Replacement of the 'Augustinian' Theodicy with an 'Irenaean' Theodicy and the Need for a New Metaphysical Foundation

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Replacement of the ‘Augustinian’ Theodicy with an ‘Irenaean’ Theodicy and the Need for a New Metaphysical Foundation

Dedicated to: My friends at Carroll and family who have supported and encouraged me throughout the course of this project.

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Senior Honors Thesis
4/2/07
Thank You

I would like to thank Dr. Mark Smillie, Sister Annette Moran, and Dr. Richard Lambert for their guidance and help in setting up independent studies, clarifying ideas, proofreading, making suggestions, and encouraging me throughout the course of this project. Thank you for the generous donation of your time and especially for your friendship.
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April 2, 2007
# Table of Contents

Introduction.............................................................................i-iii

Chapter I. The Existence of Evil and the Adamic Myth:  
Faith Seeking Understanding  
A. The Character of Creation............................................4-7  
B. Pervasive Evil.................................................................7-9  
C. Original Paradise.............................................................9-11  
D. Radical Sin.................................................................11-11  
E. Fall into Corruption and Death.................................11-15  
F. Augustine’s Theodicy and the New Cosmology......16-27

Chapter II. Platonism and the Principle of Plenitude in  
Augustine’s Theodicy  
A. The Dualistic Influences on Augustine.......................28-29  
B. ‘Otherworldliness’ and ‘This-worldliness’ in Plato....30-33  
C. Principle of Plenitude in Plotinus: Whence Evil?.....33-36  
D. St. Augustine: What is Evil, What is its Source?.....36-38  
E. Historical Difficulties With Principle of Plenitude....38-48

Chapter III. Rejection of Augustinian-Type Theodicy  
A. The Platonic Meaning of Goodness.................................50-52  
B. Understanding Christian Goodness...............................53-59  
C. Evil as Privative............................................................59-62  
D. Natural Evil in the Augustinian Theodicy.................63-64  
E. Augustine’s Free Will Defense.................................64-69  
F. Creaturely Self-Creation..............................................69-71

Chapter IV. The ‘Irenaean’ Approach  
A. Irenaean Theological Anthropology..............................72-75  
B. ‘Schleiermacherian’ Insights........................................75-78  
C. The Universe as a ‘Vale of Soul-Making’....................78-80  
D. Difficulties with the Irenaean System.........................80-82  
E. Self-Creating Universe: Process Contributions........83-94  
F. Criticism of the Process System...............................94-97  
G. Conclusion.................................................................97-99

Bibliography...........................................................................100-103
Introduction

The basic questions with which this essay is concerned have confronted me throughout the course of my study as a student at Carroll. My studies in the sciences and liberal arts have taken place in conjunction with and often in a certain amount of healthy tension with my journey of faith as a Catholic. This essay concerns many of the issues with which I have struggled. My main question involves why our scientific view of the universe and its inhabitants, as well as certain religious and philosophical considerations, seem for many to be in conflict with the traditional Christian explanation for evil as developed by St. Augustine (354-430 C.E.). As John Hick notes in his book, *Evil and the God of Love*, the pervasive presence of evil in the world is one of the most significant reasons for atheism, and is a constant challenge to the faith of the believer. Since it seems that some conflict exists between contemporary thinking and certain aspects of Augustine’s thought, and since evil can act as a major barrier to faith, I believe that we must strive to assure the intelligibility of the Christian faith in the modern world by critically examining the traditional Christian theodicy. A better understanding of the mystery of evil cannot make it go away, but may open the doorway of faith for those to who find evil blocking the way, or lighten the burden of doubt for those who already believe.

St. Augustine’s doctrines of the fall and of original sin have exerted a tremendous influence on the imaginations of Christians for over 1500 years; and because the mystery of evil is central to the greater Christian mystery of Creation, Sin, and Redemption, many doctrines have been affected by his thought. Since a criticism of Augustine will

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necessarily have some effect on other Christian doctrines, many understandably seem reluctant to admit the need for change. I do not wish to downplay in any way the genius of one of Christianity’s greatest thinkers, but only to suggest that Augustine’s theodicy is only one interpretation of Revelation. He was, like us, limited by the accepted view of the natural world, philosophical climate, cultural context, and state of Christian understanding of his time.

In this study, it will be important to keep in mind the contrast between two general pictures of the natural world—one held by people of Augustine’s time, and one held by our scientific community today. The contrast is between a relatively static creation which sprung forth immediately perfect from the hands of the Creator, and an incomplete creation still in a teleological state of development. This view of creation is possibly hinted at in the Catechism’s acknowledgment of a creation “in statu viae.”

After showing why I believe Augustine’s theodicy to be inadequate for Christians today, I will briefly introduce an alternative way of addressing the problem which seems to have first appeared in an undeveloped way in the thinking of the early Church father Irenaeus (c.130-202 C.E.), and was later taken up independently by the Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). This ‘Irenaean’ theodicy has been advocated by John Hick in the work mentioned above, and this essay relies heavily on his development of the Irenaean contribution. I will suggest that the Irenaean theodicy offers a more coherent overall explanation for evil and sin in the world today, while staying faithful to the core of the Christian faith. I will also attempt to show how a slightly different understanding of the general way in which God created may help to solve the problem of dysteleological suffering, a problem which the Irenaean position does not seem to explain

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adequately. Although Hick does not concern himself with suggesting a new metaphysic, the overall Irenaean theological view may not fit into the Platonic/Aristotelian thought system, at least not without significant modification. Though the scope of this project will not allow me to address this problem in any kind of detail, I suggest that a metaphysical system similar to that developed by Alfred North Whitehead may work better than the traditional one. However, I will also point out that some of the conclusions of ‘Process’ Theology seem to be at significant variance with orthodox Christian belief. Though these differences may ultimately render process thought untenable for Christianity, there may be some aspects of it which prove useful. Also, it may be that, as Stephen Duffy suggests, many Process insights have already been appropriated within already established theological traditions.

The primary focus of this thesis will be in bringing to light what I believe to be wrong with Augustine’s position. However, I also wish to suggest that the Irenaean theodicy allows for a better understanding of the Christian paradox that evil is at once the enemy of our loving God and must be removed wherever possible, but at the same time exists only because, in God’s sovereignty, it is allowed to exist for the greater good of all.
Chapter I. The Existence of Evil and the Adamic Myth: Faith Seeking Understanding

We have all endured hardships in life, and though we may not personally have experienced any which could be called extreme, we have at least known those who have or heard stories about the sufferings that have befallen humans throughout the course of our history. In the first place, many people must toil and struggle simply to survive, while most of us operate under a certain amount of stress to be responsible family and societal members. Then there are some of the more sinister social tragedies, such as oppression of one group of people by another, racism, and discrimination of all types. We have seen these horrors taken to the extreme in the murder of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps, in slavery, and in the violent wars and conflicts throughout history. Moral tragedies aside, natural disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake or more recently, the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake in the Indian Ocean or Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans can be devastating to human life. Also within the spectrum of hardships caused at least partially by the function of the natural world would be diseases like AIDS, cancer, Alzheimer’s, genetic malformities, some mental disorders, and innumerable other illnesses. There are also the more subtle, but still devastating, forms of suffering which manifest themselves in feelings of unimportance, helplessness, depression, and anxiety about where we come from and where we are going. Besides human suffering, it can also be difficult to understand the carnage that is part of the animal world. Why does our world often seem so inhospitable or at least indifferent to the life which it harbors?

Though the use of the word ‘evil’ is not commonly restricted to evil in the religious sense, this is the sense in which it will be used throughout this essay. A
‘theodicy’ is the attempt to explain the existence of evil in a world supposed to be the work of a perfectly good and omnipotent Creator. In order to understand why evil can weigh so heavily on the Christian or be a reason for an atheist’s non-belief, it is necessary to understand what the Church teaches about the character of creation and its Creator, for as C.S. Lewis says, speaking of pain and evil, “pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving.”\(^1\) First, however, I wish to briefly address an issue that Harry Emerson Fosdick broached and which John Hick calls to our attention.

Fosdick asserts that, though the existence of evil may seem inexplicable in light of the existence of a good God, on these grounds the existence of good is equally unexplainable if there is no God. He says:

> Once I decided that I could not believe in the goodness of God in the presence of the world’s evil, and then I discovered that I had run headlong into another and even more difficult problem: What to do about all the world’s goodness on the basis of no God? Sunsets and symphonies, mothers, music, and the laughter of children at play, great books, great art, great science, great personalities, victories of goodness over evil, the long hard-won ascent from the Stone Age up, and all the friendly spirits that are to other souls a ‘cup of strength in some great agony’—how can we, thinking of these on the basis of no God, explain them as the casual, accidental by-products of physical forces, going it blind? I think it cannot be done. The mystery of evil is very great upon the basis of a good God but the mystery of goodness is impossible upon the basis of no God.\(^2\)

Hick claims (see above citation) that this is not sound reasoning, since the burden of proof here is on the Christian. The atheist is not obliged to explain anything, but need only take the good with the bad, simply as part of the way life is. The Christian, though, is attempting to justify a particular doctrine of creation based on a good, loving, omnipotent God, and so is presented with a difficult challenge.

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But I think there is another aspect of evil that makes the idea of “taking the good with the bad,” difficult to accept, and which can be seen in a scene in Tim Winton’s novel “Cloudstreet.” The scene finds a lower working class couple, Lester and Oriel Lamb, having seen their favorite son nearly drown and become permanently mentally disabled as a result, engaged in a discussion about how difficult life is.

I just wish I knew what to believe in.
You believe in what you like, Lester Lamb. That’s one thing I can’t show you.
You’ve got mean, Oriel.
She sniffs.
Is it the war that’s done it to you?
It’s all war, she said.
What is?
I don’t know. Everythin. Raisin a family, keeping yer head above water. Life. War is our natural state.
Well, struggle maybe, said Lester.
No, no, its war.
Ah, things come along. You take the good with the bad.
Oriel rears with sudden passion: No you don’t. You know about boats. You can’t steer if you’re not goin faster than the current. If yer not under yer own steam then yer just debris, stuff floatin. We’re not frightened animals, Lester, just waitin with some dumb thoughtless patience for the tide to turn. I’m not spending my livin breathin life quietly takin the good with the bad. I’m not standin for the bad; bad people, bad luck, bad ways, not even bad breath. We make good, Lester. We make war on the bad and don’t surrender.³

This, to me, captures an important aspect of the problem of evil: good tends to be inconspicuous, harder to see, something that takes a developed character to identify and appreciate. In contrast, partly because we tend to take what good we have for granted, the bad seems gratuitous, ubiquitous. Everyone, at least from their own perspective, has plenty of evil and not enough good. Now this may be chalked up to our human immaturity and sinfulness, however, it still seems to me a fact of experience that we tend to see the bad as always knocking on the door, every-ready to swallow us up should we let down our guard. The bare fact that we often have to work at seeing the good in things, whereas the bad is usually readily evident, can lead one to wonder why God had not

made it easier on us. Couldn’t he have made a much happier place for His creatures to live?

Another obvious but in some ways difficult-to-understand fact is that the amount of good and bad in a person’s life is not necessarily correlated to the goodness or badness of the person. The old question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” can just as easily be turned on its head to ask “Why do such good things happen to bad people?” This can seem to indicate a great lack of justice in the world. With such questions in mind, I will now explain the doctrine of creation in order to put our inquiry into the existence of evil into its Christian context within which it can at first seem so foreign.

A. The Character of Creation

If the question “What is the essence of the Christian faith?” were asked of most Christians, the response would rightfully entail an account of the Incarnation, Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Belief in the historical Jesus Christ, both fully God and fully man, and His saving action is indeed the distinguishing element of Christianity. Still, the event itself is unintelligible apart from the whole of Christian faith, especially the doctrine of creation and the universality of sin, God’s revelation of Himself to the Israelites chronicled in the Old Testament, and the development of Christianity after Christ’s death up to the present time. Christian teachings and doctrines develop from God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and from the life of the Church community, but also in every day personal religious experience. They constitute Christianity’s response to the fundamental questions of human existence that have been asked from the beginning. The asking of these questions is a distinguishing characteristic of humanity, and in seeking answers, the most immediate data for observation and evaluation are given
by the world around us. What is this place we find ourselves in and where did it come from? These two questions involve the doctrine of creation.

[The doctrine of creation] concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that human beings of all time have asked themselves: Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is our origin? What is our end? Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going? The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions.  

The doctrine of creation is, at least in part, a doctrine of the Creator, and reveals the character and identity of God and His work. Creation is “the foundation for all God’s saving plans...the beginning of the history of salvation.” The doctrine of creation intimately involves the universality of sin, the existence of evil, the reason for Christ’s coming, and the whole Christian drama. It will therefore be necessary to briefly explain the essential elements of the doctrine of creation, in order to understand why it is so difficult to come to terms with the seeming ubiquity of evil.

Much of Catholic doctrine flows from the creation narratives in Genesis:

Among all the Scriptural texts about creation, the first three chapters of Genesis occupy a unique place... The inspired authors have placed them at the beginning of Scripture to express in their solemn language the truths of creation—its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of humankind, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation.

Although there is a secular tendency to dismiss this primitive account of creation as being scientifically naïve based on several impossibilities in it (e.g. light appearing before sun, morning and evening coming before the earth and the sun, six days of creation, etc.), it is important to note that it would not be possible to empirically describe such an event even if there were observers to do the describing. How could we understand or record such a momentous event even if given a front row seat? Neither does this seem to have been the

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4 CCC 282
5 CCC 280
6 CCC 289
intention of the author. Rather than attempting to give a scientific explanation, the ancient author alludes throughout to the fact that he or she is describing something that cannot be described, that creation is ultimately shrouded in the mystery of God’s power and wisdom in creating. These texts express truths beyond the reach of empirical or rational method and testify to the quality and character of creation, a character that can only be seen through the eyes of faith.

In the creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis, the character of God’s creation is revealed in that God “saw that it was good.” In the second chapter, humans are said to be created “in the image and likeness of God.” These are yet two more revelatory claims that are not subject to empirical or rational evaluation, but entrusted to faith. In the Psalms, we learn that the Lord created in wisdom, that the work of the Creator is to be praised, that God has created out of love, and that creation is ultimately about God’s glory. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms all this when it says; “the glory of God consists in the realization of this manifestation and communication of His goodness, for which the world was created.” It also adamantly maintains that God’s greatness transcends that of creation, and that he exercises sovereign power over it, guiding it in His providence toward ultimate perfection.

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7 John Cavadini, “In God’s Image: The Mystery of Creation” (Satellite Theological Program; University of Notre Dame, copyright 2003.), Unit 1 Lecture Text. <www.step.nd.edu> (June-July 2006).
8 Genesis 1:18
9 Genesis 2:26
10 Psalms. 104:24
11 Psalms. 33:2-8
12 Psalms. 104:14-15
13 Psalms. 19:1-4
14 CCC 294
15 CCC 300
16 CCC 303
To summarize, Catholic tradition affirms the goodness of God along with creation, God’s power and providence in guiding it, and that God created out of wisdom in order to communicate His love and show forth His glory. It is with this understanding of God and creation in mind that the Christian must cope with the reality of evil in the world.

B. Pervasive Evil

Despite the Christian claim for the goodness of the world and its Creator, evil is an undeniable reality. It is usually classified by theologians and philosophers into three categories: metaphysical, natural, and moral evil. Metaphysical evil, probably the easiest to justify from the standpoint of theodicy, describes the inherent finitude and limitation of creation that necessarily results from its separate existence from the infinite Creator. Creation cannot simply be an appendage of deity, but it must exist ‘outside’ of God, having its own proper autonomy. Only God is uncreated, the cause of His own existence, thus all created things are inherently mutable and exist only according to the will of God. Natural evil describes the evil that occurs when humans or animals are negatively affected by hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, mutation, disease, famine, and the like. Moral evil describes all the evil that has resulted from humans’ mistreatment of themselves and of others throughout history. It not only describes personal evil, but the seemingly anonymous social evil that emerges from the combination of personal evils and becomes embodied in social structures.

The character of metaphysical and natural evil seems to be quite different than that of moral evil. With no prior knowledge of the Christian doctrine of the fall, it would

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17 Hick, 12.
seem quite natural for a person to feel a certain amount of guilt and responsibility for the latter, but the two former evils seem to be imposed from the outside and not correlated with personal choice at all. We cannot help our finitude, and how can natural disasters be blamed on human sin? However, Catholic teaching affirms that all evil has entered the world through our first parents’ free choice to sin and because of the fall of the previous falls of the angels. Before sin entered the world, the first man was “unimpaired and ordered in his whole being because he was free from the triple concupiscence that subjugates him to the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for earthly goods, and self assertion, contrary to the dictates of reason.” Adam and Eve were created “in an original state of holiness, and “as long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer and die.” However the first humans sinned against God, and brought evil into the world through their act of disobedience.

Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness. The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul’s spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. Because of man, creation is now subject “to its bondage to decay” (Rom 8:21). Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will “return to the ground (Gen 3:19),” for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history. (Rom 5:12)

Therefore all the evil that exists in the world is to be understood as punishment for humanity’s first sin. The Church firmly maintains, as seems to be clearly consistent with experience, that the amount of evil which a person experiences is in no way necessarily

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18 I say ‘all’ evil because even though some may understandably claim that metaphysical evil would have been an aspect of creation regardless of the fall, it seems to me that this type of evil would not have been regarded by Augustine as evil at all. Our limitedness as created beings would not have been evil for Augustine and he tended to emphasize free will while ignoring the implications of finitude.
19 CCC 377
20 CCC 375
21 CCC 376
22 CCC 397, 400
correlated with or proportional to his or her personal sins. Obviously we have brought moral evil on ourselves; but though it may seem instinctively awkward or unjust for humans to be punished with natural evils for a sin not personally committed, this is in fact the teaching of the Church. I will now show that the Catechism’s teaching of an original paradise, Adam’s sin upon temptation, and the resulting fall relies heavily upon Augustine’s interpretation of the Adamic myth in the third chapter of Genesis.

C. Original Paradise

As John Hick points out, it is important to distinguish between Christian mythology and Christian theology. He defines Christian mythology as “the great persisting imaginative pictures by means of which the corporate mind of the Church has expressed to itself the significance of the historical events upon which its faith is based, above all, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus who was the Christ.” Christian theology, in contrast, is the attempt by Christian thinkers to speak systematically about God on the basis of the data provided by Christian experience.” He says that the less people tend to know about the natural world, the more Christian myth tends to become confused with history or science, and he claims that this fact has profoundly affected the Augustinian tradition of Christian theodicy. The confusion of the Jewish and Christian Adamic myth with theology is problematic, because myths are intended to “illuminate by means of unforgettable imagery the religious significance of some present or remembered fact of experience,” not to serve as a scientific explanation. They present problems and paradoxes to us pictorially, but do not offer solutions to those problems. The role of

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23 Hick, 245.
24 Hick, 246.
25 Ibid.
26 Hick, 249.
theodicy is theological. It attempts to conduct a systematic inquiry into the mystery of evil in order to provide an adequate explanation for its existence in the world, and in so doing we must keep in mind the distinction between theology and myth.

The distinction between pre-fall and post-fall humanity was a relatively common feature in early Christian thought before Augustine, but the distinction becomes even sharper in his thought. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve existed in a perfect, paradisal state free from suffering and death. In this idyllic state, there was nothing to be feared, to be anxious about, or to be desired that was not readily available. This first human couple acted in perfect love toward one another, a love that was not isolated from, but was an integral part of, their love for God. With nothing either externally or internally to cause anxiety, fear, pain, or suffering, Adam and Eve were perfectly happy. Notions of an original incorruptible nature can also be found in other places in scripture. Besides the writings of Paul, we have from the Song of Songs, “for God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him.” From The Book of Wisdom, “God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.”

27 “God created human kind in such a way that, if he remained subject to his Creator as his true Lord, and if he kept His commandments with pious obedience, he should pass over into the company of the angels and obtain, without suffering death, a blessed immortality without end. But if he offended the Lord his God by using his free will proudly and disobediently, he should live, as the beasts do, subject to, the slave of his own lust (Augustine, City of God, vol. 1, 514-15).”
28 “For who can be called happy if they are afflicted by fear and pain? Moreover, what was there to bring fear or pain to those human beings where there was such an abundance of good things, there was no danger of death or any bodily sickness, and where noting was absent that a good will might seek, nor anything present that might injure humankind in flesh or mind as they lived their life of felicity? . . . The love of the pair for God and for one another was undisturbed, and they lived in a faithful and sincere fellowship which was the source of an immense gladness for them, for what they loved was always at hand for their enjoyment . . . How happy, then, were the first human beings, neither troubled by any disturbance of the mind nor pained by any disorder of the body! And the whole universal fellowship of humankind would have been just as happy had our first parents not committed that evil deed whose effect was to be transmitted to heir posterity (Augustine, City of God, vol. 2, 20-2).”
According to Augustine, Adam and Eve were created physically and spiritually mature, free from all difficulty. They possessed explicit knowledge of what God expected of them and of their rightful relationship with Him. This conception of the original state of affairs greatly affects Augustine’s understanding of the first sin.

D. Radical Sin

In such a blessed state, in which everything that could possibly be desired was readily available, and in which there existed no internal conflict between the will and intellect, Adam and Eve’s sin was particularly grave. God had given them only one stipulation—not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Rejecting God by eating this fruit was therefore a wholly malicious act, since they had been given every good thing. Augustine says that anyone questioning why one sin would have such a negative effect on human nature...

...should not regard what was done by Adam and Eve as light and trivial. Certainly, it involved a piece of food which was not evil or hurtful other than because it was forbidden. ... But God’s command required obedience ... and, where there was so great an abundance of other foods, the command prohibiting the eating of one kind of food was as easy to observe as it was simple to remember, and it was given at a time when desire was not in opposition to the will: such opposition arose later, as a punishment of the transgression.

Adam and Eve’s unfortunate choice was made out of need of nothing, so it could only have been made in explicit and spiteful rejection of God and his love, and was therefore particularly malicious. This rejection revealed a desire to be separate and autonomous from God and His goodness. Therefore, we can only understand the entrance of discord into the world in light of the terrible gravity of Adam’s sin.

E. Fall into Corruption and Death

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31 Gen 2:17
Due in large part to the influence of Neo-Platonic thought, Augustine conceived creation to be an intricate and delicately balanced aesthetic masterpiece. This delicacy stemmed especially from the complete free will that God granted to human beings. However, something so perfectly and intricately crafted was only the more susceptible to corruption, and so Adam brought rampant discord on himself and the rest of creation through his sin.

God in His justice abandoned him [man] to himself, not to live in the absolute independence he affected, but instead of the liberty he desired, to live dissatisfied with himself in a hard and miserable bondage to him to whom by sinning he had yielded himself, doomed in spite of himself to die in body as he had willingly become dead in spirit, condemned even to eternal death (had not the grace of God delivered him) because he had forsaken eternal life.33

It is clear that for Augustine, humanity was not originally meant to suffer physical death or hardship. The world Augustine found himself in, with all its difficulty, would not have existed in such a state had the first sin not been committed:

Man... whose nature was to be a mean between the angelic and the bestial, He created in such a sort, that if he remained in subjection to his creator as his rightful Lord, and piously kept His commandments, he would pass into the company of the angels, and obtain, without the interruption of death, a blessed and endless immortality; but if he offended the Lord his God by a proud and disobedient use of his free will, he should become subject to death, and live as the beasts do—the slave of appetite, and doomed to eternal punishment after death.34

This sin brought confusion, anxiety, hardship, suffering, corruption, and ultimately death on creation as its consequences. Not only did human nature become diseased and characterized by internal division, but, “all nature was changed for the worst.”35

After the fall, human nature is plagued by an inner conflict between what the will desires and what the intellect knows to be good. The Latin word used by Augustine for this disordered desire is *concupiscentia*, which is a direct result and penalty of the fall.

33 Ibid, 29.
34 Augustine, *City of God*, vol. 1, 514.
Concupiscencia is the Latin translation of the Greek word *epithumia* used by Paul, which in turn is translated from the Hebrew word *yetser ha-ra*. Hick shows that *yetser ha-ra* is based on an interpretation of Genesis 5:6: “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” This idea became popular within the Jewish tradition, and eventually came down to Augustine through Paul. James Gaffney points out that the subtle shift in meaning that occurred between *yetser ha-ra* and concupiscence is significant. While the former describes Adam’s inclination to sin, a certain psychological tendency, the latter is a disordered desire and penalty for the fall. In this latter sense, Augustine’s concupiscence describes a condition originally foreign to the human, which only became associated with it as a resultant punishment for sin. Augustine felt this internal conflict and weakness of will deeply, and his inability to do that which he knew to be right gave him a certain feeling of helplessness. He felt his sinfulness to be more powerful than his freedom to will the good, and identified with Paul’s reflection on the human condition:

> So now it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good that I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Although, for Augustine, the Redemption restored humanity’s relationship with God, concupiscence nevertheless remains as His justly administered punishment. God’s grace, mediated through the community and sacramental life of the church, can effect a conversion to do the good, but humans can no longer do this autonomously.

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36 Hick, 205-5.
37 Wiley, 29.
39 Rom 7:17-20
40 Wiley, 66.
It is clear concerning the fall that Christian and Jewish myth is here beginning to become mixed with theology, and it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. The originally mythological idea of an “evil imagination” in Gen 5:6 will become, through the theological idea of concupiscence, central in Augustine's theology of grace. However, the idea of a vitiated human nature is not part of the original Genesis 3 story. The shift in meaning between the Hebrew *yester ha ra* and Augustine’s *concupiscentia* is important because the original Hebrew word seemed only to describe a human existential tendency, an inclination immanent in human nature. On the other hand, *concupiscence* carries with it the idea that human nature exists in an entirely different *ontological* state after the fall than before the fall, and is thus dependent on the idea of original perfection. This important idea became even more ingrained in his thought during a prolonged conflict with the ascetic monk Pelagius.

The subject of God’s grace was an extremely important one for Augustine because of his own experience with sinfulness. It was in thinking about sin and grace, in experiencing and reflecting on the sense of brokenness that he felt, and especially in holding tension between his vision of living in a state of ruined innocence or corrupted paradise with a great faith in God’s goodness and sovereign power, that Augustine developed his theology. According to Roger Haight, in the Pelagian conflict two distinct views of humanity and the human relationship with God emerged. Pelagius held that human nature itself had not lost anything in the fall, and that people retained the ability to know and choose the good. He believed that grace *was* human free will itself, and that with Jesus Christ as an example, the human person could live an authentic Christian life of piety and asceticism. Augustine, holding human nature to be plagued by
concupiscence, likened the human state to one of convalescence. Since free will is held in bondage by sin, only the grace of God could heal the infirmities of our nature and allow a person to choose the good. Augustine eventually prevailed in the disagreement, as Pelagianism was condemned by the Council of Carthage in 418 C.E.

Augustine’s theology of grace is revelatory of his whole view of theological anthropology. He believes in a creation once made perfect, subsequently self-corrupted, and now in need of restoration. The exigencies of dealing, as bishop of Hippo, with real-world theological issues such as Pelagianism, apologetics against Manichaeanism, the circulation of various Christian and Jewish myths, the contemporary cosmology, Augustine’s own personal experience, and the philosophical climate of the time (as will be discussed in the next chapter), all came together in Augustine’s thought to produce what was and still is today the predominant (though not the only) Christian explanation for evil. Because Augustine’s thought is so engrained in orthodox Catholic thought, a criticism of Augustine can seem to be a criticism of Revelation itself. I only wish to point out that Augustine’s explanation for evil in Christianity is only one among others, and was necessarily based on a limited perspective—as all theodicies must be. I will now explain what seems to me to be the most basic, and also a very significant, objection to Augustine’s theodicy.

42 Augustine’s conflict with Pelagius is extremely important in the development of his conception of grace. However, a detailed description is beyond the scope of this paper. My purpose here is only to highlight one of the practical issues Augustine dealt with as Bishop in response to which Augustine shaped his thought concerning the fallen human state and God’s grace.
F. Augustine’s Theodicy and Our Contemporary View of the Natural World

The cosmology of Augustine’s time was a basically “static” one. The accepted Christian view was Aristotelian, except that in Christianity the world was not thought to be eternal, but created immediately complete by God. Owing to the influence of Neo-Platonism, Augustine believed that the cosmos was a kind of divine artistic masterpiece, created perfectly beautiful by the power of God and initially filled with every conceivable variety of living thing according to God’s goodness. It is only after Adam’s sin that creation is thrown into chaos, “subject to bondage and decay.”

Our contemporary picture of the universe could scarcely be more different, and I think it will be useful to review in a very broad way the contours of that picture. We now know the earth to be one small planet orbiting a sun which is one of more than 100 million stars in our galaxy, itself only one of more than 100 million galaxies. Science has revealed the earth to be approximately 4.5 billion years old, with the universe as a whole being estimated at anywhere from 10 to 15 billion years old. Life on earth did not begin to emerge until about 3.8 billion years ago, and then only in the form of very simple unicellular organisms. During the first 3.2 billion years after life emerged, the first forms of life evolved ways of storing information (genotype) and expressing that information (the actual expression results in an organism’s phenotype). The evolution of cellular membranes and membrane-bound organelles allowed cells their own specialized

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43 By static I mean in the sense of being immediately created as such by God—not having come to be at its present state through any major developmental or evolutionary process.
44 The influence of Neo-Platonism and what Arthur Lovejoy has called the principle of plenitude on Augustine’s thinking will be discussed in the next chapter.
45 Rom 8:21
47 Martin Rees, 10-11.
environment to facilitate optimum conditions for survival. Cells developed the fundamental processes of DNA replication, protein synthesis, respiration, and cell division, and paved the way for the Cambrian explosion of life around 543 million years ago (mya). Following the progressive evolution of more complex life forms from the Cambrian down through the appearance of the first vertebrates 460 mya to the first dinosaurs 228 mya, and finally to the first members of our own genus *homo* about 1.8 mya, it is easy to see that, whenever the exact emergence of *homo sapiens*, humanity is a recent arrival on the terrestrial scene.  

Very generally, evolution results from the fact that the individuals of a given species are phenotypically and therefore genotypically diverse. Since variation exists within a population, and because there is constant competition for limited resources, some individuals will be better suited to a given environment than will others in the same population, and will therefore be more likely to reproduce and pass on their genetic information to the next generation. As a result, populations change gradually over time as dictated by their environment. This evolution is in no way a conscious or sub-consciously purposeful adaptation by the organisms themselves; that is, from our limited scientific perspective, evolution is not a teleological process. It may seem difficult to imagine simple unicellular forms of life evolving into the incredibly diverse community of life that exists on earth today, but I would also suggest that it is equally difficult to imagine the magnitude of the time scale on which this development has occurred. As is commonly asserted by scientists today, the ‘theory’ of evolution has really gone far beyond the level

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49 Though the scientific view is certainly limited, the apparent lack of teleological purpose is not only a primary criticism of the Irenaean theodicy (as we shall see in Chapter 4), but also a difficulty from the Christian perspective in reconciling evolution and Christianity in general.
of theory in the sense that most people understand the word. Evolutionary principles now provide the foundation on which the life sciences are based. I will now very briefly outline what is known regarding the evolution of humans.

Fossils of the earliest hominids have been discovered in various regions in Africa. These bipedal ape-like creatures first began to diverge somewhere between 7 and 5 mya. Scientists have uncovered a relatively diverse range of these hominid fossils in Africa that have been left behind by the ancestors of our genus *homo*. Though the evolution of our own species (*Homo sapiens*) was a very complex process regarding the details of which there is still much debate, it will be useful here to very briefly sketch an outline of the process. Various waves of migration out of Africa by a hominid of modern body type named *H. ergaster* took place beginning about 1.8 mya. After this, the fossil record shows that various hominid forms began to appear in Asia and Europe, some of which were quite different from one another both morphologically and behaviorally (as can be determined by any artwork or cultural artifacts found with the fossils that provide some indication of their level of cognitive development). The best-supported hypothesis today, based largely on mitochondrial DNA evidence, holds that beginning somewhere around 200,000 years ago, a population of hominids emerged in Africa and subsequently replaced all the other hominid species that had emerged up to that point. This population represents our most recent common genetic ancestor, and therefore the first population of *H. sapiens*.

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50 For more information on this topic see the discussions of the “Multi-regional hypothesis” and the “Out of Africa hypothesis” in *Scientific American*, 13 (2003).
This general picture reveals that self-consciousness, language, artistic expression, the ability to think abstractly, religious tendencies, and the other characteristics which seem to make us distinct from the early bipedal hominids and characterize us as ‘human’ emerged very gradually, developing over the course of over two hundred thousand years. The first populations of *H. sapiens* were still quite different from present-day humans, as humanity’s current developmental state was still many thousands of years in coming. The evolutionary process by which humans evolved included the mutation, disease, death, competition, and struggle for survival that is characteristic of the evolution of all forms of life.

With this picture of human origins before us, it already seems difficult to find a place for Augustine’s paradise. There is no place in history which finds the first humans having explicit knowledge of God’s desire for them, being free of pain, disease, and suffering, or of a sudden change in nature which could have resulted from the sin of a historical pair of humans. Certainly our first ancestors committed sin, but an explicitly malicious sin, such as described by Augustine, committed in full knowledge by our first parents would have required a much different natural state than is revealed by science. A paradise would also have to have been free from the destructive forces of nature, and so a historical Eden would seem to be discontinuous with the rest of nature as we know it to have existed. It seems that we can no longer hold, with Augustine, that all evils that now exist in the world, both moral and natural, entered as a consequence of Adam’s sin, since natural evils (mutation, disease, pain, suffering, hurricanes, earthquakes etc.) were present long before Adam existed to sin. What Augustine called ‘concupiscence’ cannot

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51 First hinted at by certain burial practices and other evidences that suggest some form of belief in an afterlife. For more information see above citation.
be a punishment for the fall, but would instead seem to be a condition native to humanity from the beginning.\textsuperscript{52} Pierre Teilhard de Chardin sums up the problems that come with Augustine's historical interpretation of the Adamic myth:

\begin{quote}
The earthly paradise can no longer be understood in these days as a specially favoured reservation of some few acres. We now see that everything in the universe holds together physically, chemically, and zoologically, too integrally for the permanent absence of death, suffering and evil (even for a small fraction of things) to be conceivable outside a general state of the world different from our own. The earthly paradise is intelligible only as a different way of being for the universe (which fits in with the traditional meaning of the dogma, which sees in Eden 'another world'). Yet however far back we look in the past, we find nothing that resembles this wonderful state. There is not the least trace on the horizon, not the smallest scar, to mark the ruins of a golden age or our cutting off from a better world. As far as the mind can reach, looking backwards, we find the world dominated by physical evil, impregnated with moral evil (sin is manifestly 'in potency' close to actuality as soon as the least spontaneity appears) – we find it in a state of original sin . . . The truth is that it is so impossible to include Adam and the earthly paradise (taken literally) in our scientific outlook, that I wonder whether a single person today can at the same time focus his mind on the geological world presented by science, and on the world commonly described by sacred history. We cannot retain both pictures without moving alternately from one to the other. Their association clashes, it rings false. In combining them on one and the same plane we are certainly victims of an error in perspective.\textsuperscript{53}

The idea that a historical interpretation of Augustine's Adamic myth is no longer tenable based on our scientific world-view is certainly nothing new. As Stephen Duffy asserts, "Theologians have for some time recognized that the traditional formulation of the doctrine of original sin, based on a literalist and historicized reading of Genesis 1-3, is at odds with biblical scholarship and with what science has established about our

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\textsuperscript{52} I mean by this that certain insights from sociobiology suggesting that our evolutionary heritage, and the selfishness (in a non-pejorative sense) that is part of our biological drive to eat, reproduce, and survive must be understood as having a definite influence on some of our natural inclinations to sin, as contributing at least in part to the 'internal split' between intellect and will which Augustine described. Darryl Domning goes so far as to assert that concupiscence is completely the cause of sin. (See "Evolution, Evil, and Original Sin" in America, v. 12, 2001.) While this position is certainly reductionist, Stephen Duffy advocates a more moderate and theologically sound position in which he admits the affects of our biological heritage while maintaining that sin is more complex than simply biological tendencies and also involves the "personal, cultural, and intellectual" dimensions of the human person. (See "Genes, Original Sin and the Human Proclivity to Evil," Horizons 32/2 (2005): 211-217.) There may be a sense in which concupiscence is a 'punishment' for the fall, perhaps in that habitual sin becomes the foundation for further sin and makes its avoidance increasingly difficult. But to hold that there was a physical or ontological change in the nature of all humanity as a result of the sin of an historical human ancestor is to come into conflict with the current view of the natural world.

evolutionary origin.\textsuperscript{54} John Hick affirms this same thing, saying “but this theory, so simple and mythologically satisfying, is open to insuperable scientific, moral, and logical objections.”\textsuperscript{55} The moral and logical objections will be addressed in the following chapters when some of the more philosophical elements of Augustine’s thought will be discussed. Before moving on, however, I wish to go further in explaining why Augustine’s myth cannot be made consistent with evolution, in order to respond to several objections I have heard in response to this view.

Augustine maintains that all created things, since they are not the cause of their own existence, are necessarily mutable, and therefore mutability in itself cannot be bad. Humans and angels, since they are created to be immortal, are mutable in precisely the sense just mentioned. However, Augustine seems to use the word in a different sense when applying it to the animals. He says in \textit{On the Free Choice of the Will} that the principle of plenitude requires the passing away of finite objects, an assertion that could not have applied to Adam in the garden if he was to continue in a state of immortality so long as he did not sin.\textsuperscript{56} So animals are mutable, for Augustine, both in that they are not uncreated and that they necessarily have limited life spans. Humans are originally only mutable in the former sense. Although mutability is not bad, Augustine claims that corruptibility is: “We are then burdened with this corruptible body; but knowing that the cause of this burdensomeness is not the nature and substance of the body, but its corruption, we do not desire to be deprived of the body, but to be clothed with its

\textsuperscript{54} Stephen Duffy, “Genes, Original Sin and the Human Proclivity to Evil,” \textit{Horizons} 32/2 (2005): 210. Besides this article, almost
\textsuperscript{55} Hick, 249.
\textsuperscript{56} The ‘principle of plenitude will be a focus of Chapter 2.
immortality.\textsuperscript{57} This implies that the original physical constitution of the human body was somehow different from that of animals’ bodies so far as it was not corruptible.\textsuperscript{58} But, as we saw in the explanation of evolution, the physical human body is as much a part of the animal world and of nature as are all other organisms, constituted from the same building blocks of life and functioning in the same general way. Science tells us that matter, once assimilated into complex structures, will always tend to break down, as explained by the thermodynamic principle of entropy, and that it has functioned in this way from the beginning—long before the existence of the first humans.

An attempt to reconcile this scientific understanding with the Adamic myth would force us to say that, at a particular point in evolution, our hominid ancestors suddenly ‘evolved’ a soul (or it was somehow ‘inserted’ by God through a miracle) which afforded them a supernatural control over their material bodies such that the matter which composed them was not subject to the laws of nature but was instead subject to the power of the soul. Let us first assume that this could have happened, either by evolution or by a miracle.\textsuperscript{59} In order for Adam to exist without risk of pain or any natural danger he would have not only had to possess control over animals anywhere he went (e.g. magically stopping the rush of an oncoming predator), but over such natural phenomena as seismic activity and gravity as well. In order to defend the idea of an original paradise, therefore, it is not enough to say that the soul had the power to keep the human body

\textsuperscript{57} Augustine, City of God, vol.2, 4.

\textsuperscript{58} An alternative way of viewing things is that the human soul originally had the power to keep the body from corruption. However, Augustine’s adherence to the absolute absence of any pain or danger to the first humans would also imply that the human soul would have power over all the other aspects of nature (e.g. predators, natural disasters, gravity, etc.). Otherwise, even if the soul had complete control over the functions of the body, there would still be many possibilities for Adam and Eve to be harmed. This seems an awkward position to hold.

\textsuperscript{59} I would also like to suggest here that the view that the human soul came about from within the normal function of nature need not be viewed as any less ‘miraculous’ than God’s having immediately created it. If God is the author of everything, then God is still equally responsible for the emergence of the human soul.
from corruption. We must allow that it controlled every force in the natural world, a position which seems to me to have absolutely no foundation in Genesis or elsewhere in Scripture. If this view seems awkward, then perhaps God, upon hominids having evolved into humans, reconstituted the whole of nature such that matter and natural laws functioned in an entirely different way, in order to maintain Augustine's idea of paradise. In this case nature would presumably have reverted back to its pre-human state as soon as Adam sinned. In suggesting these possibilities we are stretching the benefit of the doubt that can be given to the Adamic myth; but though they may seem absurd, I suppose they are possible. The real problem comes when we see that the sudden popping into existence of the humanness which our reconciliation of science and doctrine is granting, contradicts the principles on which evolution itself is based. In the first place, individuals do not evolve—populations do. This can only happen gradually over the course of many generations. Those things that make us different from the other creatures did not arise from the formation of a new gene through mutation or genetic recombination, the expression of which made us human. Our humanness (or at least many important aspects of it) arises from of an incredibly complex and unique association of genes, an association that could only have developed over the span of many hominid lifetimes. Therefore it seems that the H. sapiens population only gradually approached humanness, and thus it is difficult to locate a place in which they all of a sudden had complete knowledge of God and His will such that they could violently sin against Him and throw nature into disarray.

I am not here adopting a materialist position in which humans are nothing more than the sum of a whole bunch of atoms (whatever atoms are). What a soul is and how it
works remain mysterious. However, through science we can measure effects, and therefore we can know roughly at what point in history the soul began to function. This seems to have been a gradual process and to have come about from within creation, rather than being super-added. It is difficult to think of God inserting it by an action discontinuous with nature at some specific point in time. At any given point in the evolutionary process, there would have existed a whole population of hominids at different stages in their lives. If God gave souls to all the members of a population at once, we find ourselves in the awkward position of saying that some creatures lived part of their lives as hominids and part as humans. If God, on the other hand, inserted souls only in a pair of hominids (the historical Adam and Eve), then these humans would have had non-human parents. Also, in this latter case, it seems that we could reasonably expect to find obvious evidence of this human race, once immediately constituted as such, since they would have exhibited a vastly superior culture which could reasonably be expected to reveal itself in our fossil record. We do know regarding the soul is that somehow we have, uniquely from the other creatures on earth, developed a special capacity for relationship with God, an apprehension that the natural world is not the whole story.

Having seen some of the difficulties involved in reconciling the Adamic myth with evolution, I think it will beneficial to consider a few more aspects of the new cosmography which any attempt at theodicy must take into account.

In asking questions about life and attempting to understand our faith, we necessarily formulate answers based on the data offered to us by the world and our experience in it. For the philosopher and theologian, the starting point for questioning is the natural world. It seems reasonable then that if our general cosmography and therefore
data concerning creation changes, our systematic theological understanding will necessarily need to be readjusted. The new cosmography is drastically different from the old one, and therefore I think it necessary to contrast these two pictures in order to find a starting point for re-thinking our theodicy. This will also be helpful in understanding why the progress of science finds slow and often reluctant popular acceptance, since it forces us to find new explanations for questions we thought were comfortably answered.

In describing the old cosmography, Lovejoy says:

Though the medieval world was thus immense, relatively to man and his planet, it was nevertheless definitely limited and fenced about. It was therefore essentially picturable; the perspectives which it presented, however great, were not wholly baffling to the imagination ... this cosmical scheme had the essential qualities of a work of classical art; indeed the most classical thing in the Middle Ages may be said to have been the universe ... the world had a clear intelligible unity of structure, and not only definite shape, but what was deemed at once the simplest and most perfect shape ... It had no loose ends, no irregularities of outline.60

The old cosmography was therefore something that the medieval person could ‘wrap their mind around’ and, though still immense, it was ordered and ‘graspable.’ According to Arthur Lovejoy, this picture began to change with Copernicus, although the loss of geocentricity was not really such a radical change as has been assumed by some. For the medieval mind, the center of the world was nearest the dregs, very close to hell and very far away from the perfect heavenly bodies. Therefore this aspect of the cosmography did not really serve to give man a ‘high’ sense of his own dignity and importance, but elicited the opposite emotion. The loss of geo-centricity then was not all that problematic, although it did raise certain difficulties in literally understanding such biblical events such as the ascension. More significant was the modern tendency to begin viewing the universe as infinite and acentric. Claims that the stars may be separated by vast irregular distances rather than being locked in a fixed outer sphere, that the other stars were suns

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similar to ours, possibly with their own surrounding planets, and that there may be
conscious life elsewhere in the solar system or on planets surrounding other suns were
much more difficult to accept. Lovejoy points out that even for Copernicus, “the solar
system and the universe remained identical; his world, though not geo-centric, was still
centered, still spherical in shape, still securely walled in by the outermost sphere…”

The real tensions between the old and new cosmologies arose out of a feeling of
disorientation, of loss of order in the universe. These theories also addressed new
questions to Christianity, since this world had always been thought to be the singular
object of the Divine concern. If life could be thought to reside elsewhere in the solar
system, could it be sentient? Could it be morally concerned? If so, must Christ have also
died and risen on those planets? Or did Christ’s earthly act of Redemption count for the
other planets too? Or was it possible that those other beings had never fallen?

Lovejoy claims that the actual scientific progress at the time had a much weaker
effect on the popular conception of the universe than did certain philosophical
considerations based on what he has called the “principle of plenitude.” He says:

The features which differentiated the new from the old world-picture most widely, those whereby
it most affected the imagination and modified the prevalent conception of man’s place in the
universe, the traditional religious beliefs, and the new religious feeling—these features owed their
introduction and, for the most part, their eventual general acceptance, not to the actual discoveries
or technical reasonings of astronomers, but to the influence of those originally Platonistic
metaphysical preconceptions... which, had, though potent and persistent, been always repressed
and abortive in medieval thought.

In summary, the Christian view of the natural world was originally one of a
perfectly ordered creation which had sprung immediately complete from the hands of the
Creator, and was subsequently corrupted by Adam’s sin. Our modern picture is of a

62 Lovejoy, 104.
63 Lovejoy, 99.
universe of inconceivable size, developing over a vast period of time and only very recently becoming home to human life. My objective here has been to show that any attempts to portray the Adamic myth as a historical or scientific account reconcilable with current scientific knowledge inevitably ends up in fantastic and awkward speculation. If we are to seek understanding of our faith, we must maintain communication with all the developing areas of human knowledge and apply this knowledge to doctrinal understanding. It seems prudent to embrace the Adamic myth as a beautiful pictorial way of communicating our human situation and relationship with God, but to resist making it into a scientific account. Now that we have seen the difficulties in understanding Augustine’s theodicy in light of the new cosmography, we will turn to the more philosophical aspects of Augustine’s thought.
Chapter II. Platonism and the Principle of Plenitude in Augustine’s Theodicy

The reason Christian theodicy presents itself as such a difficult task stems from its faithfulness to the profession that God is both perfectly omnipotent and perfectly good. There have been various attempts to justify the existence of evil in Christianity by limiting God’s power such that evil cannot be blamed on God. One of the ancient attempts at this can be seen in the ‘exterior’ dualism of the Manichees, while one of the modern attempts can be seen in the process theology that has been developed based on the thinking of Alfred North Whitehead. However, John Hick asserts that “if our terms are not to be uprooted from the ground of customary usage we must insist that these deviations … do not constitute the normative or historic Christian faith.”64 The philosophical roots of Augustine’s theodicy which we will here examine supposedly allowed Augustine to develop a doctrine in which God’s absolute omnipotence, omniprescience, and goodness were protected, while completely exempting God from all responsibility for evil.

A. The Dualistic Influences on Augustine

At the age of about 20, Augustine’s intelligence and desire for intellectual freedom, combined with the attractiveness of the Manichaean explanation for evil, led him to become a ‘hearer’ among the followers of this extreme Gnostic sect.65 The Manichees, founded by a Persian named Mani (217-274 C.E.), held that humans were

64 Hick, 4.
really divine fragments of light, trapped in the physical world by matter and isolated from the Kingdom of Light by the invasion of the Kingdom of Darkness into the world. Salvation for the Manichees, as in Gnostic sects, consisted in attaining a ‘gnosis’ of one’s rightful origin and destiny in the Kingdom of Light. Thus two powers at work, one essentially good and the other essentially bad, existing in their own right and fundamentally opposed to one another. The Manichees represented an extreme form of dualism so preoccupied with protecting the Goodness of God that it ended up positing, as Peter Brown says, “a God of so untarnished an innocence as to be dangerously shorn of His omnipotence.”66 This compromising of omnipotence is not consistent with the Christian understanding of God, who is ultimately sovereign over all existence, and so the Manichaean explanation for evil that cannot be reconciled with Christianity. Interestingly enough, it was in large part the conflict between the accepted Greco-Roman astronomy and Mani’s religious system which ultimately led Augustine to reject Manichaeanism at the age of 29, as he did not think it allowed for the reconciliation of accepted knowledge of the natural world with the truth about God.67

In Milan, after his rejection of Manichaeanism, Augustine became acquainted with the Neoplatonism of Plotinus (204-270 C.E.), which had begun to be incorporated into Christian thought upon its translation near the middle of the 4th century into Latin by Marius Victorinus, a Platonic convert to Christianity.68 Neoplatonism represented a less extreme form of dualism than Manichaeanism, but Augustine made certain modifications in it to fit with Christianity’s monotheistic requirement. In order to better understand the

66 Brown, 42.
67 Brown, 46-8.
68 Brown, 79-84.
aspects of Neoplatonism most relevant to our discussion, it will be necessary to briefly examine their origin in Plato, especially in the Republic and Timaeus.

B. ‘Otherworldliness’ and ‘This-worldliness’ in Plato

A central element in Platonic thought is the preoccupation with permanence in the face of the ever-changing, corruptible world. Is there any source for objectively true knowledge about the world, or as Heraclitus and the Sophists claimed, is truth based on convention? How is it possible that ‘beauty,’ for example, be rightly attributed to disparate things? Socrates, serving as Plato’s dialectic protagonist, is often concerned with what virtue is metaphysically, its essence. Plato’s search for objective truth led him to posit an unchanging, eternal realm in which to ground the temporal world, and this led to the development of his theory of Ideas. These Ideas exist in a separate realm from our ‘world of appearance,’ and are the source from which all particular existences in this world derive their being. They are eternal, immutable, and therefore good. The identification of goodness with existence is typical of Greek philosophy, but is a crucial assumption, and we shall see that it led to some very important implications in Plato’s thought that would preoccupy philosophers and theologians for more than two thousand years.69

It is somewhat unclear whether all Plato’s Ideas are on the same level, or whether they exist in some type of hierarchical relationship. At some points in his thought, the World of Ideas seems only to be a more real and de-temporalized correlate of the world of appearance. Arthur Lovejoy explains that:

The Idea of an object of sense . . . is still only a congealed and inefficacious counterpart of that object—with some of its characteristics left undeterminate. Nothing of the rich qualitative diversity of nature is—or at all events, should be—left out: simple sensible qualities; the non-

69 Lovejoy, 50.
temporal relations which subsist between natural objects; the complex groupings of such qualities and relations, which make up the ‘what’ of the things we experience; and with these, all the moral and aesthetic qualities, justice and temperance and beauty—all are simply projected into another realm of being, where each may be the better enjoyed aesthetically by virtue of its conceived exemption from passage and alteration and of the irrelevance to it, in its eternal fixity, of all human planning and striving. 70

In the Republic, however, Plato introduces the Idea of Ideas, or the Good. The Good is the ultimate Idea, from which the other Ideas seem to be derivative, and it is at this point that we can see the source from which Plotinus develops his philosophy and which will greatly influence Christian thinking. Lovejoy writes, “Here, as elsewhere, there is no question as to the nature of Plato’s historic influence; the completely ‘other’ and ineffable ‘One,’ the Absolute of the Neoplatonists, it is certain, was for those philosophers, and their many later echoers, medieval and modern, Jewish, Moslem, and Christian, an interpretation of Plato’s Idea of the Good.” 71

A crucial aspect of the Good is that it must be completely self-sufficient, the source of its own existence, not dependent on any other thing. Plato says “The Good, differs in its nature from everything else in that the being who possesses it always and in all respects has the most perfect sufficiency and is never in need of any other thing.” 72 This aspect of Plato’s thought implied that all finite things can bring no excellence to or take any from the Good, and that he is the primary source for the “endlessly repeated theorem of the philosophic theologians that God has no need of a world and is indifferent to it and all that goes on in it.” 73 The upshot of all this is that ‘goodness’ and ‘perfection’ came to be seen in terms of existence and self-sufficiency.

70 Lovejoy, 39.
71 Lovejoy, 39-40.
73 Lovejoy, 43.
The foregoing is the source of the ‘otherworldly’ line of thought in Plato, exemplified in the famous ‘Allegory of the Cave.’ Here, the ‘highest’ good of the philosopher is to turn his or her attention away from the shadowy world of appearance toward the enlightenment that comes from contemplation of the Ideas, especially the Idea of Ideas. To spurn the mutable and temporal things of the world in preference of the Ideas was to be associated with the true, everlasting, and good. However, according to Lovejoy, at just the point where Plato’s philosophy becomes most ‘otherworldly,’ he brings the focus back on this world. The question becomes, why should the world of appearance exist at all?\textsuperscript{74} Timaeus, speaking of the origin of the universe, asks,

\begin{quote}
Now why did he who framed this whole universe of becoming frame it? He says that it is because He was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so, being free of jealousy, he wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible... Now it wasn’t permitted (nor is it now) that one who is supremely good should do anything but what is best.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

The grounding of the existence of the entire world of appearance is then found in the goodness of the Idea of Ideas, since It could not, as constrained by Its goodness, have done other than It has done. For Plato, ‘good’ had primarily meant that which was perfectly self-sufficient in its existence. Plato here uses ‘good’ in a quite different, moral sense, and thereby provides an explanation for the existence of the world of becoming. This change in the usage of ‘goodness’ will become very important later, but at this point, the question for Plato becomes: how many things should be created? The answer is, \emph{all} things, since the perfectly good being cannot be jealous of anything that could possibly attain to existence. Lovejoy claims that ‘all things’ can only refer to “the sensible counterparts of every one of the Ideas.”\textsuperscript{76} Lovejoy calls this necessary ‘fullness’ of

\textsuperscript{74} Lovejoy, 45.
\textsuperscript{75} Timaeus, 29,30.
\textsuperscript{76} Lovejoy, 52.
existence in Plato the “principle of plenitude,” and claims that it combined with an idea of continuity derived from Aristotle’s method of biological classification to form an influential concept of the universe as a great chain of being, hierarchically filled with all possible finite things as necessitated by the Good. 77

This element in Plato’s philosophy seems to suggest an entirely different set of values from those put forth in the allegory of the cave. Since Plato’s concept of the Good demands that all possible forms of being should be brought into existence, all particulars become very good in their own right, since their own existence is now as necessary as the Good itself. The practical, ‘this-worldly’ ethical teaching that would seem to arise is that one should not attempt to overstep his or her rightful place in the chain of being, but act in a way proper to the position which they happen to occupy.

Now that we have introduced the ‘otherworldly’ and ‘this-worldly’ Platonic concepts in which the principle of plenitude finds its origin, we will now see its presence in Plotinus’ thought and the way in which he used it to explain evil.

C. Principle of Plenitude in Plotinus: Whence Evil?

As has already been mentioned, Plotinus’ ineffable ‘One’ or Absolute must be traced directly back to Plato’s Idea of Ideas. In the Plotinean doctrine of emanation, all possible being proceeds from the Absolute down hierarchically toward the realm of non-being, decreasing in intensity of being and goodness the further it proceeds from its source. 78 Even more for Plotinus than for Plato, fecundity is an essential characteristic of the utterly transcendent and self-sufficient One.

77 Arthur Lovejoy, 55.
78 Plotinus, Enneads, VI, vii, 12. In Brown, 89.
The One is perfect because it seeks for nothing, and possesses nothing, and has need of nothing; and being perfect, it overflows, and thus its superabundance produces an Other.79 . . . Whenever anything reaches its own perfection, we see that it cannot endure to remain in itself, but generates and produces some other thing. Not only beings having the power of choice, but also those which are by nature incapable of choice, and even inanimate things, send forth as much of themselves as they can: thus fire emits heat and snow cold and drugs act upon other things. . . . How then should the Most Perfect Being and the First Good remain shut up in itself, as though it were jealous or impotent—itself the potency of all things? . . . Something must therefore be begotten of it.80

For Plotinus, evil has no part in true being, since by definition true being is good. Evil is then a privation of true being.

If such be the Nature of Beings and of That which transcends all the realm of being, Evil cannot have any place among Beings, or in the Beyond-Being; these are good. There remains, only, if Evil exists at all, that it be situate in the realm of non-Being that it be some mode, as it were, of the Non-Being, that it have its seat in something in touch with Non-being or to a certain degree communicate in Non-Being. By this Non-Being, of course, we are not to understand something that simply does not exist, but something of an utterly different order from Authentic-Being. . . . Some conception of it would be reached by thinking of measurelessness as opposed to measure, of the unbound against the bound, the unshaped against the principle of shape, the ever-needy against the self-sufficing: think of the ever-undefined, the never at rest, the all-accepting but never sated, utter earth. . . .81

Evil is therefore found upon the efflux of being from its center in the divine arriving at the border of non-being, a place where every kind of form is absent—referred to as ‘Matter’ by Plotinus. For, Plotinus, Matter and evil seem to be closely related, if not the same thing. However, Matter does not seem to be bare privation or nothingness. Instead, Plotinus seems to describe it as having an active disordering effect. As in the quotation above, it is not to be thought of as simply non-existent, but ‘never-sated,’ ‘never at rest.’ But how can nonbeing have any effect or be said to cause anything?

Regarding this inconsistency Hick observes that “Matter sometimes seems to have a

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80 Plotinus, V, 4, 1, 203. In Lovejoy, 62.
positive force of its own and sometimes, as fits better within Plotinus’ metaphysical system, to be a passive reality.”

Tracing Plotinus’ idea of the creation of the world back to Plato’s mythical exposition in the *Timaeus*, we can see the dualism present in both Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought. Here a divine power, the Demiurge, using the Ideas as a kind of pattern for this world, fashions it from already existing chaos. In answering the question, “A chaos of what?,” Hick explains that this myth is probably an attempt to communicate the creative act as a balance between Reason and Necessity, Necessity here referring to a kind of chaotic formlessness in opposition to which the Demiurge created the orderly world of becoming. This dualistic opposition between Reason and Necessity can be seen in Plotinus’ Being and Non-Being.

Plotinus asserts that humans have no grounds to complain about evil, since as we have seen, it follows inevitably from the nature of things. The goodness and perfection of the One is manifested in the actualization of all possible things, an actualization which necessarily entails that some beings will be less perfect than others.

It is the [cosmic] Reason that in accordance with rationality produces the things that are called evils, since it did not wish all things to be [equally] good . . . Thus the Reason did not make gods only, but first gods, then spirits, the second nature, and then men, and then animals, in a continuous series—not through envy, but because its rational nature contains an intellectual variety. But we are like men who, knowing little of painting, blame the artist because the colors in his picture are not all beautiful—not seeing that he has given to each part what was appropriate to it. And the cities which have the best governments are not those in which all citizens are equal. Or we are like one who should complain of a tragedy because it includes among its characters, not heroes only, but also slaves and peasants who speak incorrectly. But to eliminate these low characters would be to spoil the beauty of the whole; and it is by means of them that it becomes complete.”

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82 Hick, 43.
83 Hick, 26-7.
84 Plotinus, III, 2, 11, Volkmann, I, 239. In Lovejoy, 64.
Thus the principle of plenitude demands that there should be all manner of beings, and the privation that exists in creatures is necessary to the overall aesthetic value of the creation.

Plotinus’ two conceptions of evil, one as positive and the other as passive, seem to be confused: as Hick says, “in its [Plotinus’ privative understanding of evil] role as a mode of philosophical discourse it is both a product and a fertile source of conceptual confusion, and could profitably be abandoned....”85 In any case, it is important to note that when the philosophical edifice of Neoplatonism is adopted by Augustine, the dualistic aspect must be abandoned in order to bring all things under the sovereign rule of God. We will now turn to specifically examine the Neoplatonic influence on Augustine.

D. St. Augustine: What is evil and where did it come from?

We have already seen in chapter one why evil is thought to have entered the world—through Adam’s sin. However, in philosophically examining the origin of evil, Augustine first asked what evil is, metaphysically. Indeed, for Augustine, this is the first question that must be asked when discussing evil. Augustine was not satisfied with the Manichaean answer, but found in Neoplatonism a much better way of thinking about it. Augustine made use of the principle of plenitude to explain both the reason for God’s creative act and the diversity present in the universe.

The order of creatures proceeds from top to bottom by just grades, so that it is the remark of envy to say: That creature should not exist, and equally so to say: That one should be different. It is wrong to wish that anything should be like another thing higher in the scale, for it has its being, perfect in its degree, and nothing ought to be added to it. He who says that a thing ought to be different from what it is, either wants to add something to a higher creature already perfect, in which case he lacks moderation and justice; or he wants to destroy the lower creature, and is thereby wicked and grudging.86

85 Hick, 42.
Of course, Augustine had to reject the Neoplatonic dualism that threatened the sovereignty of God over all things, and he did this by asserting God’s creation of the world *ex nihilo*. God, for Augustine, is the source of all existence, not bound by any pre-existent chaos or forced to compromise between Reason and Necessity. Evil, then, can have no positive or dis ordering force for Augustine, as it seemed to have for Plotinus, though Augustine certainly would not have denied that it can seem to be a very powerful and positive force in our lives. All beings, no matter their status in the chain of being, are good insofar as God has created them to be what they are, and their occupation of a particular position in that chain contributes to the overall aesthetic perfection of God’s work. The goodness of things consists in their possession of measure, form, and order, as given by God, and evil is only a malfunctioning or corruption of these attributes. The thing corrupted is still good, however, and is bad only insofar as it is corrupted.  

The core of Augustine’s theodicy then consists in a world created perfectly good by the sovereign Source of all that exists, subsequently corrupted by human sin and hurled into chaos and disorder. God, however, foresaw that Adam would sin and allowed it to happen because it was better, due to the principle of plenitude, that all manner of beings should exist, including those possessing free will. Like Plotinus, Augustine maintains that our complaints regarding the existence of evil are really indicative of our limited viewpoint and short-sightedness:

To thee there is no such thing as evil, and even in thy whole creation taken as a whole, there is not: because there is nothing from beyond it that can burst in and destroy the order which thou has appointed it. But in the parts of creation, some things, because they do not harmonize with others, are considered evil. Yet those same things harmonize with others and are good, and in themselves are good . . . I no longer desired a better world, because my thoughts ranged over all, and with a sounder judgment I reflected that the things above were better than those below, yet that all creation together was better than the higher things alone.

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For Augustine, it is necessary to maintain God’s foresight of this whole ordeal, since to say that God neglected to account for Adam’s sin would be a defect in God, which is impossible. We are then to understand that God foresaw from the beginning that man would sin and took this into account by creating hell for those whom he foresaw would sin against him. If there was no hell, there would be a defect in God’s justice, and therefore hell was created by God in order that moral balance and the perfection of creation might be assured. 89 It will now be useful to take a very brief look at several thinkers who, following out the principle of plenitude to its logical conclusion in their respective theodicies, encountered the difficulties that it ultimately engenders.

E. Historical Difficulties with the Principle of Plenitude

Augustine was the first to adapt the Platonic way of thinking about evil into Christianity. As we have seen, he uses the principle to explain creation in all its abundant variety and as the basis for its great beauty. Ultimately though, God’s reason for creating as such must, in Christianity, derive from His own free will and reason for creating, a rationale to which we can have no direct access. Also, God cannot be compelled in any way to create, since He is ultimately sovereign over all, not forced to anything and completely self-sufficient. 90 But as we have seen, for Plato, the fecundity of the Idea of Ideas does not leave the Good the freedom to choose whether or not to create, since any

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89 Hick, 87-9. I would like to add here that Hick goes on to say that Hell itself constitutes one of the major problems of evil, since its existence implies perpetual opposition to the good purpose of God and His desire that the good be actualized for all. Hick claims that the necessity of Hell is due to Augustine’s aesthetic conception of the good (originating in Platonism), which he criticizes and which will constitute part of my own criticism of the Augustinian theodicy later in this chapter. However, due to the scope of this paper, I do not wish to address the issue of whether or not there is eternal damnation for sinners, but will only recognize that Hick believes it is an unnecessary doctrine.

90 For examples of this teaching, see CCC 269, 295.
deity which did not create would be 'envious'—an inexcusable defect which would render It unable to meet the criterion required of a perfectly good God. The Platonic-type deity must create, fecundity is part of its essential nature. Plotinus asks, "Is it by the mere will of the being who meted out to all their several lots, that inequalities exist among them? By no means, it was necessary according to the nature of things that it be so."\(^9\) As Lovejoy says, "the whole tendency of the Neoplatonic dialectic is adverse to that conception of arbitrary volition and capriciously limited selection from among the possibilities of being, which was to play a great part in the history of Christian theology."\(^9\) Neither is it admissible in Christianity to postulate a dualistic inherent necessity in the nature of things which limits God's action and necessitates some minimum amount of evil. Augustine recognized these implications of the principle of plenitude, and was always quick to affirm the freedom and sovereignty of God, but this leaves the problem which arises in employing this principle unsolved. We will now examine the rational, ethical, and natural difficulties involved in the application of the principle of plenitude as can be seen in medieval and Enlightenment thinking.

### The Rational Problems

The utterly transcendent, self-sufficient understanding of God which Christianity inherited from the Greeks can have no demands made on Him, either from the outside or even, apparently, from His own nature. As Lovejoy says, "If the world-generating act had been determined by any motive, had had any ground even in the divine essence, it would not have been free; but since any action of a being already self-sufficing must be

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91 Plotinus, III, 3, 3, Volkmann, I, 253. In Lovejoy 64.
92 Lovejoy, 63.
absolutely unmotivated, its freedom could not be doubted." As we have seen, the claim that God must create according to the principle of plenitude because of the necessity of His own goodness was entirely unacceptable to Christianity. However, St. Augustine, and later St. Thomas Aquinas both employ the principle of plenitude to explain the variety and beauty of creation. Aquinas, for example, says:

Everyone desires the perfection of that which for its own sake he wills and loves: for the things we love for their own sakes, we wish ... to be multiplied as much as possible. But God wills and loves His essence for its own sake. Now that essence is not augmentable or multipliable in itself but can be multiplied only in its likeness, which is shared by many. God therefore wills things to be multiplied, inasmuch as he wills and loves his own perfection ... Moreover, God in willing himself wills all the things which are in himself; but all things in a certain manner pre-exist in God by their types (rationes). God, therefore, in willing himself wills other things ... Again, the will follows the understanding. But God in primarily understanding himself, understands all other things; therefore, once more, in willing himself primarily, he wills all other things.

Aquinas also in other places uses this principle to explain the diversity of creation based on the required manifestation of God’s goodness. However, Aquinas realized the implication that, if followed out to its logical conclusion, the principle of plenitude implies that God must create the best possible world. Both he and Augustine are caught in the tension that seems to exist between God’s ultimate freedom and His goodness, for Aquinas avoids saying that God must have created the world as he did:

It is to be maintained that, these things being supposed, the universe cannot be better than it is, because of the supremely befitting order which God has assigned to things, wherein the good of the universe consists. If any one of these things were [separately] better, the proportion which constitutes the order of the whole would be vitiated ... Nevertheless, God could make other things than he has, or could add others to the things he has made; and this other universe would be better.

As Lovejoy here points out, the third sentence is a plain contradiction of the first.

Though Aquinas was content to live with the difficulties which arise from the principle of

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93 Lovejoy, 157.
94 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, I, 75. In Lovejoy, 73.
95 c.f. Lovejoy, 72-80; Hick, 93-106
96 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I, q. 25, a.6. In Lovejoy, 79.
plenitude, using it to explain the goodness of creation but stopping short of saying that God could not have created a better world, others were not.

According to Lovejoy, the Scotists and William of Ockham solved the problem of God’s own goodness compelling Him to act in holding that God’s will itself was the sole determiner of value, that the goodness or badness of a thing was determined by the Divine volition. However, Lovejoy claims that the Scotists’ position was rejected by those who “felt the need to mean something when they called God ‘good,’ and those who, inheriting the Platonic tradition had an aversion from the creed of the ultimate irrationality of things.” Those who wished to maintain the Platonic definition of goodness, to say that goodness has a certain essence of its own which need not be referenced to God, followed the principle of plenitude out to its logical conclusion. To this position we now turn.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) held that the world which God has in fact created must be the best of all possible worlds because a divinity which created any other world than the best could not be Christianity’s perfectly good God. “It is certain,” says Abelard, “that it is intrinsically impossible for God to do (or make) or to leave undone (or unmade) anything other than the things that he actually does at some time do or omit to do; or to do anything in any other manner or at any other time than that in which it actually is done.” The most extreme and deterministic form of this position can be seen in the thought of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). For Spinoza, every single detail of the world must have sufficient root in God’s perfect reason and every possible existence must in fact be actualized: “Of everything whatsoever a cause or reason must be assigned, alike

98 Lovejoy, 70.
99 Ibid.
for its existence of its non-existence.”\textsuperscript{101} This absolute necessity of there being
“sufficient reason” for everything in the universe restricts God’s freedom to create or not
and is radically deterministic.

In the philosophy of G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716), God chose from among an
infinite number of possible universes, the most harmonious and therefore best one, and
brought it into existence according to His perfect goodness. This decision was an “eternal
decision encompassing all temporal events.”\textsuperscript{102} Leibniz was also very influenced by the
principle of sufficient reason, and its requirements that God have the best reasons for
every detail of creation—as well as for those things that seem to be possible in
themselves but absent from creation (e.g. unicorns, centaurs, etc.).

If the will of God did not have for a rule the principle of the best, it would either tend toward evil,
which would be the worst of all; or else it would be in some fashion indifferent to good and evil
and guided by chance. But a will which always allowed itself to act by chance would scarcely be
of more value for the government of the universe than a fortuitous concourse of atoms, with no
God at all. And even if God should abandon himself to chance only in some cases and in some
respects, ... he would be imperfect, as would be the object of his choice; he would not deserve to
be wholly trusted; he would act without reason in those cases, and the government of the universe
would be like certain games, half a matter of chance, half of reason.\textsuperscript{103}

Leibniz explains that those things which seem to be absent from creation can be
explained by the concept of ‘compossibility.’ This term arises from the notion that in any
actual (finite) world, the entities which are involved must be made compatible with each
other. Though their essences are not logically incompatible, they inevitably conflict in a
finite situation. Therefore Leibniz conceived that creation involved a divine choice
between an infinite number of different sets of essences which could compatibly exist
together in actuality and chose the best possible one: therefore, “there necessarily are
species which never have existed and never will exist, since they are not compatible with

\textsuperscript{101} Baruch Spinoza, Ethics, I, prop. 8. In Lovejoy, 152.
\textsuperscript{102} Marjorie Suchocki, The End of Evil (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 17.
\textsuperscript{103} G. W. Leibniz, Theodicee, in Philos. Schriften, VI, 386. In Lovejoy, 167.
the series of creatures God has chosen.”¹⁰⁴ For Leibniz, God’s power and goodness have no limits in themselves, but “when unified in one nature which is God, power, knowledge and will intermingle in such a way that they produce limitation of choice.”¹⁰⁵ Leibniz held that the entire universe is a divinely chosen harmony of interrelated simple, self-contained substances (monads). This harmony is at once physical and moral and its final cause is in God’s decision to create the best possible world. However, the inherent limitations of finitude have a restrictive effect in any possible world, and evil will always necessarily result from it.

In attempting to escape Spinoza’s determinism, Leibniz maintained that humans were truly free, and attempted to explain that God foresaw in the case of each possible universe, the different choices people would make in it, and actualized the best overall universe. In asking whether Judas the betrayer was bound to sin as a result of the particular universe which God chose to bring into existence, Leibniz says:

Whence comes it then that this man will assuredly do this sin? The reply is easy. It is that otherwise he would not be a man. For God foresees from all time that there will be a certain Judas, and in the concept or idea of him which God has, is contained this future free act. The only question, however, which remains is why this certain Judas, the betrayer who is possible only because of the idea of God, actually exists. To this question, however, we can expect no answer here on earth except to say in general that it is because God has found it good that he should exist notwithstanding that sin which he foresaw.¹⁰⁶

Leibniz essentially says that Judas is personally responsible for his freely chosen actions, but that God foresaw those actions before the creation of the universe and determined that this was nevertheless the best possible world. Although Leibniz claims that Judas was in fact free, Suchocki points out that since God could have actualized other worlds which involved Judas making different free decisions, His creation of this particular universe

¹⁰⁵ Suchocki, 17.
has bound Judas to the particular course of actions which this universe determinately involves.\textsuperscript{107}

It therefore seems that Leibniz was not ultimately able to escape the deterministic implications of the principle of plenitude. Leibniz does, however, allow for two important insights. First, while Augustine traced evil completely back to free will, we can see in Leibniz’s notion of compossibility the important insight that finitude is a logically necessary implication in any creation which is not to be simply an appendage of God. Also, another of Leibniz’s insights regarding the nature of sentience and insentience will be used in the final chapter.

The Ethical Implications

There are also ethical problems with the principle of plenitude. The implications of holding this world to be the best possible world can be depressing. The Optimist position is that God could not have created better than he has, and if we were only able to see creation as a whole and understand the contradiction that would be involved in creating a better world, we would have no grounds for complaint. This position is expressed by Archbishop William King (1650-1729):

You’ll say that some particular things might have been better. But, since you do not thoroughly understand the whole, you have no right to affirm this much. We have much greater reason to presume that no one part of it could be changed for the better, without greater detriment to the rest, which it would either be inconsistent with, or disfigure by its disproportion.\textsuperscript{108}

If this is the best (in the Platonic sense of the word) possible world, as the ‘optimist’ position holds, then there can be no hope for a better one. God has chosen the best situation from an infinite range of possible ones. While this rationalization of evil may make it easier to understand, it does not seem to allow for progress or change. Arthur

\textsuperscript{107} Suchocki, 20.
Lovejoy expresses Voltaire’s sentiment regarding the optimist position as found in his *Candide*:

An evil unexplained seemed to Voltaire more endurable than the same evil explained, when the explanation consisted in showing that from all eternity the avoidance of just that evil had been, and through all eternity the avoidance of others like it would be, logically inconceivable.  

So, even the confusion and anxiety which the mystery of evil can engender becomes preferable to a rationalization of it that leaves no hope for future improvement, no goal toward which to strive.

It may be argued that Leibniz’s notion (similar to that of King) of the best possible world may in fact leave some limited room for improvement. On this view, while God has in fact specifically determined the exact conditions of the universe, we as humans *could* still vastly improve our ethical behavior and thus greatly decrease the suffering that results from personal sin. However we have already seen in the Judas example, that there is no real free will within Leibniz’s system despite his claim to the contrary. In this case Voltaire still seems to have a legitimate complaint.

Another troublesome implication of the principle of plenitude was pointed out by Peter Lombard, when he explains that it “makes the creature equal to the creator,” since, according to God’s goodness, the whole chain of being exists as necessarily as He does. This leads Lombard to conclude that God “could have made other things and better things than he has made.” The principle also gave rise to two quite different ethical positions. The one is inferred from the fact that every creature exists as it does for a reason, and, occupying a unique and rightful place in the chain of being, should not get out of place. A person’s nature is creaturely, not divine, and humans should therefore fix

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111 Ibid.
their attention on human matters and not attempt to be over-spiritual. The opposite reaction, expressed in the Romantic movement, is that a person should endeavor to maximize their diversity of experience, since this maximization of existence contributes to the diversity of creation and its overall beauty.\textsuperscript{112} We will now see how a changing view of the natural world affects the principle of plenitude.

\section*{The Natural Problems}

According to Lovejoy, two different conceptions of species were prevalent in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, both arising from Aristotle. One derived from the separation of the different species into distinctly different classifications, which tended to promote the idea that species had a particular fixed nature that has always been the same. An example of this can be seen in a quotation from Comte de Buffon, stating that a species is "a whole independent of number, independent of time, a whole always living, always the same, a whole which was counted as one among the works of the creation, and therefore constitutes a single unit in the creation."\textsuperscript{113} This view began to give way to the other tendency to see the classification of organisms into species as an artificial characterization of distinctness which does not actually exist in the continuous chain of being. This tendency eventually won out over the other, and it became popular at this time for scientists to search for missing links in the chain of being. The many apparent absences of links were attributed to a deficiency in current scientific knowledge, and not to any problem with the philosophical assumption behind it. It therefore became popular to search for these missing links, a trend that continued until the time of Darwin.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{112} For example, see Arthur Lovejoy, 288-314.
\textsuperscript{113} Comte de Buffon, Histoire Naturelle, XIII (1765), I in Lovejoy, 230.
\textsuperscript{114} Lovejoy, 231-41.
Lovejoy notes that up until this point the chain of being was an excellent example of the “rigid and static scheme of things,” which the principle of plenitude and of sufficient reason engendered.\textsuperscript{115} It was thought that since God’s reason for creating is non-temporal, eternally the same, every possible species must be represented at all times in the past and in all times future. On these grounds many findings in paleontology of apparently extinct species were rejected, as was the embryological theory that the newly arising individuals within a species were not new at all, but simply unfolding from a pre-formed state in which every living thing was originally contained within the first members of that species.\textsuperscript{116}

As the weight of natural evidence for missing links within the chain of being became more significant, and as the general climate of contemporary thought came to be dissatisfied with some of the moral and religious implications of Optimism, popular adherence to a strict interpretation of the principle of plenitude began to wane. People came to think that the principle of plenitude would be fulfilled over time, a realization that some thought could reasonably be extended to include life arising on other planets and in other galaxies.\textsuperscript{117} However, that the principle of plenitude will be fulfilled over time is ultimately incompatible with the idea that God’s goodness and sufficient reason are not time-bound, and so what He saw fit to create at the beginning must be fitting for all times and places.

Today, the gaps in the chain of being are much too obvious to ignore, and the theory of evolution is nearly universally accepted in the scientific community. As Hick points out, it is possible that the principle of plenitude has been actualized on other

\textsuperscript{115} Lovejoy, 242.
\textsuperscript{116} Lovejoy, 243.
\textsuperscript{117} Lovejoy, 245.
planets, in other galaxies, or even in other dimensions and realms of being wholly foreign to our own. However, he says:

... in this process the hypothesis would become a sheer *a priori* speculation, entirely unrelated to human experience. It is *conceivable* that there are centaurs and mermaids on Mars or elsewhere; but to affirm this merely because it is conceivable, and because it must be the case if every possible kind of being is to exist, would be to have turned the corner from rational speculation into uncontrolled fantasy.¹¹⁸

It no longer seems tenable to posit a fixed possible realm of Platonic essences which have been given reality by God. Since we have seen that there are many gaps in the chain of actual being; and keeping with the principle of plenitude, we would either need to say God has limited power, or that He is limited by some kind of necessity inherent "in the nature of things," which is unacceptably dualistic. There can be no "nature of things" apart from God.

Now that we have examined the primary difficulties with accepting the principle of plenitude, we will directly examine three core elements of Augustine’s theodicy that must be rejected: the aesthetic (Platonic) meaning of goodness, the privative concept of evil, and the free-will defense. I will then suggest that the notion of creaturely self-creation must be central to any new theodicy which attempts to be consonant with the idea that God wishes to call human beings into personal relationship with Him.

¹¹⁸ Hick, 80-1.
Chapter III. A Rejection of the Augustinian-type Theodicy

Despite the problems for Christianity latent in Neoplatonism, Augustine was content simply to uphold God’s ultimate freedom and sovereignty while using the principle of plenitude to explain why God created as He did. Adam and Eve were made perfect by God and sinned freely against Him, causing a catastrophic malfunction in the delicately balanced work of creation. However, God foresaw this sin and all subsequent sin of the human race, allowing it to happen because creation was still most beautiful when inhabited by creatures possessing free will. Though Adam’s sin was a great evil, God brought only good from it in sending Jesus Christ to redeem the world (O felix culpa). Also, for Augustine, the same primeval fault that explained moral evils (e.g. disease, natural disasters, etc.) explained natural evil as well. As regards animal pain and the carnage which is involved in the creaturely struggle for survival, Augustine explains this in light of the principle of plenitude, that it is better that a lion (with its characteristically violent way of making a living) exist than that even one type of creature be left out in the actualization of the great chain of being. It has even been suggested that animal suffering can be explained by Adam’s fall.\textsuperscript{119} Finally, in order to maintain the just balance of creation, Augustine held that those who reject God suffer everlasting punishment in Hell, and those who cling to God attain eternal bliss in heaven. With this general scheme, God’s innocence, as well as His sovereignty over evil, was maintained.

\textsuperscript{119} Lewis, 138.
A. The Platonic Meaning of Goodness

Plato and subsequent philosophers influenced by the principle of plenitude defined ‘goodness’ based on self-sufficient existence. In the Republic, the Idea of Ideas was perfectly good because it was uncreated, the cause of its own existence, utterly transcendent, powerful, generative, and beautiful. In the Timaeus, Plato uses of goodness to explain the existence of the world of appearance. He claims that the Good could not ‘be jealous of,’ or envy any other possible existence,\(^\text{120}\) therefore all possible beings must be, and accordingly have been actualized.

The first problem with Platonic thought, when adopted into Christianity, is that the positing of possible essences that exist independently of God already involves an unacceptable dualism, opposed to the Christian understanding that all existence flows from God. God makes all things possible, and any conceived possibility already assumes His existence.

But let us now return to the Platonic meaning of goodness. In attributing a moral quality to the Idea of Ideas by claiming that Its goodness requires a complete lack of ‘envy’ for any possible beings, Plato subtly changes from a metaphysical meaning of ‘goodness’ to a moral one. Before, the definition of goodness had been based on self-sufficiency of existence; but in the passage previously cited from the Timaeus, perfect goodness is associated with a lack of ‘envy.’ Arthur Lovejoy supports this change in meaning as crucial to the history of philosophy:

Yet when he [Plato] sets about telling us the reason for being of this world, Plato exactly reverses the essential meaning of ‘good.’ . . . And thus, Plato, tacitly making the crucial assumption that the existence of many entities not eternal, not supersensible, and far from perfect, was inherently desirable, finds in his otherworldly Absolute, in the Idea of the Good itself, the reason why that Absolute cannot exist alone. The concept of Self-Sufficing Perfection, by a bold logical inversion,

\(^{120}\) Plato, Timaeus, 29, 30.
was—without losing any of its original implications—converted into the concept of a Self-Transcending Fecundity.\textsuperscript{121}

Plato here uses the goodness of the Idea of Ideas in a \textit{moral} sense (e.g. envy) to explain the necessary actualization of the world of appearance, whereas he usually employs it in a \textit{metaphysical} sense (e.g. self-sufficient being), when speaking of the self-sufficiency and utter transcendence of the Good. Since the Good \textit{cannot} by Its very nature ‘envy’ any other possible existences, the whole chain of possible being is brought into existence. The result of this Platonic influence on Christian thinking was that God’s goodness came to be correlated with fecundity, and was necessarily manifested in the beautiful artistry of creation as required by God’s very nature. Augustine says, “All have their offices and limits laid down so as to ensure the beauty of the universe. That which we abhor in any part of it gives us the greatest pleasure when we consider the universe as a whole. . . . The very reason why some things are inferior is that though the parts may be imperfect the whole is perfect, whether its beauty is seen stationary or in movement. . . . The black colour in a picture may very well be beautiful if you take the picture as a whole.”\textsuperscript{122} John Hick sees this particular Platonic conception of goodness as being problematic for Christianity:

How do we know, or on what grounds may we suppose, that God adopted the principle of plenitude as His policy for creation? . . . Today, when the personal character of God and of His dealings with mankind have become increasingly central and normative for theological thinking, we are more inclined to say that God willed to create finite beings who should be capable of personal relationship with Himself, and that He created our enigmatic world as an environment whose apparently arbitrary character provides the concrete occasions and opportunities for free and faithful obedience to Him. . . . Throughout medieval theology the love of God tends to be thought of in metaphysical rather than personal terms. It is not so much the love of the personal Infinite for finite persons, as the inexhaustible creative divine fecundity, expressed in the granting of being to a dependent universe with its innumerable grades of creatures. \textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} Lovejoy 49.
\textsuperscript{122} Augustine, \textit{On the Morals of the Manichaeans}, i., in Hick, 83.
\textsuperscript{123} Hick, 77.
The Augustinian-type theodicy, with its aesthetic meaning of ‘goodness,’ can be seen in the position of Archbishop King addressing the problem of animal pain. Lovejoy points out that King is involved in a “trans-valuation of values” when he says, “If you insist that a lion might have been made without teeth or claws, a viper without venom; I grant it, as a knife without an edge; but then they would have been of quite another species, and have had neither the nature, nor use, nor genius, which they now enjoy.” It was then aesthetically better that creation include a violent creature which survives by killing as well as to contain a creature whose nature it was to be killed. Though it is impossible to know for sure the extent to which animals suffer, we can reasonably suppose, based on observation and on the physiological similarity of the animal and human nervous systems, that they can at least experience significant pain. That the Christian God would place the aesthetic value of having as a part of creation an animal which experiences pain over the value of the comfort and happiness of His creatures seems an awkward assertion.

Plato primarily understood the ‘goodness’ of the Good in an ontological or metaphysical sense, in terms of self-sufficiency and perfection, as the summit of all being. The problem with the principle of plenitude lies in the equivocal meaning of goodness which Plato employs. It does not seem consistent to maintain that God must lack ‘envy,’ a moral concept, if we are to hold to the ontological criteria for goodness which Plato employs elsewhere. Since ‘goodness’ and ‘evil’ are obviously very important to theodicy, I will now examine their traditional meanings in Christian thought, and suggest a more useful way of thinking about them.

124 Lovejoy, 220-1.
B. How Can We Understand Christian Goodness?

Up until now I have been arguing against the principle of plenitude on the grounds that, if carried out to its logical conclusion, the differing meanings of goodness which it entails ultimately seem to come into conflict with God’s freedom. Augustine and Aquinas became trapped in this paradox when employing the principle to explain the created order of things and the existence of evil, but chose to resolve the issue simply by asserting that God was in fact free and could have created differently than He had. The inconsistent use of the word ‘goodness’ in Plato’s thought, along with the difficulties that lie in attempting to reconcile it with what is observed in the natural world, should be sufficient to do away with this principle. An additional problem is that Augustine’s use of the Platonic principle of plenitude, which results from Plato’s changing from a metaphysical to a moral meaning of goodness in the Timaeus, involves him in a “trans-valuation of values.” Explaining the existence of pain, suffering, and evil in the world as necessary aspects of the ‘fullness’ of creation suggests that God values the beauty of creation over the happiness of His creatures, which does not fit with the understanding of the Christian God of love revealed by Jesus Christ. In rejecting the meaning of goodness which gives rise to the principle of plenitude, it will be important here to set out exactly what I do mean by ‘goodness,’ since this meaning is foundational to the basic question of theodicy: how can a perfectly good and omnipotent God allow evil in the world?

There seem to be at least two and possibly three different meanings of ‘goodness.’ The first sense of the word, ‘ontological’ goodness, has been equated with being. The second sense is usually not separated from ontological goodness, but I wish to distinguish it for the moment as it seems to mean something slightly different. This meaning of
goodness is 'that which is desirable,' and seems slightly different from ontological goodness since it implies the existence of a subject for which to be desirable. The third meaning, 'moral' goodness, describes the character of some agent based on whether or not it does in fact desire what is desirable.

Any coherent meaning of 'goodness' must take into account three difficult issues. First, since God is the source of all that exists, it does not seem that goodness can be a standard which exists apart from God with reference to which His actions may be judged. This means that somehow goodness must be part of God, or that God is goodness, or that he 'created' it. Secondly, however, if we are to ask the theodicy question, we must necessarily do so based upon how we as humans understand goodness. If goodness for sinful humans does not mean the same thing as goodness for God, then we cannot begin to ask the theodicy question. Therefore we cannot think of goodness as being arbitrarily determined by the whim of God, since it seems that anything God chose to do would then be defined as goodness. Third, while maintaining that God does in fact always do what is best, we must somehow meaningfully show how God freely chooses to do the good.

St. Thomas Aquinas is an example of how goodness has been traditionally understood in Christianity. He takes from Aristotle the idea that the good is what is desirable. Whatever is desirable is only desirable in so far as it has some perfection or desirable property. Something has perfection inasmuch as it is in act, and is in act inasmuch as it has being. Aquinas explains that goodness and being therefore differ in idea, but are the same really.\(^\text{125}\)

\(^{125}\) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Q V, art. 1.
In God, being and essence are the same, as it is God’s essence to exist. Since God
is absolutely self-sufficient and lacks nothing, there can be no potentiality in Him.\(^\text{126}\) God
is therefore pure actuality, and because something is in act insofar as it exists, and since
being is really the same as goodness, God is good. Goodness is identical with God’s very
being. For Aquinas, God is the source of all being, and all created beings are good
according to their perfection, that is, insofar as they exist. Since existence comes from
God, God is what all things aim at or desire as their final cause. Aquinas says,

To be good belongs pre-eminently to God. For a thing is good according to its desirableness. Now
everything seeks after its own perfection, and the perfection and form of the effect consist in a
certain likeness to the agent, since every agent makes its like; and hence the agent itself is
desirable and has the nature of the good. For the very thing which is desirable in it is the
participation of its likeness. Therefore, since God is the first producing cause of all things, it is
manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to Him . . . .\(^\text{127}\)

Here we see the fusion of the first and second senses of ‘goodness’ (ontological
and desirability) into one by Aquinas. But I would like to call attention to what seems to
me a significant point that did not seem to be important for St. Thomas. The assertion that
goodness and being are really the same depends on the central notion of desirability. But
God’s quality of being desirable is dependent on some beings for whom He is desirable.
It is true that God is the final cause of all beings and is therefore their ultimate good, but
would it make sense to say, apart from the existence of creatures to do the desiring, that
God is good based on desirability?\(^\text{128}\) On the grounds that a good thing is only good
insofar as it has some perfection, and is only perfect insofar as that perfection is actual, it
seems obvious that that thing must exist. But does this work the other way around (e.g.

\(^{126}\) Ibid. Q 3, art. 4.
\(^{127}\) Ibid. Q VI, art. 1.
\(^{128}\) I am aware that Aquinas would have said that God loves himself, but I cannot see how it makes sense to
say that He desires himself. On these grounds, therefore, I do not see how God can be called good apart
from creatures for which God is desirable.
that something that exists must necessarily be good) without assuming that there are ‘desiring creatures?’ It seems to me that it does not. Goodness (desirability) describes a relation, either between two subjects, or between a subject and an object. Therefore if goodness is to be understood in terms of desirability, I cannot see why it is necessary to make goodness identical to being, although I agree that there is a very close connection. Returning to Aquinas, we will now see how his understanding of goodness can be problematic.

Bruce Reichenbach points out that according to Aquinas’ arguments, God is by his very nature good, and God necessarily promotes the good which is Himself. This means that God’s acts must also be good, since they must be consonant with his nature. But here we encounter a problem. We know that God’s actions are good from what has been said, but in order to predicate moral goodness of God, He must really be free with respect to His acts. Reichenbach points out that we do not praise or chastise people for being ethically (morally) good or bad when they did not really have a choice in the matter:

... we make no commendation of a man for not beating his wife when he is in Detroit and she in Minneapolis, that is, where the necessity is external. Neither do we morally condemn someone if as the result of an epileptic seizure she causes injury to another individual... In both of these cases, since the action was not done or done out of necessity, though the action be right or wrong in terms of some ethical norm, the agent who performed the action is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy on account of it.

But God’s actions, because they must be consistent with His nature (goodness), are not free in any morally praiseworthy sense, since He by definition always does what is best. It is not conceivable that He do evil, for as Aquinas says, “Yet it does not follow that in

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130 Reichenbach, 55.
either case he [God] can do ill, which is to sin." The problem is that central to our understanding of God as the God of love is the idea that God freely chooses to be in relationship with us, that God freely chose to become incarnate and subject himself to finitude. Reichenbach goes on to argue on these grounds that moral good cannot be predicated of God. He says,

But though not possessing the lack characteristic of potency might be seen to establish ontological perfection, it remains to be shown that this perfection includes or entails moral perfection. For Aquinas the connecting link is his contention that the good is being insofar as it is appetible or desirable. However, so conceived there is still no reason to think that the goodness thereby ascribed to God as the end everything desires is moral goodness. It is the goodness of being desirable, but it is not the goodness of desiring the desirable . . . In sum, if God’s goodness is predicated on the basis of His nature, then the notion of good as applied to God loses its ethical dimension.  

Reichenbach explains that because Aquinas’ argument seems to lead to a denial that God is morally good, moral goodness cannot be part of his nature, although he maintains that God’s nature could still include the ontological goodness which Aquinas argues for. I agree with Reichenbach’s position here, with the added distinction that the ontological goodness of God only makes sense in view of the existence of creatures which desire God as their end—since desirability entails that there be subjects to do the desiring. I suggest that there is some difference, however slight, between goodness and being.

But we must now return to the subject of God’s moral goodness, since it is crucial to Christianity’s understanding of God that He be morally good. Although we have seen that God cannot be morally good by nature, God must be morally good in some other way. Reichenbach suggests the view that “God is good because He does good acts, and

\[131\] Thomas Aquinas, On the Power of God Q 1, art. 6, reply 7. In Reichenbach, 57.
\[132\] Reichenbach, 58.
he is perfectly good because he always does and is disposed to do the good."\textsuperscript{133}

Reichenbach does not intend to mean that God is perfectly good \textit{by necessity}, but that he in fact does always freely choose to do what is best—God is \textit{able} to do evil, that is, it is within His power, yet he never does. This means that God’s moral goodness is logically contingent rather than necessary.\textsuperscript{134}

There is yet another important question to be cleared up. Granted that it is a logically contingent matter that God is morally good, by denying that God is good \textit{by nature} haven’t we now been forced into admitting a standard of goodness apart from God? Reichenbach suggests that it would be helpful to think of the standard of goodness as existing in the mind of God, as something which God has not created and which is not “subject to his whim and fancy,” but which nevertheless does not exist apart from Him.\textsuperscript{135}

In summary, it seems that we can hold two senses of the word ‘goodness.’ We can maintain both that God always acts in consistency with the moral good, and that God is good by nature insofar as He is the end, ‘which all things desire.’ However, I contend that it will be useful to discard the notion of bare ontological goodness divorced from any subjects for which that good may be desirable. Good, then, is understood less in terms of ontological and metaphysical categories and more in terms of personal and relational categories. It should also be pointed out that an understanding of goodness in personal/relational categories will necessarily have an effect on how we conceive of evil.

\textsuperscript{133} Reichenbach, 59.

\textsuperscript{134} Reichenbach acknowledges that one may object to this argument in the following way: It does not make sense to say that God’s goodness is logically contingent because it is impossible that He would deviate from the moral law, since if He did, He would not be perfect and therefore would not be God. But Reichenbach points out that this is not a legitimate criticism since ‘God’ is here being used in two different senses: first, as a proper name, and second, as a title distinguishes his position as the proper object of religious worship. If God did wrong, it is true that He would not be the proper object of religious worship, but this does not mean that he would not be God.

\textsuperscript{135} Reichenbach, 64.
Based on the privative understanding of evil developed by St. Augustine, it has been said that it is impossible to ‘pick up a handful of evil.’ Evil has been understood in terms of meaninglessness, nonbeing, and privation. As a corollary, this almost seems to suggest that you could pick up a handful of goodness. Although Aquinas would not have put it this way, it still seems to me that since goodness has previously been thought of as in a way having substance (since everything that exists is good insofar as it exists), the ontological understanding (being/nonbeing) of good and evil leads to such an idea. I suggest that the personal/relational understanding of goodness is more intelligible in light of our experience, and that these categories can also be applied in understanding evil; and to this we now turn.

C. Evil as Privative

For Augustine, all being is good inasmuch as its existence comes from God, who is perfectly good. If, then, evil exists or has being in the true sense, it would therefore be a good, which is nonsense. Augustine says, “Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, and that would mean it was very good indeed, or it would be a substance liable to destruction—but then it would not be destructible unless it were good.”136 Augustine therefore found in the thought of Plotinus a useful way of maintaining that God is at once the source of all ‘natures’ and completely innocent of evil.

For Plotinus, evil could be found at the point where being ‘touches’ non-being, where the possible essences to which the Absolute gave existence were finally exhausted. Plotinus called this non-being or formlessness ‘Matter,’ to which being is attributed only

"by an accident of words." But rather than being bare non-existence, Matter is sometimes treated by Plotinus as if it had a kind of positive, evil nature of its own. "Evil was there before we came to be; the Evil which holds men down binds them against their will." This chaotic formlessness which seems, for Plotinus, to oppose the orderliness and coherency of being, may be what Plato was grappling with metaphorically in the Timaeus when he explains how the Demiurge fashioned the world through a balance of Reason and Necessity. John Hick points to the difficulty in thinking of evil on the one hand as sheer nothingness, and on the other as a positive force:

The question immediately arises whether this non-being is a positive force with a malevolent nature of its own, liable to attack and infect all that it touches, or merely a passive and innocent occasion of evil. Like other participants in the [Platonic] tradition, Plotinus is obliged to treat it as both—as negative and passive when he is using it to support the thesis that the universe, as the emanation of Perfect Goodness, contains no independent power of evil; but as positive and active when he is using it to explain the felt potency of evil in human experience. This internal tension in Plotinus' thought is a symptom of a deep-seated weakness of the meontic [ontological view of evil] theme in theodicy.

Augustine seems to have wished to completely exempt God from all responsibility for evil. Therefore, not only can evil not exist independently of God, but neither can it be some positive thing which He created. Plotinus' privative concept of evil was therefore very useful. Privation of goodness is also privation of being, and so evil is nothing, non-existent. Not only was the privative concept useful in fitting with the Christian understanding of God, but it also expresses well the meaningless, the loss of human likeness to God caused by moral evil. Augustine, however, was acutely aware that the privative concept of evil belies its very positive reality in the world.

Where, then, is evil; where does it come from and how did it creep in? What is its root, its seed? Or does it not exist at all? But in that case, why do we fear and avoid something that has no

137 Plotinus, Enneads, I, 8, 7; in Hick, 41.
138 Plotinus, i, 8, 5; in Hick 42.
139 Hick, 27.
140 Hick, 42.
reality? If we say that our fear is meaningless, then the fear itself is undeniably evil, for it goads and tortures our hearts to no purpose, and so the evil is all the greater inasmuch as the object of our fear is nonexistent, yet we fear all the same. Either the evil we fear exists, or our fear itself is the evil.141

Augustine explained that evil manifests itself in the turning away from God as the source of existence and goodness, a malfunctioning of something originally made perfect. This metaphor of “turning away” is very useful theologically and seems to be consistent with the human experience of sin, of preference for or turn to the self over against God.

However, if we are to reject Augustine’s claim that human sin hurled creation into a state of disorder, then the privative idea cannot be stretched to cover such things as natural evil and animal pain, since nature functions the way it was always intended to function. Disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the Lisbon earthquake are understandably seen by those affected as being great evils, but the same events, if they took place on an uninhabited island, would hardly be considered evil. An asteroid striking the earth in the middle of New York City would seem a great evil, but the same asteroid crashing into a distant planet would not. Natural forces are wholly positive, and only relatively good or bad for humanity depending on the situation.

The Plotinian language and system used to understand evil, while capable of finding some degree of resonance with our experience of moral evil and useful for protecting God’s innocence, carries with it the assumption that evil is somehow a ‘thing’ or substance. I suggest that evil, like goodness, can be better understood in terms of relationship to God’s purpose, than of ontological or metaphysical categories. On this view evil would consist in the explicit rejection of God by creatures endowed with free will. Describing natural disasters as being ‘evil’ would then be somewhat misleading.

141 Augustine, Confessions, 125.
They would perhaps better be described as simply being among the 'bad' things that happen to us and which can cause great tragedy, but which have nothing to do with moral evil.

This view seems to leave behind some of the confusing implications of the Platonic dualistic or privative understandings of evil.¹⁴² John Hick admits that seeing evil as privative is valid theologically in that it protects Christian monism and expresses well the human experience of meaninglessness, but thinks that the metaphysical understanding of evil which comes to us from Neoplatonism may profitably be abandoned:

...non-being can be useful as a piece of poetic diction, suggesting certain aspects of our human experience of evil, but ... as an ontological or metaphysical concept it represents a mistaken hypostatization of language, and can be of no positive help in relation to the theodicy problem.¹⁴³

In the first chapter, I explained how Augustine's explanation for some natural evils (in this case disease, corruption, natural disasters, etc.) based on his interpretation of the Adamic myth and doctrine of the fall is no longer tenable in light of current scientific understanding. Augustine also used the principle of plenitude (see quotation on pg.3) to explain various other aspects of natural evil, such as the carnage characteristic of the natural world. But the aesthetic conception of God's goodness from which the principle of plenitude arises seems to be inconsistent with the goodness of God (since it emphasizes God's fecundity and the beauty of creation over God's love) as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, and so this explanation is also untenable.

Natural evil, if we are to reject its entrance into the world upon Adam's historical sin, often seems to be the most difficult type of evil to accept in light of a loving and

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¹⁴² One confusing element is the inability of the privative concept to cover natural evil (if, of course, Augustine's interpretation of the fall is to be rejected). Another confusing element, as I have mentioned, is the tendency in Greek philosophy to view good in ontological/metaphysical rather than personal or relational categories.

¹⁴³ Hick, 187.
omnipotent God, since it cannot be a punishment for an historical human sin. But if the way in which nature now works is thought to be the way it has worked from the very beginning, then how are we to understand God’s allowance of it?

D. Natural Evil in the Augustinian Theodicy

If we are to suggest a new theodicy, the subject of natural evil calls out loudly for attention. Subjectively for God, natural evil must in the end be a mysterious good, or exist only in the allowance of some greater good if He is to remain at once the sovereign source of goodness and the Christian God of Love. Here, I will summarize the reasons for rejecting Augustine’s explanations for natural evil, and introduce two alternative explanations which will be developed later in the chapter.

Natural evil can only be unequivocally evil and exist contrary to God’s will if at least one of the following is true: God’s power in creating is limited, the principle of plenitude and correlative conception of aesthetic goodness is invoked, or if it somehow entered creation as a result of human choice. I have already explained that the aesthetic/metaphysical conception of God’s goodness and dualism cannot be accepted, since God’s goodness as revealed in Jesus Christ and God’s omnipotence are central to Christian Revelation. I have also shown that free choice alone cannot explain all types of evil. There seem to be two remaining alternatives. If the universe’s evolutionary development is being directly shaped and molded by the Hand of God according to an exact Divine blueprint, then natural evil can only be thought an ultimately good part of creation which God directly intends, even if it is a good which we do not understand. This is the basic position of the Irenaean-type theodicy. On the other hand, if God is creating the universe in a slightly different way, “beckoning” it into existence out of
nothing, allowing it to, in a sense “make itself,” then natural evils may be thought of as the “growing pains” of creation, analogous in a limited way to human sin. On this view of the way in which God creates, God grants a radical autonomy to creation, not forcing or compelling the universe into a particular mold, but ‘persuading’ it out of nothingness into being and relationship with Him. If creation was allowed such an autonomy, he would then be constrained (by self-limitation) to allow the natural evil which results in the process.  

In any case, instead of examining the universe from the standpoint of something God has created, it is now much more consistent with the new cosmography to examine it as something that is becoming, or that God is in the process of creating. We will now see, in the process of examining Augustine’s free will defense, two further reasons for rejecting his theodicy.

**E. Augustine’s Free Will Defense**

Augustine blames the sin of Adam on two sources: the previous fall of some of the angels, and Adam’s choice itself. Even though tempted from an outside source, Adam was created perfect with complete knowledge of the good, in need of nothing, free from pain or suffering of any kind; and so his sin was particularly grave. But the first instance of sin, for Augustine, could be traced to the fall of the angels. The angels were created immortal, but mutable insofar as their continued bliss required that they cling to their

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144 ‘Persuading’ and ‘beckoning’ are agreeably vague terms that are meant in a sense metaphorically, but also in a sense literally. The terms are usually employed by process theologians and are in some way literal based on the process understanding of how God is present to each ‘entity.’ For Process theologians, God provides each entity at every moment with a set of possible courses of actualization which, along with the entities remembered past, influence what the entity will become. Not only is this how God interacts with humans, but it is also the way in which he is present to the whole of creation. This view moves away from seeing God as having directly and immediately formed the universe into a particular mold, and toward a view of the self-creation of the universe. The process metaphysic is addressed briefly in the final chapter.
Maker. According to Augustine, some of the angels dwelt on the fact that God foreknew which of them would not persevere, and in dwelling on this they turned away from God toward themselves, and therefore sinned. Interestingly, Augustine actually admits that the lack, for some of the angels, of assurance of continuing in eternal bliss meant that they were not in the same state of perfection as those which did not fall and which knew of their own perseverance. Although this could imply, in Augustine’s formulation, some responsibility in their fall on the part of God, Augustine nevertheless maintains complete creaturely responsibility for evil.

The real question here that must be asked of Augustine is how it is possible that creatures created perfect in every respect could conceivably sin. For, there are several important aspects of a person which influence the decision he or she will make. For Augustine, God endowed His creatures with perfect attributes (e.g. intelligence, knowledge, immortality, control over their own physiological function, etc.). But were our first parents also created with perfectly formed moral character? To Augustine, it seems that they were: “The love of the pair for God and for one another was undisturbed, and they lived in a faithful and sincere fellowship which was the source of an immense gladness for them, for what they loved was always at hand for their enjoyment.”

If Adam and Eve were endowed with perfect moral character, I do not see how it is possible to conceive that they could sin, let alone believe that they did. For Augustine, they clearly did sin, however, which seems to indicate a lack of preformed character. Even in Augustine’s own interpretation of the fall, Adam’s sin in the garden was only the

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flowering of an already germinated seed which Adam had allowed to grow in his heart.\textsuperscript{147}

But how could Adam, endowed with perfect moral character, have allowed this?

Any claim that Adam did not have perfect character would not be permissible for Augustine, since it partially implicates God in the responsibility for evil. As John Hick says:

> The basic and inevitable criticism is that the idea of an unqualifiedly good creature committing sin is self-contradictory and unintelligible. If the angels are finitely perfect, then even though they are in some important sense free to sin they will never in fact do so. If they do sin we can only infer that they were not flawless—in which case their Maker must share the responsibility for their fall, and the intended theodicy fails.\textsuperscript{148}

It seems to me that there is a contradiction in holding the position that a 'culpable imperfection\textsuperscript{149}' originated from a being created perfect in every way.

When speaking of the fall of the angels, Augustine seems to suggest that God preordained the fall of some. "These [fallen] angels, therefore, either received less of the grace of the divine love than those who persevered in the same; or if both were created equally good, then, while the one fell by their evil will, the others were more abundantly assisted, and attained to that pitch of blessedness at which they became certain they should never fall from it..."\textsuperscript{150} Here, the responsibility would seem to fall on God, who did not give sufficient assistance of grace to those who did in fact fall, whereas he apparently did give it to those who did not. Elsewhere Augustine tends toward an even more extreme view in saying, "their [the fallen angels] blessedness was destined to come to an end."\textsuperscript{151} Hick points out that, here, Augustine tends explicitly toward predestination,

\textsuperscript{147} Augustine, \textit{City of God}, vol. II, 25.
\textsuperscript{148} Hick, 63.
\textsuperscript{149} By 'culpable imperfection,' I mean as opposed to other imperfections that Augustine would have granted of Adam and Eve, even in their perfect state, such as not being as intelligent as the angels or simply being mutable.
though on the whole, Augustine seems to hold the milder position that speaking of predestination is only a way of saying that God foresees those who will in fact accept His grace (the elect), and those who will not (the damned).\textsuperscript{152} Of course, if the theory of predestination is adopted, then God is responsible for which creatures sin and which do not, and the theodicy ultimately fails.

In summary, Augustine maintained God's goodness and innocence with recourse to the principle of plenitude and the corresponding aesthetic perfection of creation, by asserting that God created the first humans absolutely perfect, by explaining (\textit{O felix culpa}) that His allowance of Adam and Eve's sin ultimately set the stage for the coming of Christ, and by positing a hell in order to maintain moral balance and justice in creation. God, of course, could have done otherwise according to His omnipotence, but saw (again, according to the principle of plenitude) that this way was best. However, I have argued that the principle of plenitude and the underlying Platonic conception of goodness do not fit with an authentic Christian understanding of goodness because it forces God to conform to some outside standard, as if Goodness were an abstract 'form' which subsists of itself separately from God. We have also seen, based on our contemporary view of the natural world and the impossibility of understanding how perfect creatures could fall, that Augustine's free will defense cannot withstand scrutiny. We will now see one further, and most important, problem with Augustine's development of the free-will defense.

John Hick raises another important question regarding the free-will defense. Granted that God can do anything that is logically possible, and that he has in fact chosen to create free creatures as opposed to automata, could God have created free beings which always freely choose the good? The argument is that, if it is possible for one

\textsuperscript{152} Hick, 63-5.
person to (in freedom) choose rightly in a particular instance, then it should also be possible for that same person to do so in every case. If this is possible for one person, then it should logically be possible for all people. God can do anything that is logically possible, therefore, why did he not so constitute human beings of such a character that they would always freely choose rightly? Hick grants that God must be able to do the logically possible—thus God could have created beings in this way—but claims that these creatures, though free in the sense of not being compelled from the outside, could not respond in personal loving relationship with their Creator. They would be free with respect to the course of events taking place in the sense of having ownership of their choice, but would not be free with respect to God, since He ‘so constituted’ them that they would in fact always choose rightly. Hick likens this situation to a person once hypnotized, then waking up and proceeding to carry out the suggestions of the hypnotist. Although this person would be the autonomous source of his or her own action, and in that sense would be free with respect to their choices, he or she would still be programmed or ‘so constituted’ as to not be free with respect to the hypnotist. In effect, Hick says that this would be a false freedom, or at least one which would render them unable to participate in relationship with God.153

It seems reasonable that any creature imputed both with perfect knowledge of the good and perfect character would predictably act rightly in freedom in the absence of external compulsion. The real issue here lies in asking, “What is ultimately valuable to God?” Does God simply value the occurrence of a great multitude of morally correct actions? Or is it more consistent with Christian revelation to hold that what God really values is the loving response of His creatures? Quoting Isaiah 29:13, Jesus says “Isaiah

153 Hick, 266-74.
was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites, it is written: these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

Throughout the Scriptures, Jesus seems to be much more concerned with the heart, with the character from which choices flow. If character is of primary importance, can a response rightly be called ‘loving’ unless it is not only the creature’s own self-sponsored response, but also unless that response flows from a self-determined character? In some sense the creature must be free to create the character which influences its free choices. If the choice ultimately derives from a preordained nature given by God, then it cannot have much meaning. A truly loving response must come from a character that has been, not given, but achieved. Thus, ‘character,’ when we are speaking of people existing in a personal relationship with God, cannot in principle simply be given, but must be developed by the person.

F. Creaturely Self-Creation

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French paleontologist and Jesuit priest, saw that, though the world may be in some sense a ‘work of art,’ it is not a completed work of art. He saw that the processes of development and becoming are central to the world in which we find ourselves and to the human mode of existence in it. Though most theologians seem willing to accept that even an omnipotent God cannot do the logically impossible (e.g. make a square circle), Teilhard, in *Christianity and Evolution*, extends the notion of logical impossibility to include such things as God’s instantaneous creation, for example, of a fully constituted Peter or Paul. According to Teilhard, the Schoolmen tended to think of the world as being simply made up of a great number of isolated and interchangeable parts, which could be immediately created and organized by God in whatever fashion

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154 Mark 7: 6
desired. However, for Teilhard, the existence of Peter or Paul, their incredibly complex physiological constitution and interrelatedness with the whole of organic creation, and the innumerable experiences, relationships, and free choices that have gone into making them who they are, all constitute a whole which could not logically be created in an instant, even by God. An authentic understanding of human beings necessarily includes time and experience in which to develop personality and character, other creatures with which to relate, and a common environment in which all this may take place.\textsuperscript{155} Teilhard holds that in this light, evil is an inevitable part of creation when he says:

In so far as we can judge the progress of the world, God’s power has not so free a field for its action as we assume: on the contrary, in virtue of the very constitution of the participated being it labours to produce (that is, briefly, in virtue of the perfection proper to itself), it is always obliged, in the course of its creative effort, to pass through a whole series of intermediaries and to overcome a whole succession of inevitable risks. . . Everything which is not God is essentially multitude—multitude organized in itself, and multitude organizing around itself. If God, then, is to make a soul, there is only one way open to his power: to create a world. In consequence, man includes among his fully realized conditions of possibility more than just ‘animality’ and ‘rationality’; the notion of man implies also; ‘mankind, earth, universe...’ . . . If the general laws of becoming (controlling the progressive appearance of being—created being—from an organized multiple) must be regarded as modalities rigorously imposed on God’s action, then we can begin to see that the existence of evil might very well also be a strictly inevitable concomitant of the creation.\textsuperscript{156}

Teilhard’s view of the world as a dynamically interrelated ecological community in which an individual constituent is really not intelligible unless viewed in relation to the whole, is I think, a great insight which fits very well with contemporary scientific understanding. It is true that Teilhard asserts many times that God could not have created a world except through a process of becoming, which may be construed as a limit on God’s power. However, Teilhard is always speaking from a view of the world as it is, not of a hypothetical world that could have been. Therefore, I think that he is most concerned

\textsuperscript{155} Teilhard, 30-5.

\textsuperscript{156} Teilhard 31-2.
when emphasizing this point, with pointing out that God could not have created *this* 
world, which happens to be inhabited by morally responsible beings capable of 
relationship with Him, except through a process of becoming. On this view, the limitation 
on God’s power would be a self-imposed limitation, effected in order to allow for a 
universe with a particular character. Evil *would* then be a necessary aspect of this ‘best 
possible world,’ except that ‘best’ would not be understood in terms of Greek philosophy, 
but of ‘best according to God’s ultimate purpose.’
Chapter IV. The ‘Irenaean’ Approach

There is much demanded of our new theodicy. It must be consonant with the new cosmology, evolutionary thinking, contemporary theological insight, and the revealed Christian understanding of God. Our contemporary view of the natural world necessitates an important shift in perspective regarding the theological anthropology which has developed from Augustine’s interpretation of the Adamic myth, but our theodicy must remain faithful to the core of Christian truth. We must somehow show that God allows evil’s existence and is sovereign over it, but that it only exists because God somehow sees that it is ultimately ‘better’ this way. The new theodicy will maintain that the possibility for personal relationship of autonomous beings with God is central to the purpose of the universe, and that evil must be seen in light of this purpose. In the process of suggesting this view of evil, I will suggest that God’s goodness is revealed even more in the person of Jesus Christ than in the aesthetic beauty of creation.

A. Irenaean Theological Anthropology

In the writings of the Church father Irenaeus (c.130-c.202), Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, can be found elements of a theological anthropology quite different from that of St. Augustine. Irenaeus, referring to the first chapter of Genesis, distinguishes the ‘image’ of God from His ‘likeness.’ The ‘image’ of God which humans bear describes the fact that we are intelligent beings capable of relationship with our Creator, while our ‘likeness’ to God intimates a certain spiritual resemblance to Him. The ‘likeness’ comes only through the gift of the Spirit and was lost by Adam and Eve as a result of the fall; however,
Irenaeus (unlike Augustine) held that humans retain the image of God and therefore the capacity for turning away from sin toward God.\textsuperscript{157}

While Irenaeus, like Augustine, understood the fall in a historical sense, original perfection did not play the same role in his thought as in that of the African bishop. For Irenaeus, Adam and Eve were like young children at the beginning of a process of spiritual maturation. Since they were not created as immediately perfect or mature beings, their sins could be thought of as ‘growing pains’ or ‘stumbles’ rather than malicious rebellions against God. This milder understanding of sin does not excuse Adam and Eve from personal responsibility for it, but does tend to give sin a certain inevitable element. It would seem unreasonable to expect that a child would never make a mistake. On this view God is seen as a loving parent, guiding His children toward maturity, but recognizing that their character and personhood must be autonomously self-attained, and cannot simply be downloaded to them. Any good parent knows that every person, whether doing homework, learning a new skill, or dealing with personal relationships, must ultimately face life’s challenges and struggles themselves. These things cannot be done for them, character and personhood must be earned. This is no limitation on the part of the parent, or analogically on God, but a logical requisite for the self-attainment of personhood. As Irenaeus says,

For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.\textsuperscript{158}

As John Hick points out, Irenaeus also saw that the freedom to respond in personal relationship with God required a certain cognitive freedom. He says, “Not

\textsuperscript{157} Irenaeus, \textit{Against Heresies}, V. VI. I. Translation in the Ante-Nicene Library. In Hick, 211.
\textsuperscript{158} Irenaeus, IV. XXXIX. I. Part of a larger quote in Hick, 212.
merely in works but also in faith, has God preserved the will of man free and under his own control.”\textsuperscript{159} It seemed to Irenaeus that human faith in God required an original lack of knowledge of Him, a lack of knowledge which also included an original lack of knowledge of the good:

...how, if we had no knowledge of the contrary, could he [man] have had instruction in that which is good? ... For just as the tongue receives experience of sweet and bitter by means of tasting, and the eye discriminates between black and white by means of vision, and the ear recognizes the distinctions of sounds by hearing; so also does the mind, receiving through the experience of both the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious of its preservation, by acting in obedience to God.... But if any one do shun the knowledge of both kinds of things, and the twofold perception of knowledge, he unawares divests himself of the character of a human being.\textsuperscript{160}

This original ‘epistemic distance’ which each person finds between themselves and the Divine is requisite for a true freedom of response:

...the reality and presence of God must not be borne in upon men in the coercive way in which their natural environment forces itself upon their attention. The world must be to man, to some extent at least, \textit{etsi Deus non daretur}, ‘as if there were no God’. ... He must be knowable, but only by a mode of knowledge that involves a free personal response on man’s part, this response consisting in an uncompelled interpretative activity whereby we experience the world as mediating the divine presence. Such a need for a human faith-response will secure for man the only kind of freedom that is possible for him in relation to God, namely cognitive freedom, carrying with it the momentous possibility of being either aware or unaware of his Maker.\textsuperscript{161}

This epistemic distance certainly coheres much better with our scientific anthropological understanding of the human species’ gradual emergence from the ape lineage. As has been argued, there does not seem to be any place where we can point to the first humans being fully and perfectly constituted as such, and possessing ideally complete knowledge of God. Indeed, our own experience testifies that we do not have any sort of complete original knowledge of God. Each one of us must personally undertake his or her own journey of faith from a starting point in the world characterized by ambiguity. This is not to deny that there may be some basic ‘transcendental’ human awareness or instinct for the

\textsuperscript{159} Irenaeus, IV. XXXVII. 5. In Hick, 213.  
\textsuperscript{160} Irenaeus, IV. XXXIX. 1. In Hick, 214.  
\textsuperscript{161} Hick, 281.
Divine, but only to point out that the great diversity of understandings of God in our world are obviously not all consistent with one another, and that many people deny any divine existence whatsoever. If we were to have been endowed with complete knowledge of God and our rightful relation to Him, there would be no room for the journey of faith.

B. ‘Schleiermacherian’ Insights

The Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) proposed a theological anthropology which has much in common with Irenaean thought, though, as John Hick points out, he seems to have developed his ideas independently from those ideas found in Irenaeus’ writing.162

For Schleiermacher, the purpose of our developing world is the drive toward ‘God-consciousness,’ a consciousness manifested in humans.163 According to process theologian Margorie Hewitt Suchocki, for Schleiermacher, before the emergence of humans, created things participate in a state of unconscious interdependency with one another and of absolute dependency upon God. This state of creation is characterized by the striving of individual organisms for survival and self-propagation. The evolution of human beings marks the first point where creation becomes aware of itself, the first emergence of spirituality in the world. The human development of spirituality demands a turning from the natural self-centeredness of organic being toward a more all-inclusive interest. The evolution of spirituality brings with it an apprehension of the moral law, of God’s call to personal relationship. Humans must now have an outwardly directed intention, one that includes a concern for others and for the whole of creation.164

162 Hick, 219.
164 Suchocki, 32-7.
In the pre-spiritual, sensuous beginnings of existence, there is an unconscious interdependence among the beings in the world; as existence develops toward consciousness, it does so toward the end that this interdependence, and the further absolute dependence of all finite beings upon God, will become recognized. Once recognized, this state of dependence is to become the criterion for conscious action. ... The creation is to receive a coherence and cohesiveness with the advent of human spirituality, through which the creation overcomes fragmentation, and is unified through recognized interdependence and mutual absolute dependence.165

Human awareness of the contrast between the interdependency of all organic creation of which they are a part and its absolute dependence upon God, allows humanity to be a kind of link between creation and Creator. However, since humans share an organic, biological nature which developed in the context of self-interested evolution, there is a tension (much like Augustine’s concupiscence) between spiritual development and physical nature which sometimes results in sin, thought of as an arrestment of the God-consciousness.166 Humans do not have the strength to unify creation under their own power, and therefore Christ acts as the perfect link, the completion of creation both from within and without.167

Hick points out that for Schleiermacher, the original perfection of the pre-human and therefore preconscious organic creation lies in its adaptation for facilitating the emergence of the God-consciousness, of the type of creature which will be capable of personal relationship with the Creator.168 The pre-conscious evolutive world is then good in itself, since its function is specifically tailored for the emergence of spirit. However, when we allow organic, self-interested animal nature to interfere with our own spiritual

165 Suchocki, 33.
166 As mentioned earlier (footnote #52) some reductionist views (e.g. Darryl Domning) have attempted to derive the source of sin and evil completely from the genetic and animalian ‘heritage’ of humans, claiming that self-interest over against others is the source of all sin. Although it is a valid and helpful insight to point out the influence our evolutionary heritage certainly has upon us, this aspect alone does not capture the greater mystery of sin and human relationship to God. Sociobiology does, therefore, have something to contribute to understanding sin, but is certainly not the whole story. This point is argued by Stephen Duffy (mentioned in footnote #52).
167 Suchocki, 35.
168 Hick, 220.
development, we succumb to moral evil. Again, this is not to claim that we are not responsible for our sins, but only to point out that in Schleiermacher’s understanding, as in the Irenaean picture, sin is virtually inevitable. It cannot be logically inevitable, since this would imply a lack of freedom, but must certainly be expected in light of the gradual emergence of spirituality from organic creation and the original ‘infancy’ of each human person.

From these things we can see that human finitude must play an important part in our understanding of evil. Finitude itself, however, cannot be thought evil, since it provides the foundation for the self-creativity of the world. Whereas perfection for Augustine described the fully formed universe as God’s work of art, perfection from the ‘Irenaean’ standpoint lies in its incompleteness and openness to self-creativity and novelty. As Suchocki explains,

...incompletion is not negative; rather, it is a positive affirmation of one’s participation in creativity. The incompletion of humanity and all of creation is the opportunity for humanity, giving the possibility for each creature’s own creative contribution to the world. We can take this further and say that the world’s incompletion becomes the means for the world’s self-creativity. A true self-creativity becomes a radical thing now, and not quite like the freedom of classical thought. Whereas there freedom was the opportunity to maintain an already given nature, here incompletion and self-creativity provide the means to bring a nature into being.169

We can see in this quote that the notion of self-creativity, which Hick is mostly concerned with attributing to humans, is being extended to the universe as a whole. This otherness and incompleteness sets the stage for the possibility of creation’s otherness from and relationship with the Creator. John Haught points this out in his book, Deeper than Darwin:

The incompleteness of the cosmic project logically implies, therefore, that the universe and human existence have never, under any circumstances, been situated in a condition of ideal fullness and perfection. In an evolving cosmos, created being as such has not yet achieved the state of integrity. Moreover, this is nobody’s fault, including the Creator’s. The only kind of universe a loving and caring God could create, after all, is an unfinished one. For God’s love of creation to be actualized,

169 Suchocki, 37.
the beloved world must be truly “other” than God. And an instantaneously finished universe, one from which our present condition of historical becoming and existential ambiguity could be envisaged as a subsequent estrangement, would in principle have been only an emanation or appendage of deity and not something truly other than God. A world that is not clearly distinct from God could not be the recipient of divine love.¹⁷⁰

Suchocki claims that the abandonment of Platonic essences determining what the world will be allows for an important openness to novelty which can be found in Schleiermacher’s thought.¹⁷¹ The broadening of the notion of self-creativity to include the entire universe will prove useful upon further examination of evil within the Irenean system.

C. The Universe as a ‘Vale of Soulmaking’

In Hick’s view of theological anthropology, the universe exists as it does to facilitate creaturely self-creation, to facilitate the formation of character that allows for human beings to participate in personal relationship with their loving Creator. The universe is then seen as a “vale of soul-making.”¹⁷² If the world had an unlimited supply of resources, if there was no competition for survival, no risk in living, would this really be an environment conducive to character formation? For example, though poverty is a real evil which Christians must work to remove, the possibility for poverty is a necessary element in the universe. Although it causes much pain and suffering in its own right, it also makes room for charity and self-sacrifice as possible self-determining responses on the part of others. Learning to love others, to turn away from a self-centered existence toward an ‘other-regarding’ way of life, is a developmental process in which a person must choose, sometimes in the face of grave personal risk, to respond to God’s call to

¹⁷¹ Suchocki, 39.
¹⁷² Hick, 253.
love in their own self-determined way. Life must present us with concrete challenges and hardships which entail real consequences in order for character formation to mean anything. Hick, speaking of personal character formation, says,

It [endowment of personal character] cannot be performed by omnipotent power as such. For personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the uncompelled responses and willing co-operation of human individuals in their actions and reactions in the world in which God has placed them. . . . The value judgment that is implicitly being invoked here is that one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created ab initio in a state either of innocence or of virtue. In the former case, which is that of the actual moral achievements of mankind, the individual's goodness has within it the strength of temptations overcome, a stability based upon an accumulation of right choices, and the positive and responsible character that comes from the investment of costly personal effort.\textsuperscript{173}

The conditions of this universe are then thought by Hick to be particularly conducive to the development of personal character. God is not concerned, as we may tend to expect, in creating a hedonistic paradise in which humans may live, as if we were some unique sort of divine pets. Instead, he has blessed us with the infinitely more difficult inheritance of becoming His children. But parents rightly expect much of their children, recognizing that in personally facing trials and tribulations they will grow toward maturity. Indeed, the theme of people as 'children of God' is a recurrent one in the New Testament. Hick points out that the question is not,

Is this the kind of world that an all-powerful and infinitely loving being would create as an environment for his human pets? or, Is the architecture of the world the most pleasant and convenient possible? The question that we have to ask is rather, Is this the kind of world that God might make as an environment in which moral beings may be fashioned, through their own free insights and responses, into 'children of God'? . . . For if our general conception of God's purpose is correct the world is not intended to be a paradise, but rather the scene of a history in which human personality may be formed towards the pattern of Christ.\textsuperscript{174}

In light of the Irenaean theodicy, the way in which nature works, our metaphysical limitations, and the possibility of moral evil are all necessary features of our

\textsuperscript{173} Hick, 255-6.
\textsuperscript{174} Hick, 257-8.
environment. Hick therefore speaks of natural and metaphysical evils as being
‘instrumental’ evils that are ultimately intended by God as facilitating the purpose of the
universe as a ‘vale of soul-making,’ and claims that this was also Schleiermacher’s
view. It must be emphasized that this view does not, paradoxically, make sin good.
Only the possibility for sin, and the metaphysical and natural conditions of the universe
which may in some cases seem evil to us, are good in view of God’s ultimate purpose.

D. Difficulties with the Irenaean System

We have seen that in this new picture of the world, sin (moral evil) can be thought
of in terms of growing pains, culpable but understandable mistakes made by children
journeying toward maturity. We have also seen that metaphysical evil, or finitude, is
necessary to the ‘otherness’ of creation. In the Irenaean system, the incompleteness of
creation and the conditions which allow for the existence of natural evil are necessary to
provide for the self creativity of human beings, necessary to the soul-making process.

But we must now ask, is this in fact the case? Couldn’t we still expect the world
to contain much less natural evil than it in fact does and still serve the soul-making
purpose? One may concede that limited resources and the consequences which follow, as
well as pain, sickness, and some dangers presented by the natural world, are necessary
conditions for character development, while nevertheless calling into question how some
of the more extreme evils and sufferings in the world can be thought to benefit the soul-
making process. While some amount of suffering may be seen as instructive or character
forming, what about disasters as extreme as the Lisbon earthquake, in which anywhere
between 60,000 and 100,000 people are estimated to have lost their lives? Pain that

175 Hick, 232.
serves to protect the body from further and more serious harm is one thing, but what about the needless pain and suffering that can result from physiological malfunction? It may be a very good thing that humans come in all different shapes and sizes, with a great diversity of talents and interests. But what about those who are born with radical genetic disorders, children who are born with incredibly painful and debilitating diseases? Do these contribute anything to character formation? This difficult issue is raised by David Hume, when he points out that the various natural functions of the world often exceed “those bounds in which their utility consists.” These more extreme forms of evil constitute the biggest challenges to the ‘soul-making’ theodicy, as Hick points out in speaking of ‘dysteleological’ suffering:

Are not man’s challenges so severe as to be self-defeating when considered as soul-making influences? Man must (let us suppose) cultivate the soil so as to win his bread by the sweat of his brow; but need there be the gigantic famines, for example in China, from which millions have so miserably perished? Man must (let us suppose) face the harsh bodily consequences of over-indulgence; but need there also be such fearful diseases as typhoid, polio, cancer, angina? These reach far beyond any constructive function of character training. Their effect seems to be sheerly dysteleological and destructive... when such things happen we can see no gain to the soul, whether of the victim or of others, but on the contrary only a ruthlessly destructive process which is utterly inimical to human values.

It may in fact be true that even in these very extreme instances, some great goods can in fact arise. But it is still quite questionable as to whether even these instances merit such seemingly evil events. Thus the major objection to the Irenaean theodicy has been that the particular distribution and quantity of evils in the world in no way fits neatly into the ‘vale of soul-making’ idea.

Another challenge to the Irenaean theodicy can be seen in the question of animal pain. Though we cannot know the extent to which animals experience suffering, it at least

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177 Hick, 330.
seems evident that they are capable of feeling significant pain. But animals are not morally conscious beings, and therefore cannot benefit from the character building environment which is important for the explanation for evil employed by the advocates of the Irenaean theodicy. Couldn’t God have at least allowed a more pleasant existence for animals, as divine pets, even if this would not work for His children? The general complaint is, “if the universe is intended as a vale of soul-making, why its constitution not a little smoother around the edges?” Why has creation taken such a vast amount of time to reach its present state, and why such a messy and wasteful evolutionary process in order to make the ‘God-Consciousness’ a reality?

Darryl Domning, in his article “Evolution, Evil, and Original Sin”178 explains the accepted scientific view that we can account for disease and natural evils as normal parts way in which nature has always functioned. Domning rightly explains that entropy is a potent force in the world, and that complex structures simply tend to break down—this is simply the nature of things. Teilhard too, tends to focus on the way that matter does in fact tend to behave, rather than asking why it behaves in such a way. But this is the very question our theodicy must ask. Our question is, “Could the nature of things have been different?” If not, then it seems that God’s power is limited. If so, then why did He not make it easier on us? The questions of dysteleological and animal suffering therefore remain two major challenges to the Irenaean type theodicy. A final concern in relation to the Irenaean theodicy has to do with its seemingly excessive anthropocentric outlook. In a time when our view of the cosmos has so vastly expanded and the possibility of intelligent life existing elsewhere in the universe seems quite possible, making human moral life the specific focus of Divine concern may seem irresponsible.

178 See citation on p 42.
E. Self-Creating Universe: Process Contributions

I mentioned that there is in the broadening of the notion of self-creativity (see Suchocki’s quote above; p 42-3) to encompass the whole of creation—rather than humans alone—an idea that may be helpful in addressing the problems with the Irenaean theodicy. John Hick’s Irenaean solution is largely theological. True evil, for Hick, seems only to consist in the deliberate and free creaturely rejection of God’s purpose, the refusal to attain to our rightful moral nature. Metaphysical and natural evil, on the other hand, are ultimately intended by God because they provide the necessary environment for soul development. In this case, they are not evil, in the same sense of the word, as is moral evil. Evil, for Hick, is not a metaphysical ‘thing’ which has an existence of its own, nor is it privative. Instead it describes a mode of relationship between a moral being and God. This seems to me to be a useful way of thinking about evil. However, in suggesting this new viewpoint, our argument against the Augustinian-type theodicy has focused for the most part on the Platonic underpinnings of Augustine’s theodicy, with its characteristic aesthetic understanding of goodness and privative conception of evil. In addition, our evolutive view of the natural world, the necessary incompleteness of the world which provides the possibility for self-creativity, and the universe’s openness to novelty all seem to conflict with the eternal Platonic essences which provide a fixed pattern for the actual world. Therefore a rejection of the Augustinian-type theodicy is also in many ways a rejection of its Platonic metaphysical foundation. I suggest that the Irenaean theodicy demands a new metaphysical underpinning, and will here suggest a possible candidate.

Animal pain and dysteleological suffering are significant problems if we return to a view of God’s creative action in which He is exactly specifying every detail of the
universe. A more intelligible view may be one in which God is seen to be 'beckoning' creation into existence rather than driving it *a retro*, 'persuading' rather than forcing it into relationship with Him. Instead of limiting self-creativity to humans, this view extends it to the entire universe. But how can the universe that we supposedly know through modern science, composed of apparently insentient matter which behaves according to the impersonal laws of physics, 'know' that it is being persuaded or respond to God's 'beckoning?' Since Descartes, the dichotomy of matter and mind has led us to see the two as absolutely and qualitatively different substances, mind setting humans apart from the rest of the material world and providing for the possibility of knowing God. While any explanation of quantum mechanics is beyond my reach, the popular view today still seems to include some notion that molecules and atoms (leptons, quarks, whatever) are the primary components of things, behaving according to impersonal natural laws and combining in complex ways to produce life. However, the whole orientation of Process thought is against viewing the world as being composed of irreducible 'things' which behave according to fixed natural laws. The dichotomy between matter and spirit seems very questionable today, and I suggest that a Process metaphysic may eliminate the need for drawing hard and fast lines between the two, thus making possible a view in which all of creation may be capable of some type of 'response' to the Creator.

It has been known since Aristotle that when you get right down to it, it is very difficult to say just *what* matter and spirit are. The modern tendency is to ask, "What are they made of?" However, this question was not a focus for Aristotle, as he viewed matter as (along with form) one of the principles of being. According to Charles Hartshorne,
‘matter’ has traditionally been the term given to that part of a thing which survives through changes in form. For Aristotle, matter could only be understood analogically. He explains that the clay which makes up a statue is the ‘matter,’ while the general shape and appearance of the statue is its ‘form.’ But then we must ask, what is clay? If further investigation reveals clay to be made up of atoms, then the clay itself (which was matter relative to the statue) is now form, while the atoms are matter. But we must once again ask, what is an atom? The search for primary and irreducible units of matter therefore seems to be a futile one, for we find ourselves caught in an endless process of abstraction from form. Aristotle therefore posited a formless ‘prime matter,’ which isn’t really even a thing, but that must logically be a principle of being.\textsuperscript{179} The inability to find a fundamental material constituent of the world is not peculiar to the ancient Greeks. While modern physics has been able to discover certain mathematical relationships which persist through particular changes, it can find no ultimate ‘stuff.’

Hartshorne claims that traditionally, matter has also been thought of as potential form rather than actual form. Observing that matter was also held to be insentient, Hartshorne says,

\begin{quote}
In combination with the first point [that prime matter is potential form], the second [that matter is insentient] makes sense only on the supposition that mind as such is purely actual, so that something else is needed to constitute potentiality. To some of us this seems a very odd idea of mind, with its sense of past and future, the former as already definite and beyond influence, the latter as in principle partly indeterminate but determinable and even now in process of being further determined. What is potentiality but this determinable indeterminacy of the future? What is mind apart from the process of experiencing the already determined past and evaluating and deciding options for the future? Mind is activity, thinking, feeling, remembering, planning, deciding—and this activity is in principle both actuality and possibility. Does it really help to illuminate experiencing to suppose bits of mere stuff, or mere somethings, persisting through it?\textsuperscript{180}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{180} Hartshorne, 36-7.
Hartshorne goes on to explain that matter was originally thought to be insentient by observing the inertness of rocks and ‘inanimate’ objects. However, he says that Leibniz ‘brilliantly explained’ the apparent insentience of these types of things on the basis that “they were aggregates of invisibly minute entities to which the criteria for absolute insentience do not apply.”\footnote{Hartshorne, 37.} The criteria for insentience, for Leibniz, were inertness and disunity, therefore aggregates are insentient, and unities (he called these ‘monads’) are sentient. In process thought these basic ‘unities’ are called ‘events’ or ‘actual entities,’ and they are thought to be the primary metaphysical constituents of reality. Instead of holding bits of solid, extended, ‘stuff’ to be fundamental, the sentient ‘entity’ takes precedence in Process philosophy. On this view, the distinction between inanimate matter on the one hand, and mind or soul on the other, is misleading. Hartshorne explains that the process answer to what persists through change is “the past itself.”\footnote{Hartshorne, 38.} Whereas physical and extended matter traditionally served as the place holder to persist through changes in form, in Process thought this place holder is a temporal continuity, or memory, between the determined past of a ‘concrescing’ event and its indeterminate future. ‘Concresence’ refers to the process whereby an entity ‘chooses’ to become in a certain way. Each entity is influenced and partially determined by its past activity, but is always free to actualize itself in a new way based on a valuing of past experience and of future possibilities.

The human person is a unity, and is thus one entity. But entities are also the primary constituents of all existence, even of ‘insentient’ matter. While the ‘lower grade’ entities which compose matter do not have consciousness or mind in the same way that
humans do, for Process philosophers they are still sentient insofar as they have
‘perception,’ they are still subjects rather than objects. As Hartshorne says,

The past as still grasped (mostly unconsciously, or without introspective awareness) in the present is the ‘stuff’ we have from the past. Perception is impersonal ‘memory’ (in the broad sense—in intuition of past processes); and what we ordinarily call the word is personal, giving us our own past human experiences. Thus mind as both sense of the past and intending, partly deciding the future covers all the functions of matter. \(^{183}\)

A detailed explanation of the process metaphysic is far beyond the scope of this paper, but I suggest that the main advantage of process thought lies in its elimination of the troublesome ‘inanimate matter-animate mental substance’ dichotomy, and especially its provision for viewing all of creation—physical ‘inanimate’ world included—as having some degree of subjectivity, and thus as somehow able to self-create in participation with its Creator. It is true that substituting ‘event,’ ‘occasion,’ or ‘entity’ for Aristotle’s prime matter does not really help in understanding what matter ultimately is. The question of how solid, extended everyday objects in the world around us can be constituted by things which are not themselves solid or extended admittedly remains a mystery. I only wish to point out the value in viewing everything that exists, the whole of creation, as being in some sense a subject to which God has granted autonomy in order that it might exist in real relation with Him.

If creation as a whole, responding to God’s metaphoric ‘call,’ ‘persuasion,’ or ‘beckoning,’ is somehow responsible for its own self creation, it becomes easier to understand its roughness around the edges. Life would have emerged on earth struggling for a foothold on the sheer face of non-being, striving to become. The wastefulness of evolution, the great span of time between the origin of the universe and the emergence of life would then be more intelligible as the growing pains of an infant or adolescent

\(^{183}\) Hartshorne, 38-9.
cosmos. This view avoids the difficulty of having to consider dysteleological suffering and animal pain as having been specifically created by God in order to provide for the soul-making process. Instead, these things happen as a result of the radical freedom with which God ‘condemns’ them. This is not to say that God’s role within creation is passive, quite the contrary, God is ever-present to creation, gently urging it along in its ‘state of journeying.’ Neither does this view negate what has been said about the universe as ideally suited for the purpose of soul-making.

John Haught suggests that God specifically determined certain aspects of the universe such as the conditions for contingency, novelty, and historicity, so as to allow for its inherently narrative character.\textsuperscript{184} Haught says,

Today science can no longer take for granted that the universe \textit{had} to be so wide open to story and hence to life’s evolution. Other kinds of universes, non-narrative varieties powerless to sponsor evolutionary adventures, are now conceivable from the point of view of physics. . . . For all we know, the physics of the universe may easily have been such as to disallow the kind of narrative performance that evolution requires. An alternative physics might have given rise conceivably to a cosmos too tightly bound by the rigidity of lawful necessity, or one too peppered with contingency, or one whose temporal span was too abridged, to carry a story. What is certain is that in the absence of the exquisite blend of physical features that subtends our actual universe, evolution and the dramatic emergence of life and human history could never have occurred.\textsuperscript{185}

Haught beautifully describes this ‘narrative cosmological principle’ in a kind of biblical language as the ‘Promise’ of creation,\textsuperscript{186} and compares the fixed conditions of this universe which allow for its narrative character to foundational grammatical rules in language. Just as specific letters and the particular rules for their combination and usage provide for the possibility for words and sentences, so the conditions of our universe allow for the whole drama of life. The fixing of these conditions does not, however,
disallow for the freedom and autonomy of creation to self-create, on the contrary, they provide the environment which makes this self-creation possible.

Another important process insight is its metaphysical contribution in viewing how God can be the all-powerful, self-sufficient, transcendent, omnipotent God of orthodox Christianity, and still participate so intimately in relationship with creation. According to Hartshorne, Aristotle, along with the majority of western thinkers who came after Him, interpreted the immutable perfection of God to mean that there could be no change in God. Change was thought to be either increase or decrease in value, neither of which could be acceptably attributed to God since an increase would imply an original lack of perfection, and any decrease would be a defect. This means that there can be no potentiality in God, He must be *actus purus*. Since there can be no contingency in God, the perpetual flux which is characteristic of the universe cannot in any way qualify God.

The relationship between God and the world is necessarily a one way relationship, with the world being related to God, but not God to the world.

But according to Aristotle, to know something means to sustain a relationship with the known, and since there can be no contingency in God, God cannot know contingent things and therefore cannot know the world. If one wishes to maintain that there can be no contingency in God, but yet desires to show that He can know the world, the other path to take is that followed by Spinoza. In this case, since God’s knowledge is eternal and immutable, everything in the world becomes necessary—there can be no change—and thus Spinoza finds himself in absurdity. The only other option to take, the position advocated by Hartshorne and process thinkers, is to admit an aspect of
contingency in God. This is not to say that God is not necessary and eternal, but only to say that there may be some contingency in the Divine.\textsuperscript{187}

In speaking of knowing, Aristotle was assuming that the knower conforms to the known. Indeed, in all ordinary cases this seems to be the case, for by knowing something I do not thereby bring it into existence. This is why Aristotle claimed that the world must be co-eternal with God, for in the event that the world did not exist, God would have knowledge of something without there being anything to have knowledge of, which is absurd. According to Hartshorne, St. Thomas Aquinas departed from Aristotle’s view on this point. For God, as Creator, the relation between the knower and known must be the opposite. Thus the world depends on God’s knowledge of it, and not God’s knowledge on the world.\textsuperscript{188} In this sense of knowing, knowledge is not a passive, receptive process, but instead has a causal relationship to the known.

In Christianity however, as we have emphasized, the notion of creaturely freedom and self-creation is a central tenet which allows for a genuine relationship between God and creation, and thus St. Thomas saw that God’s causal knowing of the world cannot be completely deterministic of all its occurrences The basic response to this problem in Christianity has been to maintain that God does have perfect knowledge of the past, present, and future—while at the same time holding that creatures do freely determine their own courses of action. God only foresees these actions because He is outside of time.\textsuperscript{189} This seems to me to be an awkward position to hold. It does allow for God’s omniprescience and complete self sufficiency while maintaining creaturely

\textsuperscript{187} Hartshorne, 6-16.
\textsuperscript{188} Hartshorne, 8.
freedom. However, it does this by holding that God’s knowledge is at once the cause of everything in the world, while contradictorily insisting that creatures possess real freedom. This is contradictory because, as I have argued, possessing authentic freedom entails the ability to self-create, and thus to ‘cause’ one’s own character. But how can we determine our own character if God has already causally ‘known’ it? This seems to me to be a return to the idea of God having Platonic-like essences or ideas in His mind and then immediately actualizing them. I do not see how St. Thomas’s view of God causally knowing every aspect of the world can be made consistent with the possibility for the novel self-creation of a universe which exists in true autonomous relationship with him.

This brings us to an important disagreement between process theology and Christianity. Process theologians hold that God has perfect knowledge of absolutely everything there is to be known. However, Hartshorne rejects the traditional Christian suggestion that human decisions are “known not in advance, but eternally, out of time altogether.” He says:

Some of us think that the solution is only apparent, for if the decisions do not exist in advance, a fortiori they do not exist eternally or out of time. The idea of events spread out for divine contemplation in a finished series, some future to us, is a form of the ‘spatializing of time’ that Bergson has taught some of us to reject.  

The obvious difficulty here lies in how to deal with the many prophecies found in Scripture, prophecies given by Old Testament figures and by Jesus Himself. It is impossible to dismiss these and remain faithful to the core of Christian belief. It may be that God, in perfectly knowing everything there is to know at each present moment, in seeing the state of all the interrelated factors that go into the happenings in the world, makes ‘very accurate predictions,’ so that this may be a way of understanding His

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190 Hartshorne, 13.
prescience. However, it must be admitted that this is a difficult issue which will require further thought and study, and which will remain veiled in a certain amount of mystery.

Since process theologians hold that there is contingency in God, they also believe that God too has new experiences, and thus that events in the world make a contingent difference to Him. If the goings on in the world actually matter to God, then it becomes easier to understand the value in our actions, decisions, and responses (good or bad) to Him. I do not mean to suggest that worldly occurrences can increase or decrease God’s goodness and perfection, or ‘harm’ Him, but only that God values them according to their particular character. The more beings which respond in love to God, the more valuable and beautiful the response of His creation. In this way, God may be said to risk something in creation, in the sense that we are free either to respond in love to Him or not. This does not imply any defect in God, for it is false to assume that any change in God’s knowledge either implies a change for the worst or that He was not already perfect. Traditionally the happenings in the world could not be thought to contribute anything to God, since he was already perfect, self-sufficient, and in need of nothing. But Hartshorne says,

...if we pass from ethically inferior to ethically superior modes of volition, we do not thereby enoble deity, who cannot be ignoble. But we present God with a more beautiful creation than He enjoyed before.\textsuperscript{191}

In process thought, a human being is made up of a ‘society of entities or events.’ In humans, this society combines to produce a unified consciousness and awareness of identity through time, which can be thought of as a soul.\textsuperscript{192} For the human person, every particular choice or decision is actualized based on a balancing of past ‘prehended,’ or

\textsuperscript{191} Hartshorne, 27.
valued experiences in a particular way with the feeling or anticipation of the infinite number of possibilities open to it at the moment. These possibilities are provided by God, and the value (from God’s perspective) of the individual’s chosen course of action is based on two factors: first, on the ‘intensity’ of the freely chosen experience, and secondly on the harmony which that particular actualization exhibits within the larger context of the individual’s life as a whole. A fundamental tenet in process thought is that every experience is ‘good’ or valuable in itself. However, since every positive choice is itself exclusive of an infinite number of other possible courses of action that could have been alternatively chosen, there are always many values which are not realized.\footnote{Hartshorne, 32.} This necessary consequence of finitude, in process philosophy, is the source of evil. Particular courses of action freely chosen by human beings are good insofar as they actualize the highest intensity of experience possible, while maintaining a balanced harmony between and consonancy with the totality of actual choices which have gone into constituting the identity of the individual. Conversely, chosen courses of action are evil in so far as they are characterized by ‘triviality,’ and ‘discord.’\footnote{For a detailed explanation of the process theory of evil, see Suchcki, 61-80; See also: John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, 69-75.}

The foregoing provides an occasion to point out two important contributions and three criticisms of process thought.\footnote{I would also like to add that process thought may provide a third major contribution. Stephen Duffy, in The Graceful Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992) 169-95, in analyzing Eulalio Baltazar’s process theology, suggests that process thought may be helpful in understanding the immanence and gratuity of grace. Process thought allows for a situation in which the human is ontologically oriented toward the divine, but is dependent for transcendence upon the gratuity of God’s relationship with him or her. However, Duffy points out that Baltazar in some cases seems to be attacking a scholastic straw man in criticizing the old metaphysics of grace, and that his theology is a ‘brew of insights from process thought, existentialism, idealism, personalism, and even Scholasticism (188).’ Duffy also points out that many of the ideas Baltazar suggests have already been seen in theologians such as Rahner, von Balthasar, Schillebeeckx, and others. Duffy concludes in asserting that process thought provides some valuable insights and should be pursued, but requires much more development.} First, the insight that finitude is an important
characteristic of human existence and decision making and is therefore implicated in the existence of evil and sin is, I believe, a good one. Second and most importantly, in process thinking, human beings literally are what they do. Process theology shares the existentialist position that existence precedes essence. There is no predetermined, Platonic essence determining the destiny of a human person—process and existentialist thinking are both hostile to any sort of predestination. We are free to self-create, to determine our own identity and essential character through making decisions in response to God’s loving persuasion.

F. Criticism of the Process System

In process theology, ‘enjoyment’ is used to describe a creature’s experience of a particular event. ‘Enjoyment’ does not necessarily have the same positive connotation that accompanies the common use of the word, as it only describes the creature’s bare experience of an event in itself. Thus a creature can be said to ‘enjoy’ suffering, insofar as it experiences and values that experience in its own particular way. All enjoyment of experience, for process theologians, is intrinsically good and valuable in itself. Griffin says:

Process theology sees God’s fundamental aim to be the promotion of the creatures’ own enjoyment. God’s creative influence upon them is loving, because it aims at promoting that which the creatures experience as intrinsically good. . . . The promotion of enjoyment is God’s primary concern throughout the whole process of creative evolution. The contrary doctrine, which sees God’s primary concern to be the development of moral attitudes, is in the uncomfortable position of maintaining that over 99 percent of the history of our planet was spent in merely preparing the way for beings who are capable of the only kind of experience that really interests God.

Thus Griffin’s claim is that, while the moral response of human beings is valuable, it is subordinated to the ultimate value of ‘enjoyment.’ First of all, it should be pointed out

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196 See for example John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, 80-6.
197 Cobb and Griffin, 56.
that the ‘vale of soul-making’ theory does not deny that ‘enjoyment’ or experience in
general is really valuable to God. As has been argued, the whole history of the universe’s
self-creation, including the emergence of simple life forms, animals, and human, is
intrinsically valuable. It also leaves open the very real possibility that life may exist
elsewhere in the cosmos, and is therefore not exclusively anthropocentric. The Irenaean
position is that what God most values is the emergence of the ‘God-consciousness,’ of
beings which are capable of participating in loving personal relationship with Him.

One of the major differences which Christianity must take with process thought is
in rejecting the dualism which is part of the process system. As opposed to the Christian
doctrine of creation ex nihilo, Griffin explains,

> Process theology affirms instead a doctrine of creation out of chaos. . . . A state of absolute chaos
> would be one in which there is nothing but very low-grade actual occasions happening at random,
> i.e., without being ordered into enduring individuals. 198

The power of the Process God is confined to persuading these ‘low grade actual
occasions’ into ordered and coherent existence. But as we have seen, Christians hold that
all existence whatever comes from God. There can be no pre-existing entities,
substances, things, or conditions (other than logical constraints) to impose themselves on
the activity of an omnipotent God. While I am advocating, within the general Irenaean
worldview, that God ‘persuades’ or ‘beckons’ the universe into existence rather than
forcing it into a particular mold, I hold this not on the basis of a less-than-omnipotent
deity, but on the basis of God’s self-limitation for the purpose of allowing creaturely self-
creation. Despite this difference, I can see no obvious reason why the process system as a
whole depends on this dualistic view of the universe, and I therefore think that the
process contributions can be accepted while rejecting the dualistic aspect.

198 Cobb and Griffin, 65.
Besides this external dualism, Hick also criticizes process thought for being internally dualistic,\textsuperscript{199} by which he means that Process theologians hold that the consequences of finitude itself, exclusion of un-actualized possibilities, are irredeemably evil. In order for a finite creation to exist, there must be exclusion of possibilities, and therefore as long as a finite creation exists, evil will exist along with it. Hick labels this irredeemable type of evil ‘surd evil,’ by which he means that it is a characteristic of the nature of things which must exist, and is therefore a limit on God’s power. However, I do not see how this is the case. First of all, we may question whether or not the process definition of evil is valid in the first place. But even if it is, the evil of finitude is a \textit{logical} necessity. As Hartshorne points out, there is a logical contradiction between equally positive predicates, thus “red here now” contradicts “green here now.”\textsuperscript{200} But Hick along with orthodox Christianity would never hold that it is a limitation on God’s power to say that He cannot do the logically impossible. As C.S. Lewis says, the reason that God cannot do the logically impossible is “not because God’s power meets any obstacle,” but simply that “nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.”\textsuperscript{201} Therefore I do not think Hick’s criticism is valid.

A final aspect of process theology that must be rejected is its holding God and the world to be co-eternal. Although it would be sufficient to admit both an eternal and contingent aspect in God, while holding the world to be wholly contingent, Hartshorne wishes to go further. He claims that as long as creation has existed, the world must have also existed:

\textsuperscript{199} Hick, 30.
\textsuperscript{200} Hartshorne, 32.
\textsuperscript{201} Lewis, 18.
For, granted that everything particular or specific in the world might have been different, it does not by any logical rule follow necessarily that there might have been no world at all, i.e., that God might have refrained from creating, or might have had no effects. It is one thing for an agent to have freedom to do this or to do that instead; it is another for the agent to have freedom to do nothing. What is the value of the alleged freedom not to act? Is not any world better than none? If so, there is no praise of God in the assertion that he was capable of doing the worst possible thing, i.e., letting his creative power lie completely idle.²⁰²

Hartshorne is here asserting that it is self-evidently ‘better’ to create than not to create. But this seems to me to be a return to the Platonic conception of goodness which I have argued against, where God’s very freedom is limited by His very goodness. We must maintain, with orthodox Christianity, that God created in perfect freedom, and that His ultimate reason for creating will remain shrouded in mystery.

G. Conclusion

Change and stability have been one of the most popular topics of human concern from the very beginning of philosophy. The perfect and unchanging heavenly bodies of the medieval cosmography, the precise orderliness of the cosmos, the idea of an absolutely immutable Divinity, and God’s immediate and perfect creation of the universe and its inhabitants, all testify to the human attempt to attain happiness and permanence through whatever is consistent, complete, lasting, reliable, true, and good. Association with eternal truth and goodness—whether achieved through contemplation of the Platonic forms, faith in God, or through some other perceived source of ‘salvation’—seems to have been and to continue to be the aim of wise people.

At some level we all seem to share an acute awareness of our limitedness. This feeling of contingency and dependence, the apprehension that we ourselves are in the end ‘not enough for ourselves,’ runs deep, and from this awareness comes our desire for the Infinite. As Christians, we hold that God, as the source of all that is, possesses the highest

²⁰² Hartshorne, 17.
degree of every conceivable good quality and power. St. Augustine, in thinking about the problem of evil and developing what would continue to serve as the orthodox Christian explanation for evil over 1500 years after his death, was strongly influenced by that form of Greek philosophy which found expression in the thought of Plotinus. He therefore tended to emphasize the aesthetic beauty and perfection of God’s creation, God’s unqualified self-sufficiency, omniprescence, omnipotence, and innocence.

Undoubtedly these insights into the nature of God are good and true so far as they go, but always implicit in our use of these terms is the recognition that we are not exactly sure what they mean when attributed to the infinity of God. What, for example, do we mean in saying that God is innocent? For it seems that God’s absolute innocence—in the sense that Augustine tried to exempt Him from all responsibility for evil—ultimately comes into conflict with His omnipotence, that He is the source of everything that exists, including evil. Perhaps this provides a vivid example of the distinction between philosophy in general and Christianity as the ‘true philosophy.’ For it is not until God’s self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ that we can come to understand God’s goodness more in light of His loving relationship with creation than in terms of his utter transcendence, self-sufficiency, and perfection.

The Irenaean-type worldview does happily confess the aesthetic beauty of God’s creation, but insists that God’s goodness must ultimately be understood in that He is a God who values personal relationship with creation above all else. This means that the universe must provide the requisite conditions for the emergence of beings which can participate in this relationship with God. The broadening of the notion of self-creativity to include that of creation as a whole allows for an understanding of the universe as a ‘vale
of soul-making' while avoiding unnecessary anthropocentricity, making the problem of
dysteleological suffering more understandable, and accounting for the virtually
inconceivable size and age of the universe and the problem of animal pain.

The Irenaean worldview allows for our theodicy to be consonant with what we
have been taught by scientific advances and the other areas of growing human
knowledge. Although in the Irenaean system, sin must be thought to be inevitable in an
important sense (though obviously not in the logical sense), it in no way exempts us from
responsibility for our sins. Sin in the Irenaean system does not lose its seriousness, as we
are accountable for the way in which we choose to respond to God. If the notion of self-
creation is understood to be central in Christianity, then we can rid ourselves of an
unnecessary prejudice against contingency and mutability. Instead we can embrace both
as providing the possibility for novelty and creativity in the universe, and therefore as
making possible our self-creative response to the persuasive love of our God.
Bibliography


Additional Un-cited Research


