,* in the same way that a marriage would be if a man were to get a woman to marry him by deliberately causing her serious injury so that in looking after her she comes to love him. Having been made aware of these circumstances she may learn to accept married life as a compensation, but something would be missing from the happiness of the marriage *as a personal relationship*.

As EAT's supreme good is not personal loving relationship with God it evades this difficulty altogether. EAT's ultimate human good, a realm of enhanced agency, is also estimably more valuable than the eschaton's of both SMT and RST. Hick's universalism makes union with God a great good for every human being, but since our embodied experience cannot tell us whether a disembodied merger with divine consciousness involves the sort of personal life that would be in any way meaningful, we cannot judge whether the cost of soul-making across multiple lives is made worthwhile by this ultimate good unless we merely assert its infinite value. Stump's view of union with God as an embodied existence involving the glorification of our beings seems less mysterious than Hick's eschaton. At the same time, her focus on how the progressive integration of divided human wills around the good increases the mutual closeness and significant presence needed to strenuously love God can only go so far in describing the value of this heavenly good. It lacks any account of the sorts of choices the saved might participate in to remove any internal obstacles in the will to their strenuous love of God. Absent this context, the RST defender must rely on the assumption that loving relationship with God is supremely valuable, but the NRLAFE shows that the character of this relationship is essentially flawed.

EAT involves no radical discontinuity between life in realms of ordinary and enhanced agency. In both environments free will and embodied being are first order goods, to act with freedom involves making undetermined self-forming actions and freely motivated efforts of the will, and agents participate in learning, creativity and relatedness goods. From their internal point of view, enhanced agents would take REA to be the fulfilment of earthly goods and see both stages of existence as coherent parts of a meaningfully good whole. EAT also describes a landscape of choices within which these agents can increase their capacity to participate in an ever greater plurality of created goods in

REA. As these goods are somewhat commensurate with and strongly analogous to goods in the world of our experience, compared with the eschatons of SMT and RST we are in better position to judge the magnitude of REA's goodness relative to quantities of evil and suffering in other realms of existence, including our own, as modelled by the pyramid diagram in Chapter 4.6.

5.2 Heavenly Freedom

How do SMT, RST and EAT compare with respect to the *lack of value problem* and the *argument from heaven*? On the first difficulty, Chapter 3.1.3 concluded that the SMT defender must rely on asserting the infinite value of Hick's eschaton, since any valuable kind of personal freedom, not just that with respect to morally significant choices, seemingly cannot exist in a disembodied union with divine consciousness. Chapter 3.2.3 found that RST's concept of post-resurrection sanctification preserves a role for free will by emphasising a non-choice based view, but this account of the internal psychology of how human wills can love God strenuously under-describes the value of heavenly freedom by not depicting the sorts of choices the saved might participate in to progress their sanctification. Moreover, the RST defender cannot say more about the context within which the saved progress their sanctification because to do so would be to concede that sanctification is possible in a heavenly environment without moral and natural evils, making gratuitous any suffering involved in earthly efforts to integrate the will around the good.

EAT's account of the value of heavenly freedom has two main advantages: the *non-continuity* of experiences of beatific vision, and its *choice-based view* of REA's goods. As envisaged in Chapter 4.4, divine involvement in REA's created goods would extend their upper limits by always providing some other aspect of an infinite God to know about, relate to, and inspire creativity.[165] A form of beatific vision or experience of God is therefore conceivably the highest good of REA. Nevertheless, the good-maximising view does not entail that a vision of God is the *totality* of all experience in REA, as with Hick's and Stump's notions of heavenly life as some form of immersion in the being of God.[166] Their views of union with God give rise to an apparent contradiction within their concepts of heavenly freedom, since the beatific vision is a permanent and continuous uniting with divine essence that necessitates moral impeccability and love of God in the eschatons of SMT and RST. EAT evades this difficulty because it takes the beatific vision to be REA's greatest *reward*, a

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[165] Chapter 4.4, pp.131-132, 133.

[166] Chapters 3.1.1, 3.2.1.

temporary and non-continuous event that is a peak experience within REA, *not coextensive with it*. As such we may suppose that it periodically inspires and intensifies the enhanced agent's participation in learning, creativity and relatedness goods, with the hope of future experiences helping to motivate their impeccability.[167]

As EAT explains agency in a will-setting environment and in REA with a single choice-based account of freedom, we have a more developed idea of the value of freedom in REA compared with RST's non-choice based view of strenuous freedom and love in heaven. In EAT's account of earthly and heavenly freedom, indeterministic self-forming actions involve an agent's control over the intentions and purposes motivating choices between alternative possibilities. On earth these choices concern the setting of the will toward good or evil involving morally significant actions; in REA they involve deciding between innumerable now or later and good or better choices between alternative goods that can shape an agent's neuro-physical development and capacity for agency in different ways. This choice-based view of free will in REA is more developed than RST's internal, psychological account of heavenly freedom in the sense that it provides much more content on the types of choices which an enhanced agent might be expected to make in a maximally good environment where no moral evil exists, involving an interdependent web of repeatable and inexhaustible learning, creativity and relatedness goods.

Perhaps the main difficulty for this response to the lack of value of problem concerns the plausibility of EAT's account of the impeccability of enhanced agents given the transformative nature of REA's goods. How might self-forming actions in REA change a person's neuro-physical make-up without it going wrong? Chapter 4.4 suggested two reasons why wills would remain durably good in REA. Resurrected agents who have had will-setting freedom and preserved their goodness of will while undergoing neuro-physical change in self-forming actions would have the character and remembered experience to make similar efforts of the will in REA.[168] EAT's conception of human beings as innately good-willed also implies that the good afterlife is our natural state, which we take to, so to speak, like ducks to water. Whereas if a character patterned on goodness and aligned with God's will is solely a *second* nature, as Stump's view of character formation and soteriology implies, it seems reasonable to suppose that heavenly freedom entails the risk that we might at some point lapse and fall back on our original natures, a possibility which suggests why the impeccability of the saved requires the beatific vision on RST's view of heavenly freedom.

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[167] Conceivably, a single individual may experience multiple forms and various levels of beatific vision at different points throughout their life in REA.

[168] As discussed in Chapter 4.6, the exception is children who die prematurely and require the guardianship of enhanced agents who have successfully passed the test of will-setting freedom.

There are however two further reasons for taking REA's account of heavenly impeccability to be plausible given EAT's view of human nature. Chapter 4.5.2 argued that a good-willed person preserves the spiritual influence on the will within their neuro-physical make-up, as decisions mediated by the pre-frontal cortex integrate rather than prune out earlier neural networks formed under the dominant influence of the spirit. On this view, the person with a good character is not only neuro-physically different to a malevolent person, but they are ontologically different, since the good-willed exist as spiritual-physical unities, while bad human beings exist as bifurcated creatures in which the spiritual and physical dimensions of being are fundamentally alienated from one another. Consequently, it is not implausible to suggest that enhanced agents will remain impeccable in REA because of the kind of beings that they are *in an ontological sense*, rather than simply due to the character traits they have accumulated through past libertarian choices. Secondly, we may suppose that the neuro-physical flexibility which enhanced agents need to thrive in REA in fact contributes to the durability of the goodness of their wills. As human beings are spiritual-physical unities in which the spiritual dimension of being is the source of our moral intuitions and desire for truth, our openness to this influence on the will in moments of choice conceivably requires this flexibility, while it is harder to see how a closed neuro-physical system might be responsive to this influence.

If life in REA is a fulfilment of the innate goodness of human nature, then this need not imply that persons living out their real or deep natures will not make moral mistakes. If we understand moral goodness and evil in terms of moral beauty and ugliness, I see no reason why free persons cannot be less than perfectly beautiful with their actions in REA. For example, relatedness goods might involve errors such as a degree of thoughtlessness or insensitivity with another person. Yet the possibility of such mistakes would make possible opportunities for repentance and forgiveness between persons, beautiful acts that would add to the goodness of REA. I think the foundation of an innately good human nature, and the dualistic holism and neuro-physical account of character formation summarised above, go a long way to make plausible the idea that enhanced agents who have had their will-setting freedom tested would remain impeccable in REA's wholly good environment where experiencing the beatific vision is possible as its greatest reward.

EAT also fares better than both SMT and RST with the argument from heaven. As a weak free will theodicy SMT aims to show that a soul-making career involving morally significant choices is logically necessary for a union with God without them, but the seeming lack of *any* sort of meaningful personal existence in its disembodied eschaton suggests an incoherence. If the purpose of SMT's God is to return personal experiences of material existence to the divine consciousness, as Hick seems to imply (1976, p.458), then other material worlds would do, including those that are

more benign for the bearers of those experiences, such as one containing agents with compatibilist freedom and no moral evil or an Eden world with no natural evils. Moreover, since the God of SMT could selflessly love human beings who merely believed that their love for God is freely chosen and undetermined, this God would do better to create only a heaven where human love for God was determined, rather than make soul-making worlds simply so that *God* can know that humans had freely come to love the divine.[169]

As weak free will theodicies, both RST and EAT distinguish between freedom with respect to morally significant choices and other valuable aspects of free will, and provide an account of how the eschaton depends on the former and continues the latter. RST does so primarily by emphasising the continuity of a non-choice based account of freedom in which a divided will becomes increasingly unified around goodness as a concomitant of loving relationship with God. However, Stump's God conceivably could have created human beings in heaven with divided wills but in an already justified state, enabling their sanctification through beatific intimacy with God without requiring a mortal life of redemptive suffering. A prior stage of existence to justify faith is only a necessary condition of heavenly union with God if we grant Stump's premise that God did not intend, could not prevent and is not responsible for the human propensity for moral evil (2010, p.155). However, as Chapter 3.2.2 discussed, Stump's appeals to God's antecedent and consequent wills, or to evolution, fail to explain evil as something that originated apart from God's will.[170] Moreover, as the previous section discussed, RST cannot evade this problem by appealing to the *felix culpa* defence due to the NRLAFE.

The following summary argument derived from chapters 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 provides EAT's answer to the argument from heaven:

> 1) To maximise created goodness a good-maximising God would create a realm of enhanced agency that fully realises the agency of self-aware embodied persons with freedom and goodness of will.
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> 2) To participate in this realm's highest goods and maximise its created goodness, agents require libertarian freedom with respect to now or later and good or better choices concerning a limitless plurality of learning, relatedness and creativity goods which determine an agent's degree of proximity to God.

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[169] Chapter 3.1.2, pp.67-68.

[170] Chapter 3.2.3, pp.87-88.

3) In this dynamic environment of potentially transformative choices, agents must have the capacity for neuro-physical change.

4) *Ceteris paribus*, only agents with will setting-freedom making morally significant choices can develop this capacity, since resolving conflicts between competing motivations carried within different brain networks produces step-changes in a person's neuro-physical system by integrating the parts and the whole of that system in new ways.

5) However, individuals cannot have will-setting freedom in a realm of enhanced agency because the agency of those who set their wills on evil would be maximised, making it a hell.

6) Therefore, a realm of enhanced agency is only possible after a prior stage of existence where the goodness of will of agents with will-setting freedom is tested with morally significant choices.

7) The world of our experience is this test of will-setting freedom.

This summary shows that EAT consistently claims that the earthly freedom to make good or evil choices is a necessary condition of realising our ultimate flourishing in REA *and* that such choices are not intrinsic to life as an enhanced agent. As suggested in Chapters 4.4 and 4.5.2 it is the *degree* of neuro-physical change that can occur when self-forming actions involve morally significant choices which gives agents the capacity to undergo similar degrees of change when participating in the transformative choices that are specific to REA's environment.

The EAT objector may try to argue that such neuro-physical change is possible in worlds with narrower ranges of moral choice. However, if for example a prior stage of existence were to involve compatibilist freedom and no morally significant choices, it seems implausible to suggest that agents in this context would undergo meaningful neuro-physical changes, since a person's total neural system would *ceteris paribus* remain in a stable equilibrium state in the absence of conflicts between parts of the system.[171] A life requiring little or no neuro-physical flexibility would not prepare persons for REA's transformative goods. If the good-maximising God were to instead create REA only without a prior test of free will, and populate it with persons with compatibilist freedom and little scope for neuro-physical change, then the transformative potential of REA's highest goods would be limited, making REA less dynamic and less maximally good.[172] If the EAT objector cannot show that an omniperfect God could create a realm of enhanced agency without a prior test of will-setting

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[171] See the artificial intelligence advisor example, Chapter 4.5.1, p.146

[172] See discussion of neuro-physical flexibility, Chapter 4.4, pp.133-134.

freedom involving morally significant choices, then the conclusion of the argument from heaven is false, since the world of our experience, identified as EAT's will-setting environment, may be taken as evidence that an omniperfect God exists.

5.3 Hell and Post-Mortem Suffering

Chapter Three showed that SMT and RST fail in their responses to problems of hell and post-mortem suffering. Hick's universal salvation requires suffering over a succession of afterlives to complete the soul-making process. Hick does not endorse necessary universalism, therefore the SMT defender may answer the *denial of autonomy* objection, that universalism is incompatible with personal autonomy because choices to reject God are never efficacious. SMT's universalism also evades the *gratuitous earthly life* (GEL) objection outlined in Chapter 2.3, since earthly existence has a significant bearing on a person's soul-making career in a succession of afterlives. However, Hick's universalism motivates a conception of the afterlife that invites three other GEL objections that have force against SMT:

> 1) Since soul-making is possible in other spatial-temporal environments in a succession of afterlives, the natural evils particular to our world cannot provide necessary conditions for the soul-making process.

> 2) As there is psychological and physical continuity between a person's ante- and post-mortem selves, post-resurrection soul-making seemingly must occur in conditions of greater awareness of God's existence, making gratuitous the moral evils that result from earthly conditions of epistemic distance from God.

> 3) The lack of any physical existence at all in SMT's eschaton implies that it is realisable without the embodied suffering of earthly life.[173]

EAT does not endorse universalism, but these three GEL objections do illuminate some advantages it has compared with SMT. Firstly, on natural evils, the primary reason for earth's ungovernable natural order is to constrain the influence of systemic moral evil in a will-setting environment. As there is no such evil in REA, the disruptive power and unpredictability of natural events is not needed to put its environment beyond collective human control. This difference in

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[173] Chapter 3.1.4, pp.77-78.

material conditions between EAT's pre and post-mortem environments fits their distinct purposes, that of testing will-setting freedom in a way that ensures as many as possible succeed, and that of enhancing the agency of those who pass this test to maximise the goodness of REA. Whereas SMT's continuity of purpose across different soul-making environments undermines its explanation of natural evils resulting from the particular conditions of earthly life.

EAT evades the second GEL objection because it does not rely on Hick's notion of epistemic distance for its explanation of moral and natural evil. Recall that EAT's will-setting environment is for human beings who are naturally good-willed and have epistemic access to spiritual knowledge through our moral intuitions, and so is somewhat more like the Schellenberg-type world discussed in Chapters Three and Four, where all individuals exist in an intermediate state between epistemic distance and immediacy with a general background awareness of and receptivity to God's presence and guidance.[174] Consequently, since epistemic distance is not a necessary feature of EAT's pre and post-mortem worlds, the altered epistemic condition of newly resurrected persons does not undermine the consistency of EAT's explanation of moral evil in a will-setting environment where God's existence is less evident.

On the dualistic holism of EAT's account of human nature, its innate goodness is compatible with having cognitive freedom in relation to God and the freedom to do otherwise with respect to morally significant choices, since the spiritual dimension of being is just one of the influences on the decisions of the will, not the agent in control of those choices.[175] This means a person's innate goodness of will does not determine a person's beliefs, intentions and actions. What explains moral evil in EAT's anthropology is our immersion in and over-preoccupation with material existence, which causes us to forget or supress the spiritual influence on the will. In other words, it is our *ontological* distance from God, or lack of proximity, which opens up the space for moral evil, not our epistemic distance. Like children who behave badly when their parents are away, we may act wrongly despite knowing intuitively the right thing to do and being innately aware of God's existence.

On the third GEL objection, REA is a continuation and fulfilment of the earthly existence of self-aware embodied persons with freedom and goodness of will. As embodied life is an intrinsic part of EAT's highest human good, the embodied nature of earthly suffering is a necessary part of the realisation of this good, whereas it seems possible for the God of SMT to use means other than

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[174] I qualified this by suggesting that unlike Schellenberg's thought experiment, in EAT this would be a property of all human beings at the *beginning* of life, allowing for the possibility that it might fade over time (Chapter 4.5.2, p.148).

[175] Chapter 4.5.2, pp.153-154.

physical soul-making, and the suffering it involves, to realise its disembodied eschaton. From the internal point of view of the enhanced agent, the continuing value of embodied agency in EAT's ultimate good in principle makes an earthly life of embodied agency, and any necessary suffering it may involve, a meaningful part of a good whole, satisfying a condition of the Chisholm-type defeat of evil and suffering.

As both envision post-mortem suffering in forms of hell, EAT is more comparable with RST. RST's appeal to a mild hell *prima facie* saves it from a range of objections which target the grim view of hell, but Stump's account of a person being able to form a stable second nature around bad ends for eternity is inconsistent and implausible, collapsing her mild hell into a grim one. In other words, if the embodied agency of the evil-willed is sustained forever in hell, as Stump envisages, then a total descent into madness and depravity seems the most likely outcome. Consequently, RST is vulnerable to arguments for annihilation and escapism which target grim versions of hell. These alternative outcomes also seem more compatible with a concept of divine love that is essentially relational than any move to make a mild hell plausible within this theological framework.[176]

Even if the notion of a mild hell were granted, RST has no good answer for the *diminished capacities objection*, since a perfectly good God would not force a choice that could withhold heavenly existence from individuals who innately lack the character and willingness to decide in their own best interests by virtue of their fallen human nature.[177] The problem of divine love and hiddenness is also implicated in this diminished capacities objection: if a loving God created the world for the purpose of entering into personal relationships with us, then why were human beings created with the kind of nature that obscures God's existence, given that a stronger epistemic position in relation to theism is possible (Schellenberg, 1993) and that life in hell is the consequence of rejecting divine love? An issuant view of heaven and hell in which the existence of both originates from the same divine motivation therefore appears allusive if it relies on a relational concept of God's love for created persons.

EAT's realm of restricted agency (RRA) *prima facie* answers these objections by premising an issuant view of the afterlife on divine benevolence rather than love, and providing an account of hell that is plausibly mild. RRA is not the mild hell defined in Chapter 2.3, where those who freely reject God's love are allowed to exist in hell as the persons they have chosen to become.[178] Rather, RRA is a

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[176] Chapter 3.2.4, pp.99-100.

[177] Ibid. pp.98-99.

[178] Chapter 2.3, p.56.

consequence of God's desire to promote the most good for the least cost and the objective well-being of created persons. For the evil willed, who have proved to be irretrievably self-destructive with their embodied desires, this requires a temporary grim hell that coerces a radical change in their existence, inflicting involuntary physical suffering to bring about their willing acceptance of a permanent dissociation of the immaterial self from the body. Nevertheless, this temporary grim hell taken together with disembodied life in RRA's ghost world is overall a relative good compared with an everlasting hell of embodied evil and suffering, and therefore more acceptable from the internal point of view of the evil-willed. Ghost world preserves a personal life and a degree of agency, while restricting the capacity to cause and experience harm through self-destructive uses of a physical body. Restricted agents would not view disembodied existence as an unbearable psychological torture, since they have acquiesced to this fate, forever disabused of ever wanting embodied experiences following the physical torment of temporary grim hell.[179] EAT is therefore immune to the objection that life in an eternal hell seems likely to bring about a ruinous dismantling of the personality that ultimately collapses a mild hell into a grim one.

If RRA is a plausibly mild hell then EAT need not endorse universalism and the arguments for escapism and annihilation require no answer. EAT does invite the *vagueness objection* outlined in Chapter 2.3, since there might be some persons at the point of death who are partially evil-willed and partially good-willed and so determining their fates as either ghosts or enhanced agents on this basis would be unfair. Chapter 4.5.5 suggested an answer: that evil actions have a compounding effect once a certain threshold is reached which radically diverges the natures of good and evil-willed agents. If self-corrupting acts tend towards the extreme in forming a malevolent person's character, then there would be no arbitrary cut-offs between cases of partially evil and good-willed individuals.[180]

The existence of a temporary grim hell invites a type of *proportionality objection*. For example, the kind of physical torment involved in bringing about the acquiescence needed to accept life in ghost world might be considered a cost that is disproportionately high compared to the benefit it is meant to produce. EAT provides three answers to this problem. Firstly, if the agent relative and least cost principles apply to this embodied phase of RRA, then each individual would only experience the amount and duration of suffering which is necessary for that person to willingly accept a life separated from their body. Secondly, following Stump's defence of suffering that involuntary *simpliciter*, suffering in temporary grim hell is justifiable because it averts the much

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[179] Chapter 4.5.5, pp.172-173.

[180] Chapter 4.5.5, pp.173-174.

greater harms of eternal grim hell and annihilation. Thirdly, in the context of an evil person's complete afterlife, their suffering in grim hell would be a defeated evil, since ghost world would not be a relative good without a willing acceptance of disembodied existence, and the physical suffering of grim hell is necessary to bring about this acquiescence.[181]

EAT also answers the diminished capacities objection, which Chapter 2.3 suggested was the main difficulty for mild views of hell. Unlike in RST, where human beings lack the willingness to be good-willed due to our fallen nature, on EAT our natural goodness puts us in a better epistemic position in relation to the choice of heaven and hell. We cannot have certain knowledge of the existence of God and a post-mortem life, yet we have intuitive moral knowledge and a desire for truth by virtue of the spiritual dimension of our beings. Perhaps a natural property of this immaterial dimension is a latent awareness of the possibility of God's existence in a reality beyond the material world. On this view, the decisions of human beings upon which heavenly life depends cannot be informed choices as the diminished capacities objection supposes, since the outcomes of heaven and hell are not concrete options which one can study and assess. Nevertheless, the properties associated with having an innately good will in EAT's concept of human nature plausibly give individuals the capacity to seek out knowledge relevant to the choice.

It could be objected that in EAT human beings may be less diminished in our capacity than we are in RST, but we are diminished nonetheless. Why not make a fully informed choice between heaven and hell possible through a rational deliberation of their pros and cons? However, a condition of epistemic uncertainty concerning this and other choices is implied by two of the necessary conditions for realising a realm of enhanced agency. It seems to be part of making EAT's trial of will-setting freedom unpredictable enough to be a genuine test of free will. I have also argued that the capacity for neuro-physical change and growth needed to thrive in REA would not develop without the motivational conflicts involved in morally significant choices, a claim which implies a degree of epistemic uncertainty regarding those choices. A future in which the reality and natures of heaven and hell were completely known would limit this uncertainty for any person with this knowledge.

Finally, EAT also has strengths compared to both RST and EAT on the distribution and quantity of post-mortem suffering. In terms of the distribution of those who end up continuing to suffer after death, EAT is advantaged by the ubiquitous nature of its test of good will. Union with God in both SMT and RST depends on individuals experiencing the requisite amount of soul-making opportunities and redemptive suffering to transform their fallen natures. That this might take many

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[181] Chapter 4.6, pp.181-182.

afterlives in the world of SMT implies that such opportunities are poorly distributed in earthly existence and are not targeted to the spiritual needs of individuals. The same appears to be true of RST, since natural evils are not proportioned in this way and the lives of the unjustified are not extended to give them the chance to avoid life in hell, as one might expect a perfectly loving God to do (Draper, 2011, para.22, 29).

In both theodicies then, the apparent randomness in the distribution of salvific opportunities makes the fates of those who continue to suffer after death somewhat arbitrary. EAT, however, seemingly evades this objection. As all human beings are destined for a good afterlife unless they disqualify themselves through self-corrupting actions, there is no need to distribute opportunities for personal salvation according to spiritual need. Goodness of will is tested in all conditions of earthly flourishing and adversity, so post-mortem fates are not determined by responses to arbitrary distributions of suffering. Moreover, goodness of will is measured according to agent relative standards that take account of the particular circumstances of each person, so there is no randomness in the way individuals are excluded from REA to experience suffering in a temporary grim hell.

On the quantity of post-mortem suffering, comparison with SMT and RST also seems to favour EAT. Recall that in Chapter 4.6's pyramid diagram, EAT's grim hell involves intense physical suffering, but it is also the smallest segment as a temporary existence containing the fewest possible agents from mortal life. SMT's post-mortem suffering is also finite, but the quantity of suffering in a person's soul-making career depends on how many lives are needed to achieve union with God and what conditions pertain in these afterlives. SMT's perfectionist soteriology implies that most will need many afterlives to complete their soul-making process, suggesting that the total amount of SMT's post-mortem suffering would be greater than that experienced by the many fewer who must go through EAT's temporary grim hell.

RST has a much lower threshold for union with God than SMT, since only justification by faith not spiritual perfection is required for the good afterlife. Yet if, as has been argued, Stump's mild hell ultimately collapses into a grim hell, then unlike SMT and EAT its post-mortem suffering is both everlasting and horrendous. Moreover, Chapter 4.5.2 argued that various features of EAT, the innate goodness of human beings, the presumption of a good afterlife, agent relative standards for measuring goodness of will, and constraints on the influence of systemic moral evil, all contribute to as few as possible failing to become enhanced agents. By contrast, the natural resistance of human beings to relationship with God, our presumed existence in hell unless we choose salvation, and opportunities for redemptive suffering that are not proportioned to the spiritual needs of individuals are features of RST's world that, *ceteris paribus,* lead us to expect many fewer experiencing their

ultimate good in RST than in EAT, unless individuals are arbitrarily saved at the point of death. As more people would end up in RST's hell, and their suffering would be everlasting, the total quantity of post-mortem suffering would be much less in EAT's realm of restricted agency.

5.4 The Fate of Creatures without Free Will

As SMT, RST and EAT are theodicies which make the exercise of free will central to achieving a good afterlife, they must explain the post-mortem fate of very young human children, the severely cognitively disabled and animals who lack freedom of will. EAT's account of free will and the afterlife for such beings is *prima facie* more successful than both SMT and RST, or at least some versions of both which defenders may want to propose. For brevity, I shall refer to this class of creatures as *the unfree* when not distinguishing between young human children, the severely cognitively disabled and animals.

Hick can claim that the progressive afterlife of its pareschaton will give young human children and the severely cognitively disabled the opportunity to exercise free will and perfect their souls for union with God, but denies this opportunity to animals.[182] Stump suggests there might be mechanisms other than redemptive suffering by which unfree humans might be saved but does not specify what they might be.[183] It is consistent with EAT's good-maximising view for all human beings, whether free or unfree, and also some animals to achieve the same good afterlife in REA by virtue of the innate goodness of human nature and embodied being in general. On this view, human children and the severely cognitively disabled mature to become enhanced agents under the tutelage of human beings who have passed the test of will-setting freedom, while certain animals might exist at lower levels of a REA made up of multiple inter-penetrable dimensions of varying levels of embodied agency.[184]

EAT's account of the afterlife for unfree humans evades difficulties with the way resurrection occurs in SMT's replica theory, which requires a person's full initial bodily similarity with their previously existing body. While the SMT defender can coherently claim that all young children who die prematurely will be resurrected as children to continue their soul-making journeys, the cognitively disabled would not only have to undergo post-resurrection healing and repair processes to regenerate lost brain functioning or correct congenital disorders, but also consciously experience

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[182] Chapter 3.1.5, pp.79-81.

[183] Chapter 3.2.5, pp.101-102.

[184] Chapter 4.6, pp.177-179.

this change while being alive. Consequently, SMT's pareschaton is a bizarre environment where infants mature into adults, the elderly become younger, the physically disabled recover the use of their limbs, and the cognitively impaired regain or acquire a rational and moral nature.[185]

EAT avoids this complication because the person's body is formed to the maximum potential of their given genotype, in terms of both physical and mental attributes, *in the process of their resurrection not afterwards*.[186] This process conceivably includes any changes needed to correct a congenital disorder. The physical age at which such individuals are resurrected might then depend on the level of development of their prefrontal cortex, since being an enhanced agent depends on this part of a person's neurophysiology. If an adult's cognitive disability is associated with an under-developed pre-frontal cortex, they might be resurrected at an earlier physical age so that they can undergo the required maturation under the tutelage of enhanced agents in the same way as children.

Like EAT, the RST defender can claim that bodies are improved during the process of resurrection, as persons in heaven are perfected "in virtue of their translation to heaven" (Stump, 1985, p.398). In principle this might include correcting the congenital disorders of individuals with severe cognitive and physical disabilities. However, in RST this translation or glorification of the body is reserved for those justified by faith after they have freely acquiesced in their own redemption. If the severely cognitively disabled can be made fit for heaven without redemptive suffering then this could be so for anyone. The fate of young children gives rise to the same problem, even if the seed germination view of fallenness is granted.[187] If children are saved by grace alone, and in the process of resurrection their natures are changed so that the terminal disease of a fallen nature does not grow to take them over as they mature in heaven, then an unsaved adult could also be resurrected in a way that corrects this flaw in their will.

If attempts to extend RST to include all human beings in a single good afterlife via different means seemingly lack internal consistency, the alternative of supposing that the unfree come to exist without redemptive suffering in an afterlife outside of full union with God makes RST *ad hoc*. Yet even if such a lesser goods outweigh their undeserved suffering, arbitrarily denying the unfree the ultimate good of progressive sanctification in everlasting union with God is inconsistent with belief in a loving God (Chignell, 1998, p.214). RST must either undermine its internal consistency by

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[185] Chapter 3.1.5, p.80.

[186] Chapter 4.4, pp.141-142.

[187] Chapter 3.2.4, p.103.

permitting other means of achieving the same ultimate good, or destine unfree humans for lesser goods in a way inconsistent with God's omniperfection.

EAT escapes this dilemma because it does not share with RST the premises that give rise to it concerning the fallen spiritual condition of human beings and our need for salvation through redemptive suffering. Therefore, in EAT no extra causal mechanism is needed to explain how unfree persons might exist in a realm of enhanced agency. They have the same good afterlife as every good-willed human being, since all presumptively qualify for life in REA by virtue of the innate goodness of human nature. This does not undermine EAT's account of human freedom, however, since the participation of previously unfree persons in REA is only possible under the tutelage of those with experience of will-setting freedom.

Chapter 4.6 also suggested how the unfree might be included in EAT's test of free will in ways that are consistent with its overall explanation. I proposed an inclusive definition of free will where human self-awareness and rationality are extra features in a broad spectrum of intentional agency that includes the unfree at the lower end. On this view, the goodness of will of the unfree might also be tested relative to their own limited capacity for agency and cognition. Having participated in their own test of agency, the unfree could view any earthly suffering it involves as defeated and not just outweighed by their life in REA.[188] If no link between the unfree and the test of will-setting freedom is granted, then REA may instead be an outweighing good. EAT satisfies the *sufferer centred requirement,* since the genetic and environmental factors that result in child deaths and lives of severe cognitive disability are part of the random distribution of conditions of flourishing and adversity that is essential to the unpredictable nature of genuine tests of free will. The unfree gain a great benefit, life in REA, the realisation of which depends on a means that is the cause of their undeserved suffering, i.e., the unpredictability of a worldly test of will-setting freedom.

Finally, an afterlife for animals that could be an outweighing or defeating good for these creatures is seemingly precluded in SMT and RST by their focus on freely willed responses to soul-making challenges and redemptive suffering. Stump does not discuss the problem, while Hick rejects an animal afterlife. Supposing that their cognitive enhancement during resurrection could make animals fit for the soul-making process is an implausible move, since it involves having their intrinsic natures radically altered, recreating them as entirely new kinds of creatures.[189] Moreover, if resurrection were to make such transformations possible for animals, similarly profound changes would also seem possible for human beings who have yet to complete their soul-making process,

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[188] Chapter 4.6, pp.177-178.

[189] Chapter 3.1.5, pp.80-81.

making SMT's progressive afterlife for humans redundant while enabling one for cognitively enhanced animals.

EAT can avoid these difficulties by supposing that all embodied creatures, not just human beings, are spiritual-physical unities. On this view, animals also have innately good natures which qualify them by default for life in REA. There is perhaps a constraint on which non-human creatures this might apply to, a point I shall return to below, but *ceteris paribus* there would be no need to redeem or perfect their wills for a good afterlife. The hierarchy of goods in REA's multi-level environment could include lower non-moral goods involving sentient animal life.[190] If so, animals need not exist in REA as enhanced agents. Like human beings they might be recreated with perfected genotypes and efficient metabolisms and digestive tracts that absorb nutrients without causing waste. An everlasting existence without fear of or the need for predation might also optimise any innate capacities animals might have for experiencing an emotional and mental life and forming relationships with other animals and human beings. Yet in REA they would flourish to the greatest extent that is possible *for the kinds of creatures they are*, not in their transformation into new types of beings.

What then is the explanation for the earthly existence of animals who end up in REA? As with unfree human beings, perhaps animals might have their own test of free will relative to their particular capacity for intentional agency, for example selecting for those individual creatures or species that only kill prey animals out of necessity and not gratuitously. If so then the random distribution of earthly conditions of flourishing and adversity would be part of their relative test of goodness of will, so that any suffering it may involve is defeated by the good afterlife brought about by that test. Alternatively, the explanation for animal pain might be subordinated to that of human suffering. It could be that animal life is one of the necessary conditions of a sustainable biological environment on earth, or that it contributes to the testing of human goodness. On this view, life in REA is an outweighing good that compensates animals for any earthly suffering involved in their contribution to the test of human freedom, thereby satisfying the sufferer centred requirement.

These suggestions presuppose that animals have the cognitive capacity to take REA to be a good from their own internal point of view. Hick's view is that a good afterlife cannot compensate animals for past suffering because they lack the self-consciousness and psychic unity over time to make the past a meaningful part of the present and future.[191] However, it is not implausible that acts of compensation would have some meaning for certain mammals, for example. Francescotti (2013) and Dougherty (2014) discuss how grief, boredom, loneliness and depression suggest that higher

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[190] Chapter 4.2, p.110; Chapter 4.6, p.184.

[191] Chapter 3.1.5, p.79.

animals have a capacity to experience the flow of time. Perhaps more suggestive are anecdotes of human-animal bonding, like stories of wild animals that have been bred in captivity recognising their human caregivers after long absences and responding with excitement and affection.[192] Such behaviours might be expressions of animal gratitude, where memories of nurturing are associated with feelings of safety and pleasure, and are highly valued compared with other mental states.

If this possibility is granted, then the memory involved is not the kind which constructs a meaningful narrative about how present goods might defeat past evils. Yet it seems not too far off the sort which could make an animal feel grateful for receiving a great benefit, a life of safety and pleasure in REA, that is better than their previous life of fear and hunger. This capacity for gratefulness is significant because I have suggested that participation in REA's non-moral goods world take on moral value when done in gratitude toward the divine source of those goods.[193] Could not animals feel such gratitude, especially if they have an awareness in the spiritual dimension of their being of the ultimate source of their happiness? One implication of this speculation is that it sets a constraint on which species of animals are resurrected for life in REA: only those capable of gratefulness toward God.

5.5 The Relative Explanatory Power of Enhanced Agency Theodicy

The discussion in this chapter has shown that EAT's eschatological solution to the problem of evil is more explanatorily successful than both SMT and RST. The main finding has been that SMT's and RST's appeals to eschatological goods to explain evil are internally inconsistent, while I see no such incoherence in EAT. Since internal coherence is a necessary condition of valid explanation, and scope and simplicity are not, EAT's relative explanatory power is confirmed without assessing the relative simplicity and scope of the three theodicies.

EAT lacks those features of Christian theism that are problematic for SMT and RST. Some of these internal inconsistencies may be resolvable with reformulations of these theodicies. For example, the SMT defender need not be committed to Hick's replica theory or the notion of a disembodied eschaton, which creates difficulties for SMT's response to the problems of post-mortem suffering and the fate of unfree creatures.[194] Equally, an RST defender may try to address

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[192] For a notable example concerning grieving elephants, see Outlook (2018).

[193] Chapter 4.2, p.117.

[194] For example, the SMT defender could revert to the embodied eschaton of Hick's original proposal in *Evil and the God of Love* (1966).

problems of hell and the value of heavenly freedom by providing an account of an embodied hell that is plausibly mild or of the range of choices that might be involved in the process of heavenly sanctification. However, where apparently key features of Christian theism are involved in inconsistencies, I see no way for SMT and RST defenders to propose solutions without abandoning claims that are essential to their character as Christian approaches to theodicy.[195]

Implicated, then, are features of the Christian worldview which I suggested in the introduction seemed to create problems for eschatological theodicies: a relational concept of love as a divine attribute and motivation, the creation of an essentially fallen human nature, and our heavenly redemption in union with God. I also suggested that these problems may be resolved by EAT's focus on divine benevolence and the notion of a good-maximising God, and two implications of this view: the innate goodness yet potential badness of human nature, and the divine purpose of maximising created goods through a paradisal realm of enhanced agency. The discussion in this chapter has born this hypothesis out and confirmed EAT's relative explanatory power.

Most significantly, SMT and RST have no good response to the normatively relativised logical argument from evil (NRLAFE). Their theodicies are incompatible with the theological ethic of divine love which they endorse, since a human-divine relationship cannot be supremely loving when it is contrived by a sustainer-redeemer God who rescues us from a God-made nature and world by means of and for the sake of uniting with us. Such a sustainer-redeemer God could also be more supportive and less demanding in setting about creating a world for the purpose of bringing other beings into personal relationship with God. By contrast, I see no inconsistency between EAT's ethic of benevolence, which defines the rightness of divine-human relations by the extent to which God maximises created goodness for the least cost and acts in the best interests of persons, and EAT's main claim that human beings must undergo a test of freedom and goodness of will to experience their ultimate flourishing in REA. That EAT's God wants as many human beings as possible to exist in REA, and is generally supportive and undemanding in setting the underlying conditions of our test so that this purpose is realised, are implications of the good-maximising view of God, and so these features of EAT's explanation cannot contradict its ethic of divine benevolence.

I see no way SMT and RST could be reformulated to evade the NRLAFE, since it implicates the fundamental structure of their explanations. Section 4.4 noted that EAT's world is created to answer the question, "*can human beings exist and flourish as enhanced agents?*" The question the worlds of SMT and RST are designed to answer is "*will fallen human beings accept the offer of personal relationship with God*?" Amending SMT and RST to include EAT's explanation of the world

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[195] Oppy alludes to this problem when remarking that a theodicy requires a fair amount of gerrymandering to give it explanatory power *and* make it cohere with normative Christian beliefs (2018b, p.77).

as a test of free will, or in their terms a test of our love of God, would not cohere with their ethic of divine love, since testing the love of a beloved is not a feature of the trust and faith characteristic of supremely good personal relationships. By contrast, the King analogy shows that such a test has no implications for the rightness of the relationship between the King and his subjects, since it is not expected to involve the same interpersonal goods that loving relationships between equal parties should have. The King may test his subjects to promote the flourishing of his kingdom and the best interests of each of his subjects without undermining the rightness of his relationship with them.

SMT and RST could instead try to prioritise a benevolence view of divine goodness and focus less on the human-divine relationship as a good in itself that is sought for its own sake. This might involve a beneficent God offering personal relationship to human beings in our best interests and for our own good, because a fallen existence is a great evil. Yet a good-maximising view shows that a perfectly good God, or indeed a supremely loving one, would not create human beings with a fallen nature that naturally resists willing the good. Rather, such a God would make goodness of will an essential property of human nature, not one contingent upon choices to accept divine salvation. Yet without their anthropology SMT and RST collapse as Christian responses to the problem of evil.

In the argument from heaven, belief in an omniperfect God is rejected if a theodicy fails to show that a world with morally significant freedom is a necessary condition of creating a paradise without it. The RST defender cannot evade God's omni-responsibility for human fallenness and so must explain why an omnipotent God cannot create a paradisal existence without having to save human beings from a fallen world by means of redemptive suffering. Rather than create multiple epistemically distant worlds for our soul-making, SMT's God could selflessly love persons with compatibilist freedom who merely believe their determined love of God is freely chosen, and whose lives without moral evil could equally serve the purpose of gathering up into divine consciousness our personal experiences of material existence.

There is no fallen world in EAT, therefore no redeeming from a corrupted nature or perfecting of persons for union with God. In EAT's test of free will, *human beings achieve the good afterlife by preserving the innate goodness of their wills in their neuro-physical development as embodied agents*. The transformative potential of choices in REA's dynamic environment requires enhanced agents to have neuro-physical flexibility and a durably good will, a capacity which *ceteris paribus* can only be developed by making morally significant choices with will-setting freedom. As REA cannot contain this kind of freedom since enhancing the agency of those who set their wills on evil would make it a hell, a prior stage of existence is necessary that tests the morally significant choices of agents with will-setting freedom in conditions that maximise the numbers that pass this test.

That SMT and RST make the good afterlife dependent upon our freely chosen redemption from a fallen condition and world is undermined by their accounts of relationship with God as both the means of our salvation and our ultimate end. Consequently, both envision an afterlife where ante and post-mortem environments supply different conditions by which to progress the same goal. Even if Hick's replica theory is abandoned, any soul-making afterlife that is progressive in providing for our conscious learning from previous lives seemingly must occur in conditions of less epistemic distance because we would be aware of having been resurrected, but this makes soul-making in earthly conditions of epistemic distance gratuitous. The very idea of a succession of soul-making afterlives may be incoherent for this reason. Similarly, RST's progressive sanctification in heaven renders the redemptive suffering involved in the earthly stage of this process gratuitous, since it shows that sanctification is possible without moral and natural evils.

While personal development in earthly life also continues in REA, EAT evades this difficulty because ante- and post-mortem lives have distinct purposes, that of testing will-setting freedom in a way that maximises the numbers passing the test, and that of fully realising our capacity to participate in created goods through enhanced agency. Ante- and post-mortem environments are created with separate sets of conditions which are fit for their respective purposes. The random distribution of adversity and flourishing is needed to make the test of will-setting freedom ubiquitous and genuine, but it is not needed in REA where there is no such test. Similarly, the natural order needs to be ungovernable on earth to constrain the influence of systemic moral evil, but it need not be in REA where there is no such evil.

Finally, the fallenness of human nature is implicated in further incoherences concerning the problem of hell and the fate of the unfree. RST has no answer for a version of the diminished capacities objection since it has God withholding heavenly existence from fallen individuals who lack the character and willingness to decide in their own best interests. By contrast, the innate goodness of human nature in EAT plausibly gives us the capacity to seek out knowledge relevant to the post-mortem consequences of our choices and the resources we need to pass the test of free will. RST's presumption that all will exist in hell unless we choose otherwise also requires that the fallen natures of children and the severely cognitively disabled are made fit for heaven in a way other than through redemptive suffering, but this makes RST *ad hoc* and the suffering involved in the justification of human adults gratuitous. EAT involves no such inconsistency or extra hypotheses because the universal goodness of human nature automatically qualifies unfree humans for life in REA, while the embodied experience of adults who have passed the test of will-setting freedom is necessary to nurture the neuro-physical development of human beings who die without having had their will-setting freedom tested.

The in-built disadvantage of having a fallen human nature also leads us to expect much more post-mortem suffering in SMT and RST, unless defenders appeal to extra hypotheses that undermine their coherence. RST's presumption that all are destined for hell unless we choose salvation, and the apparently poor fit between the distribution of opportunities for redemptive suffering and the spiritual needs of individuals, would seemingly require a perfectly loving God to offer a last chance which saves most if not all at death. This is perhaps the only way the world of RST can roughly match the proportions of goods and evils in Chapter 4.6's pyramid diagram, which illustrates what we might expect from EAT's two-stage world and the supportive and undemanding conditions of its test of will-setting freedom. Yet as discussed in Chapter 3.2.4, a last chance hypothesis makes RST *ad hoc,* since there is no reason why the knowledge needed to choose salvation should be withheld until the point of death. These difficulties concerning the quantity of post-mortem suffering and the fates of creatures without free will reveal an inconsistency between the sort of soteriology we might expect from a loving God and the outcomes we should expect from the world structured by the God of RST. SMT's universalism may be taken as an attempt to resolve this problem by extending soteriology beyond death, but as discussed above Hick's idea of a series of epistemically distant afterlives appears to be incoherent.

This study aimed to assess whether EAT's eschatological solution to the problem of evil *prima facie* makes it a good candidate theodicy for inclusion in an IBE evaluation of theism and naturalism as worldviews. Chapter 1.4 proposed three success conditions to assess EAT's candidacy. EAT must have greater explanatory power than the theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump, be probable on bare theism and be probable on or strongly correlated with an actual tradition of theism. The three success conditions were as follows, where S is the amount, kinds, and distribution of suffering of all sentient creatures, t is bare theism, $t_{1/2/3}$ are varieties of actual theisms and h is a theodicy or auxiliary hypothesis of theism which purports to explain how S could be true given theism:

> 1) P (S/t & h) is high, *or at least not too low*,
>
> 2) P (h/t) is high *and*
>
> 3) P ($h/t_{1/2/3}$) is high.[196]

The closing chapter will consider the second and third conditions but what can we conclude about the first? Chapter 1.4 suggested taking explanatory power as a proxy for the probability of a theodicy's account of evil. Chapter 1.1 endorsed the principle derived from Hume that where two

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[196] Chapter 1.4, pp.34-35.

hypotheses are logically incompatible and the first is more probable than the second, the probability of the second hypothesis is less than half regardless of how probable or improbable is the first.[197] I conclude from this chapter's discussion that the versions of SMT and RST considered in this study are incoherent, while EAT's explanation of evil is internally consistent. As EAT's account of *S* is logically incompatible with that of both SMT and RST, particularly in relation to their conceptions of human nature, and SMT and RST are incoherent while EAT is not, P (*S/t* & *EAT*) must be higher than P (*S/t* & *SMT*) and P (*S/t* & *RST*).

However, is the success condition that this probability value should be at least not too low satisfied? On a scale between 0 and 1, where 0 indicates impossibility and 1 indicates certainty, the foregoing discussion suggests that P (*S/t* & *SMT*) and P (*S/t* & *RST*) are close to 0, if not in fact 0, since incoherent hypotheses are invalid explanations that cannot be true. This means that P (*S/t* & *EAT*) could still be very low, even if EAT is more probable than both SMT and RST. Further IBE comparisons of EAT with other eschatological theodicies are therefore needed to strengthen our conclusion. In particular, if EAT were to be perform well in IBE comparisons with alternatives that are also coherent, then we could be more confident in concluding that P (*S/t* & *EAT*) is at least not too low, since the rival theodicies would have a probability greater than 0. In such IBE evaluations, a judgement about EAT's explanatory power would depend on its relative scope and simplicity.

EAT's candidacy for IBE evaluation with naturalism need not wait on comparisons with eschatological theodicies such as those proposed by Peter van Inwagen (1988), Marilyn McCord Adams (1999) and Alvin Plantinga (2004). Since their explanations prioritise a relational notion of divine love, conceive of human nature as essentially fallen, and take heavenly union with a God to be our salvation, we can assume that their theodicies lack explanatory coherence since these ideas are implicated in the inconsistencies of SMT and RST. Moreover, while the concluding chapter will argue that the main propositions of EAT are entailed in or implied by the notion of an omniperfect God, these features of Christian theism are not, so the theodicies of Inwagen, Adams, and Plantinga are also less probable than EAT on bare theism.

Two theodicies that do merit consideration are the proposals of Stewart Goetz (2008, 2009) and Richard Swinburne (1998). They involve appeals to an afterlife but de-emphasise or exclude some or all of these aspects of Christian theism. These theodicies also do not make their central organising idea the relational notion of divine love that this study has shown to be problematic for both SMT and RST. In his theodicy, Goetz takes a hedonic view of heavenly bliss as subjectively felt happiness involving only pleasure and no pain. A condition of the perfection of this happiness is that we justly experience it having formed good characters through freely choosing to promote our long-

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[197] Chapter 1.1, pp.18-19.

term well-being over short-term needs (2009, p.149).[198] Swinburne justifies free will, and the natural order that provides the epistemic conditions by which we exercise it with moral responsibility, as supremely valuable in enabling us to choose our destinies through the characters we form (1998, pp.121, 143, 147, 250). Since for him a perfectly good God has a duty to provide human beings with a life that is overall more good than bad, the afterlife enables God to fulfil this obligation by compensating those whose lives have been more bad than good (1998, pp.232, 236). This compensation includes the Beatific Vision for all those who remain sensitive to goodness and truth in mortal life (1998, p.119); the lower level good of limbo for infants and children who die having yet to form characters capable of enjoying life in heaven (1998, p.121); and a mild hell that is the best place for all those who do not want heavenly life with God (1998, pp.197; 1983).[199]

If we assume that the theodicies of Swinburne and Goetz are coherent, then there are *prima facie* reasons for thinking that EAT has greater explanatory scope than both. Goetz provides a theodicy for moral evil but he thinks an account of natural evils is "beyond our intellectual purview", limiting its explanatory scope (2009, p.484). Contra Swinburne, experiencing the harmful consequences of natural evils is arguably not necessary for moral knowledge (O'Connor, 1991), but even if his argument is granted, it can only account for a small percentage of such evils (Draper, 2001, pp.463-464), and provides no explanation for large scale natural disasters. Swinburne's choice-based account of the afterlife is disinterested in the relative proportions of eschatological goods and evils, because what is in view is those features of free will that make it supremely valuable, not whether we end up in heaven or hell nor how many of us are destined for the latter, since God practically fulfils whatever life the individual chooses out of respect for human freedom. His compensation view of the afterlife, which is "integral to Swinburne's theodicy" (Hall, 2018, p.49), also lacks scope, since post-mortem recompense for injury cannot be the purpose for which the world was created.

EAT may also score highly for simplicity, an important criterion for any future IBE evaluation of naturalism and theism, given that complexity generally counts against the latter in such comparisons. EAT is not merely an explanation of earthly suffering, but offers a single account of conditions of both adversity and flourishing that exist in the world. EAT's explanations of moral and natural evils are implications of the same good-maximising view of God. The theodicy explains both heaven and hell as part of a single agency-centred account of this world and the next. EAT also integrates the fate of free and unfree creatures into the same good afterlife. These features may

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[198] Goetz does not consider his theodicy to be "Christian in nature", but he suggests that Christian theism endorses its main ideas (2008, p.132).

[199] Swinburne also considers annihilation for young children (Hall, 2018, pp.49-50).

suggest that EAT is simpler, both ontologically and syntactically, than Swinburne's theodicy for example. Further research is needed, but EAT has the potential to perform well on this measure and so strengthen its claim to a probability that is at least not too low. Nevertheless, with respect to the scope of this study and the three theodicies it has compared, the probability of EAT is relatively high by virtue of its greater explanatory power, and so I take the first success condition to be provisionally fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

ENHANCED AGENCY THEODICY
AND MUSLIM THEISM: CANDIDATES FOR
IBE COMPARISON WITH NATURALISM?

To establish EAT's candidacy for an IBE evaluation of naturalism and theism as worldviews, its correlation with an actual theism must be strong. As the research strategy in Chapter 1.3 set out, a correlation would *prima facie* show that the sort of eschatological explanation EAT provides is not merely a fictional possibility, and it would identify which actual theism, or interpretation of it, forms the wider formulation of theism within which EAT would be incorporated for provisional and detailed IBE comparisons with naturalism.[200] However, before outlining the prospects for future research into EAT's potential correlation with Muslim theism, to merit this investigation EAT must also satisfy the second success condition evaluated in this study: its probability on bare theism.

Chapter 1.4 suggested that if the main claims of EAT are entailed in, implied by, and inferred from the attributes of an omniperfect God, then the probability of EAT on bare theism would be high.[201] As EAT derives its explanation almost entirely from the notion of an omniperfect God the theodicy is probable on bare theism. The threshold argument advanced in Chapter 4.2 to resolve the paradox of maximisation showed that the idea of a good-maximising God is coherent. I also argued that the claim, *God is omniperfect,* is strictly implied by statement P1 of EAT, *an omniperfect God would want to maximise the goodness that results from its creative activity*, where in strict implication it is logically impossible for the former to be true and the latter to be false.[202] The objector will have to show that formulations of the statement P1*, *an omniperfect God would want to minimise the goodness that results from its creative activity,* are not self-contradictory. If a version

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[200] Chapter 1.3, p.30.

[201] Chapter 1.4, pp.34-36.

[202] For definitions of entailment, strict implication and implication see Chapter 1.4, p.31.

of P1* can be shown to be logically possible, then a weaker claim would hold, that omniperfection merely implies P1, where the former makes the latter probable.

The rest of the theodicy was developed from these premises. Chapter 4.3 explored the implications of the good-maximising view of God to build up a picture of a possible world such a God might be expected to create. This was a *realm of enhanced agency* in which the embodied agency of self-aware persons with goodness and freedom of will is fully realised. This analysis relied on *a posteriori* knowledge of types of goods in our own world and inferences concerning how they might be amplified or enhanced in an ideal environment. Nevertheless, Chapters 4.4 and 4.5 argued that a prior test of will-setting freedom in a world like ours is a necessary condition of bringing about a maximally good REA. Consequently, if EAT is a true explanation and our world is this prior stage of existence, then the dependence of REA's conceivability on inferences involving earthly goods is ultimately warranted.[203] Objectors could challenge the extent to which some aspects of a realm of enhanced agency or its conditions of realisation are in fact implications of omniperfection. I did draw upon a heuristic awareness of certain religious ideas for inspiration, for example in supposing enhanced agents to be able to cross dimensions in a multi-dimensional reality, but these ideas were included only in so far as they are implied by the good-maximising view of God by their contribution to promoting embodied agency and maximising created goodness overall. As EAT did not rely on claims concerning divinity, human nature and an afterlife that are not entailed in or implied by the idea of an omniperfect God, I conclude that P (*EAT/t*) is high.

Consequently, this study's evaluation of EAT's relative explanatory power and probability on bare theism provides good grounds for further research into EAT's correlation with an actual theism, and I think a correlation with Muslim theism can be established. This view perhaps seems remarkable given that EAT is derived from bare theism only, however, a strong correlation may be less surprising than it at first appears. The three main principles of Islamic theology, *al-tawhid*, the oneness and unity of God, *al-risalah*, God's providential guidance through prophets, and *al-akhirah*, the life hereafter and day of judgment (Siddiqi, 1993, pp.43-45), are arguably at least implied by bare theism. For example, *al-tawhid* is strictly implied by belief in God's omniperfection, because an omnipotent God can have no equal. *Al-risalah* and *al-akhirah* seem implied by divine omnibenevolence, since God's perfect goodness makes probable the existence of prophets who deliver providential guidance to humanity, and also makes probable some form of continuation of life after death to explain the apparent gratuity of many earthly evils, as argued in Chapter 1.5. In terms of Rowe's distinction between *restricted* and *expanded* forms of standard theism, Muslim

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[203] See the *continuity of value* rationale for conceptualising ultimate goods, Chapter 1.6, pp.42-43.

theism is a more limited form of expanded standard theism than Christian theism, and therefore simpler.[204]

Moreover, there is a *prima facie* correspondence between EAT and four central aspects of Islamic theology. Jon Hoover (2003) identifies three main responses to the question of God and evil in Islamic tradition: free will theodicy, divine voluntarism, and best of all possible worlds optimism, which broadly focus on three different divine attributes: justice, power, and wisdom respectively. Although it is not premised explicitly on a best of all possible worlds argument, EAT seems most consistent with optimism and its emphasis on the divine attribute of *hikma,* God's wisdom or wise purpose, since the good-maximising goal in EAT's P1 may be supposed to be part of God's wise purposes for the world. Divine wisdom was prioritised in the optimism of Al-Ghazali (Ormsby, 1984, pp.192-207) and Ibn Taymiyya (Hoover, 2007, pp.177-209), two of the most influential theologians within orthodox Sunni Islam.[205] Secondly, the doctrine of *al-tawhid*, concerning God's essential unity, unique oneness and utter unlikeness with any created thing (Campanini/ Higgit, 2004, pp.75-93), is consistent with EAT's view of the good afterlife as a realm that is proximate to but not coextensive with the being of God. Thirdly, a key concept that links this life to the next in the Islamic worldview*,* divine *bala* or trial*,* the creation of the world for the purpose of testing human beings (Rouzati, 2004, pp.8-30), is also a central premise of EAT's solution to the problem of evil. Finally, the majority position within Muslim tradition concerning human *fitrah* or nature is that human beings are innately good yet potentially bad, born into a state of *iman* or faith, but with the potential for disbelief and evil by means of our free will and intellect (Mohamed, 1995).[206] Perhaps this study's most interesting finding is that drawing out the implications of a good-maximising view of God provides apparent philosophical support for this view of human nature. As the previous chapter has shown, this anthropology has significant implications for the structure of explanation in eschatological theodicy.

Future research to establish a correlation with Muslim theism will perhaps face two main difficulties, the first concerning EAT's libertarian view of free will. Robert Prevost remarks that free will in Islamic theology is "not part of God's purposes for the world, and hence, it is not a part of

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[204] See Chapter 1.4, p.31 for Rowe's definitions of restricted and expanded standard theism.

[205] The attributes of divine power and divine justice are given prominence in Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite theology respectively, but common-sense intuitions suggest that power without justice is tyranny and there is no justice without wisdom.

[206] In Islamic theology there is no doctrine of the Fall or original sin. After their mistake Allah teaches Adam and Eve words of repentance and forgives them before placing them on earth to enjoy as a dwelling place (Quran 2:36-37). The incident is part of Allah's plan to place Adam on earth as Allah's *khalipha* or vicegerent (Quran 2:30).

theodicy" (1990, p.109). I think he is mistaken, and a case for EAT's compatibility with Muslim theism need not rely on heterodox views within Islamic tradition. A form of compatibilism is seemingly implied by Ash'arism, the predominant school of orthodox Sunni theology. In privileging the attribute of divine power, it considers God to be the only agent and efficient cause of all actions, while at the same time affirming the human being is a free agent (*mukhtar*) in the sense of having will or volition (*irada*) and free choice (*ikhityar*) between alternative actions. Ash'arism attempts to accommodate these two aspects of agency though the theory of acquisition (*kasb),* where there are two powers, human and divine, over every act, in which the human will is said to appropriate actions created by God (Griffel, 2009, pp.184, 218-219). However, EAT is not committed to the belief that human beings are the ultimate *creators* of their acts. Recall that it defined an *agent* as a being which acts with reason, will and intention to bring about *or participate in* changes in reality, others and the self for which they have moral responsibility. The idea of participation was included in this definition to make the concept of agency compatible with the view that God is the ultimate creator and sustainer of all acts.

What matters for EAT's potential corelation is whether normative Islam agrees that an agent is free to endorse one or other intentions or purposes in making choices, that we are responsible for our actions, and that moral choices can be self-forming resulting in neuro-physical change and growth. The independence of our wills and personal moral responsibility for our actions are implied in several verses of the Quran,[207] by the divine trial (*bala*) and last judgment (*al-akhirah*) of human beings, and the traditional view of paradise and hell (*jannah* and *jahannam)* as punishment and reward for our deeds. That our intentions and choices participate in changes in reality is affirmed in Islam's distinction between the unchanging decree of Allah's *Preserved Tablet* (*al-Lawh al-Mahfuz*), and the changing of our personal destinies through worship, prayer and good deeds, in other words through our agency (Parrot, 2017). The potential for neuro-physical change is suggested by the extensive literature on developmental spiritual psychology within Islam's Sufi tradition, which also implies that the individual is an agent, since the idea of inner struggle or *jihad* to purify oneself seems incoherent without reference to voluntary efforts of the will.[208] The idea, then, that God sustains our wills and our power to act while not determining which of our intentions we choose to endorse in our actions seems consistent with EAT's test of free will and Islamic views of divine agency.

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[207] See Quran 18:29, 2:57, 3:117, 4:107, 7:160, 16:93, 41:40, 74:36-38 (Nasr et al., 2015).

[208] Al-Ghazali/ Winter (2016) epitomises this aspect of normative Islam.

Correlating EAT's afterlife with that of Muslim theism also seems possible. The Quran's anthropocentric view of paradise as an embodied life with multiple levels of existence is *prima facie* a good fit for REA. The Quran refers to the existence of seven heavens or *samawat* (2:229, 23:86, 65:12), which exist in layers "one upon another" (67:3; 71:15), the lowest level of which contains "lamps" that may be understood to be the stars of our universe (41:12).[209] That these layers might conceivably overlap and have their own temporal modes of existence, allowing for forms of interpenetration between them, is suggested by the stories of the man outside a ruined town (2:259) and the companions of the cave (18:9-26). The plurality and diversity of REA's maximally populated environment is implied by the Quranic teaching that peoples and tribes were made so that "you may come to know one another" (49:13), and the exhortation to different religious communities to "vie with one another in good deeds" (5:48.).[210] The Quran's account of animal resurrection (6:38; 81:5; 42:29) is also compatible with EAT's argument that the good-maximising view of God implies the creation of an afterlife for certain animals.

The Quran does present heaven and hell as a reward and punishment, which is consistent with theologies that prioritise God's justice over other divine attributes. As some enhanced and restricted agents would likely see heaven and hell as such from their internal points of view, an afterlife of felt rewards and punishments is not necessarily incompatible with EAT. Nevertheless, since a focus on divine wisdom is a theological option in Muslim theism, this implies that an omniperfect God would have a rationale for creating a test of free will other than to reward and punish, so research is needed to examine whether EAT's P1 is a good candidate for a divine purpose on the Islamic view, as the optimism of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya seems to suggest.[211] Another potential problem is the traditional understanding of hell as an everlasting punishment. Yet EAT's realm of restricted agency may be a fit for alternative views of hell that have been proposed by prominent theologians in the classical tradition, including conceptions of temporary suffering, annihilation, and relative flourishing (Khalil, 2016). Notably, Ibn Taymiyya endorsed the possibility of

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[209] See Quranic Arabic Corpus (undated) for translations of this verse that take the word *lamps* or *lights* in the lowest heaven to mean *stars*. A hadith in *Sunan Ibn Majah* narrates that paradise has one hundred spatially distinct levels, the highest of which is *Firdaws* (Sunnah.com, undated).

[210] For commentary on Quran 5:48 and 49:13, see Nasr, et al. (2015, pp.301; 1263).

[211] There are at least two Quranic verses which imply an unstated wise purpose for the creation of the world: Quran 44:38 reveals that the heavens and the earth were not created for "sport" or "play"; when the angels question the purpose of humanity's creation in Quran 2:30, complaining that we will cause corruption bloodshed on the earth, Allah responds "I know that which you do not know" (Quranic Arabic Corpus, undated).

a finite hell in his defence of rationality and wise purpose in God's actions, arguing that God could have no good reason to punish anyone forever (Hoover, 2016, p.210).

Therefore, I propose that the following concepts would provide good starting points for a study of EAT's potential correlation with Muslim theism: on divinity, *al-tawhid* (the oneness and uniqueness of God), divine *hikmah* (God's wisdom or wise purpose), *bala* (divine trial), the divine names of *al-Hakim* (the Wise), *al-Latif* (the Benevolent) and *al-Rahman* (the Infinitely Good), and God's relationship to *khayr* (good) and *sharr* (evil); with respect to eschatology, *al-akhirah* (the afterlife), *jannah* and *jahannam* (paradise and hell), al-nar (the fire), *najja* (saving from destruction) and *falah* (eschatological success or victory); and concerning anthropology the concepts of *insan* (human), *fitrah* (nature), *ruh* (spirit), *nafs* (self/soul), *and khalifah* (vicegerency), as well as *kasb* (acquisition), and the sense in which the human being is a *mukhtar* (free agent) with *ikhityar* (free choice), *irada* (volition) and *niyyah* (intention).[212]

If setting aside aspects of a Christian worldview suggests a way forward on the problem of evil, my intention is not to create a division between Muslim and Christian philosophers of religion on this topic. As this research aptly demonstrates, Muslim and Christian theists share a common universe of ideas and concerns. Rather, my focus has been on whether there is a theodicy that might, as part of a wider formulation of theism, perform well in an inference to the best explanation comparison of theism and naturalism as worldviews. The difficulty for the theodicean is that only an eschatological theodicy will do, which complicates matters significantly. Nevertheless, the intuition that motivated this research was that developing a conception of the *nature* of a possible afterlife could be the key to an explanation of this life. To flesh out this picture I did not rely on Christian ideas of mystical union with a Triune God or Quranic imagery of palatial gardens with flowing streams. Instead, I focussed on the implications of a good-maximising view of God for one particular created good: embodied agency. The result is a naturalistic and rationally grounded account of ultimate goods and the way in which their realisation explains the nature of our world with the evil and suffering it contains.

As with other free will theodicies, this solution is concerned with the role of our wills in the formation of good character, but EAT's dynamic eschaton suggests something new: that our ultimate flourishing requires neuro-physical flexibility of a kind only developed in a world like ours. Alongside this naturalistic account of free will, dualistic holism provides for a spiritual aspect that is implied by the good-maximising view, and which sets this proposal apart from Christian theodicy. In EAT,

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[212] These terms are chosen from various sources referenced in this chapter. Additional sources not already referenced include Al-Ghazali/ Burrell & Daher (1995) on divine names in the Quran; Hamza (2017) on the afterlife; and Al-Ghazali/ Shaker (2016a) and Al-Attas (2015) on human nature.

human beings are universally created with innate goodness of will. What is therefore developed with the use of our freedom is not a spiritual transformation of the will that is needed to attain a good afterlife; it is our capacity for embodied agency in it. By integrating the influences of our immaterial and physical dimensions in the characters we form in mortal life, we raise up this capacity in line with the sacred status with which we are all endowed, so that in the life to come we can fully realise our natures as spiritual-physical beings. I have argued that these features provide for a better eschatological solution to the problem of evil than the theodicies of John Hick and Eleonore Stump. I have also suggested, in outline, that the proposed theodicy has scope to correlate with normative understandings of Muslim theism. Future studies to explore this correlation in more detail can point the way to an evaluation of worldviews that compares a naturalistic explanation of the world with a formulation of Muslim theism that includes enhanced agency theodicy.

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