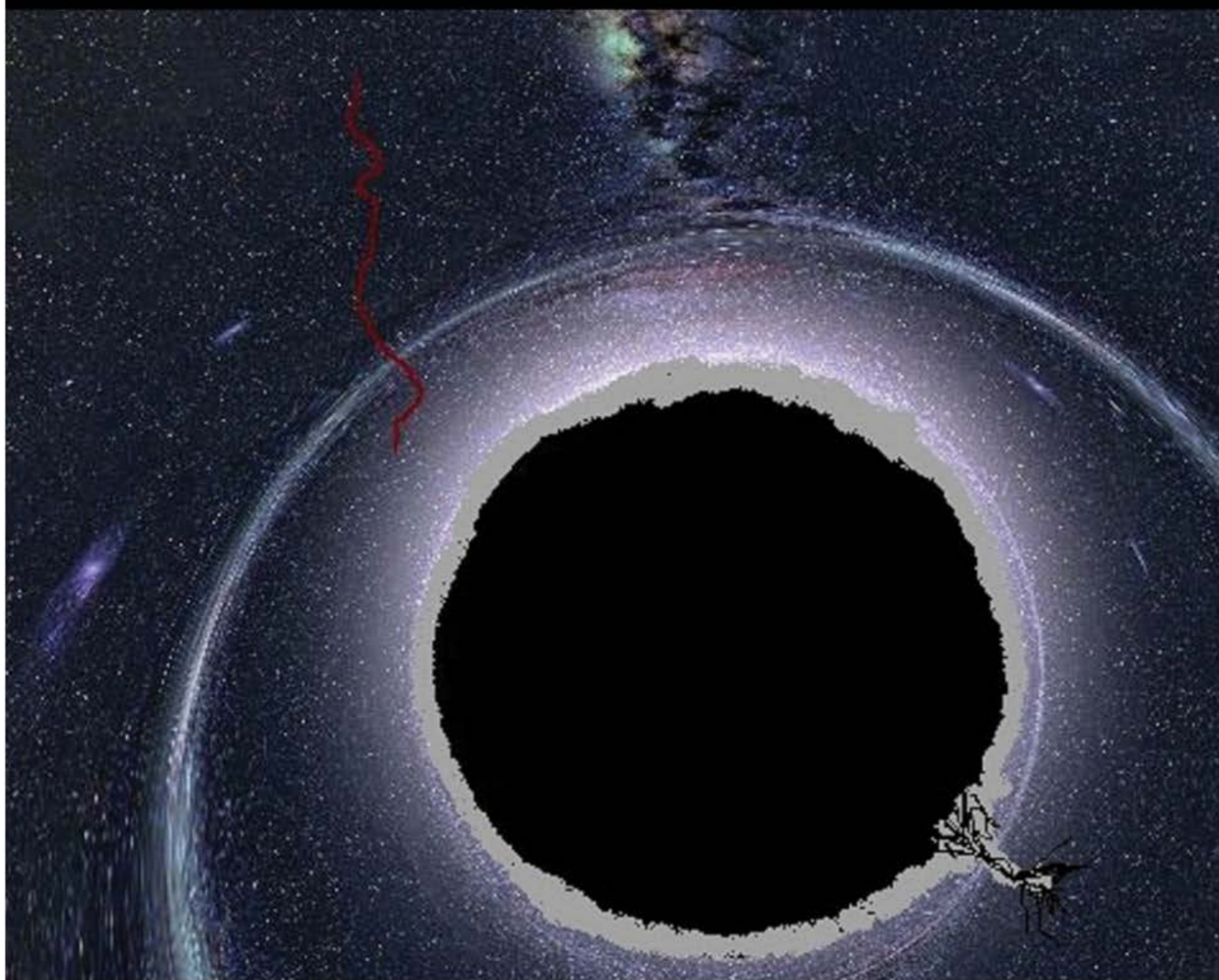


# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

NEW PHILOSOPHICAL DIRECTIONS



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## SEVEN

# What the Hell Is God Up To?

*God's Evils and the Theodicies Holding God Responsible*

*John R. Shook*

Atheism has intelligently designed plenty of ways to raise the problem of evil. Yet religions really aren't so vulnerable, since they typically acknowledge how being human brings a difficult life of struggle, suffering, and death. This harsh yet realistic attitude about this life sparks the imagination about a next life and opportunities to escape evils forever. Religions hold out hope for the better, and the eternal good, in the face of horrible tragedy and inevitable destruction. Typical religious people can't understand why atheists prattle on about suffering and tragedy. Surely religion proves its worth for all people here, since everyone must suffer evils in their lives. The more atheists talk about evil, the more religious people are glad to be religious and not atheists.

Theologies defending theism, not religious believers, are the proper target for atheist criticism on the matter of God and the eternal good. As the intellectual superstructures explaining and justifying core theistic convictions, theologies make propositional claims about divine matters, plans, and deeds. Atheism must pay due respect to theology's systematic tasks before imagining that it knows what it is talking about. Attending to theology is more the job of atheology than atheism itself. Atheism disbelieves the gods; reasonably justifying that disbelief is the task of atheology, and it is atheology which inspects theology's work for flaws and fallacies. When a theology tries to explain God's ways to humanity, the type of atheology called 'moral atheology' is ready to scrutinize those explanations and demand that morality be upheld. Letting "theodicy"

refer to theological attempts to maintain such theistic explanations in the face of evident injustices and evils,<sup>1</sup> it is therefore moral atheology's responsibility to scrutinize theodicies for their evils.

Looking closely at these theodicies, moral atheology can determine that they decisively convict God of participation in evil, no matter what God is or does. Moral atheology need only point out, as this chapter does, how theodicy accomplishes what atheism itself could never do: show why God is essentially and culpably connected with cosmically supernatural evil. Moral atheology therefore judges what any ethical person should conclude: belief in God should be abandoned.

### KNOW YOUR EVILS

Atheology's confirmation of theodicy's damning verdict against God is well illustrated by theodicy's efforts to deal with Hell. The destination of Hell hardly exhausts the problem of evil, of course. Only some theodicies are designed to deal with Hell, depending on broader theological agendas. Many religions have theologies lacking hellish designs. Some theisms never took perdition (eternal tormented damnation) seriously, because they are basically polytheistic, or they prefer reincarnation, or their monotheistic deity doesn't decide afterlife destinations, or perhaps because their monotheistic deity only utilizes temporary torment. Atheology must deal with those theologies separately. Still, theodicies dealing with Hell illustrate the central problems for any theodicy, and moral atheology's criticisms of hellish theodicies can be generalized to all theodicies.

Theisms teaching that God made Hell and uses Hell for divine purposes can hardly deny a relationship between God and Hell. Given that close relationship, it is impossible to say that this hellish matter is accidental or out of God's hands. Using Hell as the illustrative example, both theodicy and atheology can ask, Are there some kinds of true evils with which God must be intrinsically connected, and if so, does that connection make God essentially responsible for evil?

For any alleged evil, it must be first asked if it is a genuine evil, or only an apparent evil. Hell, no less than any other putative evil, must be inspected first. Is Hell a true evil? We need to apply some common sense tests.

Most evils can be thoughtfully handled and rightly classified by wise philosophy and clever theodicy. Many evils that humans personally suffer may not be all that bad from a 'big picture' perspective, and many evils that we observe around us may be aspects of greater goods, on the whole. Scale and situation mustn't be forgotten; context matters. Naturalistic philosophies have long counseled against anxiety over the tragedies that really make life as a whole more of a comedy, if one could acquire

some wisdom and practice a little stoicism. (It is said among the fools and wits that comedy is simply tragedy plus time.) Theodicies basically advise the same counsels about due perspective to religious people without having to talk specifics concerning God. If there is a deity, as theism claims, it may be the case that what we label as “evils” are actually just inconvenient events and privations, which must inevitably happen to frail yet proud creatures like ourselves. Theism has no problem telling us that we vainly expect too much from life. Naturalism’s wisdom sends the same message: only seek what is good for your own nature, not extravagances and excesses, to which you have no right. One’s evils of privation are one’s own fault, as unjust demands go unmet. The world isn’t failing to give you your due measure, if you’d empty your head of vanities. As for the world, it cannot be what we’d wish it to be. Other sorts of evils are evil from any perspective and really do deny us what would be naturally good for us, but in some sense they are necessary for the world. Theism prefers creationism to account for cosmic structure, but naturalism’s cosmology ends up making the same point without a divine designer: You temporarily enjoy a habitable part of the universe while most of it is uninhabitable and dangerous, and these two sides to the cosmos must come as a balanced package or not at all. So far, naturalistic philosophy and stern theodicy agree.

These three kinds of “evils,” the evils of perspective, privation, and proportion, are certainly evils in every sense of the word. They are just as regrettable and tragic as humanity takes them to be. Classifying evils doesn’t dispel them or turn them into good, however much they may relate to the good. Most aren’t really as bad as we suffer them to be, but we can’t enjoy them or treat them as good no matter what the intellect may say. Lesser evils are still evils. We must be wary of all evils and warmly comfort each other as best we can, because what humanly counts in the end is the suffering. Philosophical stoicism has its place in the privacy of one’s temperament and domicile. Stoicism out among one’s fellow sufferers is simply public indecency. Evils suffered do not call for emotional indifference; evils encountered do not call for moral quietism. Just as there has to be a cosmic balance of goods and evils, there has to be a moral balance as well, for despising evil is necessary for pursuing good. To let go of regrets over evils to keep one’s head only abandons morality and chills the heart. Stoicism must be taken in moderation, too. Philosophical naturalism will always have a place for the tragic and knowing the difference between good and evil. Can theism say the same thing, in all honesty?

Returning to our hotly contested subject, we ask, Is Hell a genuine evil? For those doomed to Hell, it must be an evil, the Hell-friendly theisms all agree. Inhabitants unable to regard their hellish conditions as unremittingly evil are just passing through (Jesus, Dante) or perhaps they are entirely evil themselves (Satan, presumably). On the topic of Satan,

however, theologies can disagree. Those who know the True Good the best would be those most sensitive to its complete deprivation, right? So Satan suffers Hell as evil more than anyone. On the other hand, True Evil cannot regard the True Good as good, right? After all, if Satan could acknowledge how God is more good than anything else, wouldn't something in Satan still be oriented towards the good, so could Satan really be completely evil? Theologies can't agree on this devilishly tricky problem because they don't share the same theory of personal evil. We would disagree among ourselves as well: Is being evil more about knowing the good but choosing the bad, or is it more about lacking any sense of the good in the first place? Psychologists crudely distinguish between two kinds of cruel murderers: those who can't understand the suffering they cause as they kill, and those who kill because they can understand the suffering and choose to cause it. Who is more evil? Perhaps both are equally evil.

Dualistic theologies can go either way. In Zoroastrianism, the Evil god is entirely evil by divine nature; no mindful choice was involved. Christian theology sometimes makes it sound like Satan made a knowing and willful choice against the Good deity to become fully evil. (Which is more than Judaism's Adam in the Garden did—he ate of the apple without knowing good and evil as he did it—Adam only knew of evil and sin afterwards, unlike the serpent, thanks to ingesting the apple.) The most arrogant jinn, known to Islamic theology as Iblis or Shayṭān, plays much the same role, as the persuasive temptation to sin so that humans join in rebellion against the Good deity. However much psychoanalysis is given to the Evil One, as John Milton tried with fascinating results, the fact remains that Hell isn't supposed to be genuinely good for any of its inhabitants. Hell is objectively evil. It's not as if Hell is only evil from a limited perspective, as if taking a bigger perspective would permit someone under its tortures to find them tolerable. ("Sure it's plenty hot here, but it's a dry heat.") Nor could Hell's afflictions be due to exaggerated expectations and unjust disappointments. People dying and finding themselves in Hell may feel disappointed in themselves, but not in Hell ("But I'd heard some nice things about Hell!") Bottom line: Stoicism isn't supposed to work in Hell. Hell's status as evil isn't simply a subjective matter. Only Dante's Hell has a tedious first circle that's tolerable for those rare people, the philosophers, with the wisdom to tolerate it.

The objective status for Hell's evil is clear, but that can imply that Hell is objectively proportionate, as an inevitable feature of creation. To say that Hell was objectively created along with the rest of creation isn't the same thing as saying that Hell's evil is co-originally and con-substantially real. Evil, even Hell's evil, may still lack its own categorical reality, as if it had its own essential and independent nature apart from the good and God. To use an oft-used analogy, the unadulterated light in the presence of structure can produce shadow, but "shadow" is just a deprivation of

light, and not its own kind of substantial reality. To be of shadow is to be apart from light, but it isn't to be "of" something other than light. The evil of Hell is objective (not merely a matter of subjective perspective or attitude) but not necessarily con-substantial with the good of creation or the good of God.

Christian theology has repeatedly taken this approach to evil for many reasons, too many to enumerate here. Alternative theistic theologies could better insulate the Good deity from participation in evil, by placing responsibility for evil on a co-original Evil Deity or metaphysical first principle, but those non-monotheistic theologies would be unable to credit God for responsibility for everything that exists beside God. Absolute dependence of everything objective upon God, directly or indirectly, has been a theological agenda for Christian theism going back to its formative eras. If some evil could objectively persist without God or God's creative work, then absolute dependence is not the relationship between Evil and God, and theological dualism ensues. Strict monotheism instead must insist that objective evils, such as Hell, depend on God and God's creation for their status and persistence.

It may seem odd to say that Hellish theology—the theistic theology now under discussion which accepts objective Hell—ensures that Hell has a dependency upon God. But there is no safe monotheistic alternative. If Hell is supposedly objectively real (people can't make it far less evil merely by changing perspectives or attitudes) and God has dealings with Hell (people can be put in Hell or taken out of Hell, for example) then Hell isn't just a figment of the imagination, or a psychological 'place' one can fall into, like melancholy. Theologies (and atheism) which allow Hell to have at most the subjective status of a state of mind aren't under discussion here, and they side-step the religious problem of hellish evil. Hellish theologies must regard Hell as objectively real, and so long as strict monotheism is upheld, then God is somehow sustaining Hell's existence.

Atheists may think, "Well, that's a closed case, because we've got God trapped as the one responsible for evil." Not so fast. Dependence relations aren't all the same. God has ontological priority over evil and Hell (God has the most fundamental and ultimate reality) and God has supremacy over evil and Hell (nether can make anything happen that God doesn't permit to happen). Evil and Hell couldn't have any reality or causality without God. But attributing responsibility for Hell's evils are another matter. You have to know your evils. A good God can still avoid moral responsibility for an evil Hell, if a clever theodicy can succeed. Theodicy had better be able to tell the difference between perdition and paradise.

## PERDITION AND PARADISE

If Christianity had become fully dualistic (like Gnosticism) or fully monotheistic (like Islam), it would have been similarly vulnerable to straightforward atheological criticism. Dualistic theology admits that believers have to accept, as the Good God must, cosmic Evil as irredeemably real. Monotheistic theology admits that believers have to regard God as participating in evil as an instrument for its ends. The next section deals more directly with simpler theodicies.

Christianity is a frequent target for the problem of evil as well, yet its complex doctrines can supply plenty of insulation. Christianity relies on the Old Testament's tale about the Garden of Eden and the New Testament's account of Jesus's promises of an afterlife and his own death, to preemptively offer resolutions to any problem of evil. Evil is a problem—hence Jesus. There's a reason why few Christians are stunned and dismayed by the problem of evil. Answers are available. Life's inevitable sufferings can be appropriate tests of character and faith. We shouldn't lament earthly suffering so long as an afterlife paradise awaits the faithful. The Fall of Adam and Eve from innocence is the reason why humanity must live in a difficult world instead of the Garden that God intended for us, so we are only getting what we all deserve.

The Christianity that ascended to orthodoxy by the sixth century CE developed a fourfold metaphysics of God-Jesus-Creation-Humanity, crediting each component with fundamental creative and destructive powers. Jesus didn't establish Creation from nothing; God did, and God can destroy Creation. God did not die on a cross; Jesus did die, at God's will. Creation didn't create Humanity (but it can kill humans); God created Humanity in the beginning. God didn't make the world that Humanity lives in now; Humanity did. There are accordingly four different modes of evil, corresponding to each metaphysical power. Because God exists, anywhere that God isn't fully present shares in evil<sub>G</sub>. Because Jesus exists, the evil<sub>J</sub> overcome through Jesus is defeated. Because Creation exists, there are objectively evil<sub>C</sub> events occurring in nature. Finally, because Humanity used free will in Eden, human evil<sub>H</sub> now objectively happens. Because there are four modes to evil in Christian theology, problems of evil continue to proliferate and systematic theologies can't re-converge on resolutions.

These four modes of evil aren't reducible to each other without dramatic creedal alterations to post-Latin Vulgate Christianity. For example, suppose evil<sub>J</sub> is actually identical to evil<sub>H</sub> so that every human evil is taken care of by Jesus's death. This view adopts the position of universal salvation, which denies that only some people enter paradise and accordingly rejects perdition. Alternatively, suppose that evil<sub>H</sub> is just a type of evil<sub>C</sub> so that evil human deeds are no more surprising and appalling to God than earthquakes. Testing an innocent humanity in a paradise right

after creating them, and treating a predictably poor choice as an evil sin, is an unjustifiable and unethical exercise for an all-knowing God, so perdition must be dropped. As another example, suppose evil<sub>H</sub> is inevitably part of evil<sub>G</sub> so that any sufficiently sentient God would understand how all deeds by finite creatures must fall infinitely short of perfection no matter what happens in Creation. Faulting those creatures for inevitable defects is similarly unworthy of a Good deity, so this God had better regret making Creation before entertaining any regrets over sending people to perdition, and perdition must again be dropped. Similarly, if evil<sub>H</sub> is just part of evil<sub>G</sub> so that the whole point to Jesus is to render the inevitably imperfect Creation and the invariably unworthy Humanity somehow worthier in the eyes of God, eternal damnation for anybody is out of the question, and perdition is irrelevant.

In order to reasonably maintain creedal conviction in perdition, human evil can't be reduced to the other evils so that it isn't foreseeably necessary. This is the case, regardless of the view that a theodicy takes concerning why some people should suffer eternal damnation, or why some other people deserve eternal salvation. Whether the point of Hell is punitive vengeance or retributive justice, or a metaphor for permanent separation from God, or something else, the key point is that God can't morally use Hell in response to some human failure.

This hardly means that we deserve paradise either. The question is not whether anybody deserves paradise; the question is whether anyone deserves perdition. Perhaps God would be ethically responsible for granting a pleasant afterlife to some while denying any afterlife to others. At least that outcome isn't as morally monstrous as leaving people in Hell. It doesn't appear that a good God can avoid moral responsibility for an evil Hell.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS VS. GOODNESS

A good God cannot morally use Hell in response to foreseeable and predictable human failures. Hell can't be real just because God upholds morality. But perhaps Hell is real because God upholds justice. Expecting God to promote the good and expecting God to uphold the right are separable demands, at least in theory. Monotheisms generally, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, appeal to God's righteousness for the purposes of exculpatory theodicy.

In the minds of most adherents of a monotheism, when God delivers justice in the name of defending the right, God is by definition doing good. And few adherents would find it easy to say that God could be any less beneficent while delivering justice. Righteous authority delivering terrible harms may even be regarded as an intrinsic good for most of the faithful. How God could ever fail to be perfectly good while delivering

justice can seem unthinkable. Theodicy does have some thinkable options about cosmic justice violating the good, as far as atheology can tell. Here is the run-down, from atheology's standpoint.

A "privation" theodicy, for which evil in any Creation is a necessary feature, reconciles God's goodness with God's justice by claiming that the cosmic balance of good and evil in the world is providentially the best possible. Plotinus, Aquinas, and Leibniz offered influential versions of this theodicy. A "greater good" theodicy, by contrast, treats evil as inevitably and foreseeably arising from a prioritized good (such as free will) that God providentially included in the world, so that evil is justly right in service to this higher Good. A "limited providence" theodicy takes God to be perfectly righteous, but treats evil as inevitable due to God's less-than-supreme capacity to intervene in cosmic affairs after creation. A fourth kind of theodicy, a "submission" theodicy, declares that all creatures must submit to God's authority regardless of the distribution of good and evil in this world, because it is only right that we are piously grateful for existing at all.<sup>2</sup>

The privation theodicy, despite its association with the "best of all possible worlds" label, suggests that God's aim in creating the world actually isn't to ensure fine lives for us all, but only to give each of us a fair opportunity at life despite inhabiting a difficult and troubled world. If God had withdrawn less from creation to allow this world to be easy and delightful, we'd never strive for anything, and never appreciate our dependency on God along the way. God allows 'evil' to afflict humanity, but those evils are just part of the overall balance of life and death in the world. Besides, there's salvation and a wonderful afterlife for the righteous. God is righteous and just, rather than reliably beneficent in any simplistic way, and God surely isn't in the never-ending business of rescuing us from our own hurtful decisions. God wants our salvation for our own good, of course. But you can kill with kindness—it is wiser to let people suffer so they know what they'd miss. Apparently there's no better way to guide people towards pious faith and righteousness. Even if only some individuals are saved in the end, righteousness is preserved forever by God in the face of chaos and extinction.

Atheology's reaction to this privation theology is to ask a simple question: "Why would God allow so many evils to afflict us, when persuading us to follow God could be accomplished with less torturous means?" It is easy to imagine a world with less evil and suffering but plenty of religious people. Proponents of privation theology must be convinced that a short duration for life and a long list of afflicting evils is necessarily the "best" way to bring people to their knees. However, this couldn't be the best way, for an all-powerful deity prioritizing goodness. Even if this might look like a fair deal for adults, what about the terrible afflictions and sufferings delivered to babies and small children before their premature deaths, who never get a chance to grow from suffering or reach a

soulful state of grace? And if dropping adults to their knees must be a higher priority than preventing the suffering of innocents, how could a Hell for those strong enough to take the suffering in stride make any sense? The number of people kneeling in this life is more important than the number of people released from suffering in the next life, apparently.

On this privation theodicy, hellish conditions are intrinsically valuable to God. No waiting for Hell, here—this world is already a torture test to see who will submit before death comes. Taking this theodicy to its logical extremes, as Calvinism does, leaves a great mystery about how God decides which person is truly worthy of salvation. After all, visibly good deeds are irrelevant; genuine submission is subjectively psychological, and we are too frail to even have sufficient faith without God's rescuing aid. God's delivery of sufficient grace for faith is deemed a Great Good and proof of God's love. However, God could easily deliver such grace to all by divine fiat and leave Hell empty. No, torturing righteousness out of us before we die, and then torturing us forever if God so pleases, is far more important to God. This is not a scheme designed for displaying God's loving beneficence to all creatures, by any means.

The "greater good" theodicy in Christianity insists that God has prioritized one good thing, free will, while remaining bound to the duty to uphold righteousness in the face of sin. Supposing, as this theodicy must, that it is impossible to freely choose doing the good without also freely choosing some evils, then this theodicy effectively makes human sin a lesser evil balanced by a greater good. This could almost make sense, except Christianity also demands that we minimize committing sin because it is an absolute evil. Those deserving salvation, ironically enough, aren't people choosing sin once in a while in the course of choosing many good deeds, but only people who are the least sinful among us. Paradoxically, the creatures who must deserve salvation the most would be those who make the fewest choices at all, such as babies who die before choosing any sin. Furthermore, divine omnipotence demands that God can know all human deeds before we choose them, which is logically incompatible with free will. (This isn't a claim about determinism, since God neither determines nor causes human actions on this theodicy. Rather, actual free will must be intrinsically unpredictable since it mustn't have any sufficient reasons/causes, divine or material, for free decisions.)

Atheology points out that what started out as sounding like some common sense—those more likely to choose to do good instead of evil are more likely in all fairness to get into paradise—easily warps into nonsense under this theodicy. That is why Christianity couldn't really subscribe to a theodicy prioritizing free will, and this theodicy mutates quickly into one of the alternatives. If original sin for all humanity is conveniently added, then the amount of sin actually freely chosen during one's life doesn't really count for much by comparison either way, and only a God's free and fickle will can save us or doom us. If theodicy does

take human free will seriously, on the other hand, then this requires an admission that God cannot maximize multiple important goods and cannot control creatures exercising free will, lessening God's effective powers.

The third theology, the "limited providence" theodicy, accordingly admits that God really isn't all-powerful after creating the world. Because God designed the world with its own forces and laws, and created humans who follow their own (somewhat free) minds, this creator couldn't have made a perfectly good creation and cannot perform all of the worldly interventions otherwise expected from a perfectly good and righteous deity. Evil tragedies and terrible holocausts are inevitable, because God cannot prevent them all and might not be able to foresee all of them. As a practical matter, God is effectively less than all-powerful and cannot guarantee maximal providential guidance over the world. God did establish creation with some providential planning, wishes us well, and may send extra help when possible, but little more should be expected from God.

Because this "limited providence" theodicy surrenders that triad of perfections (omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness) which arouses most problems concerning evil, atheology has far fewer objections here. For those religious spirits able to courageously accept these harsh terms of existence and survival, life appears far more adventurous and risky. Perhaps atheists themselves are just that courageous, willing to take on life's adventure since there are no gods anyways. Yet even atheists can notice how this theodicy neglects weaker, timid, or broken spirits unable to struggle on in a gamble for uncertain victory, and for whom life appears to be pointless suffering or a cruel joke. Hell is out the question. If a God of limited powers expects sinlessness from us and demands eternal punishment for our inevitable failure, that God must be heartless and evil.

The fourth theodicy awaits, after the other three have been found severely wanting. This "submission" theodicy returns to the core idea within "privation" theodicy and fully admits that perfect righteousness, not beneficent providence, is truly the divine priority. This "perfect" God just lets terrible sufferings happen in a far from perfect world, and the truly innocent do sometimes suffer before tragic death. But the truly innocent also get to go to a heavenly paradise (or at least purgatory perhaps), while the sinners are bound for a hell. There must be some genuine evil in the divine plan, it seems to this theodicy, to guarantee a greater righteousness. But we shouldn't get fixated on tragic evils that had to happen in God's righteous plan. All that matters is that providence is fine-tuned perfectly to allow God to demonstrate perfect righteousness in the face of inevitable sin. It really doesn't matter what sort of creation this God bothered to design—that mistake dooms the other theodicies. Asking for beneficence is a distraction, since it keep us alert for

evils. The truth is that evils shouldn't be any surprise to anyone. Evils are no surprise to God, after all. We are busy noticing evils only when we are forgetting to be grateful to god for existing anywhere at all, and grateful for whatever natural home allowing us live as we do.

Atheology has no difficulty pointing out what is plainly obvious for this fourth theodicy: God has no obligation to adjust the ratio of good to evil in creation whatsoever. If evil must be a necessary feature anyways, then standing up for righteousness in the face of evil is all that matters. The more evil, the better! On this theodicy, God has a righteous duty to create Hell and guarantee eternal torment as the just punishment for sin. After all, what better way for God to ensure the sharpest possible contrast between divine righteousness and evil sinfulness than to contrast the infinitude of divine right against the infinitude of divine punishment? A lenient policy of no punishment, or temporary punishment, wouldn't do the job. Who is more against sin: the one who eventually forgives, or the one who never forgives? God can't forgive, not ever.

#### GOOD GOD AND NECESSARY EVIL

Moral atheology's complaints against religions using Hells comes down to this: How can theologies justify multiplying evils throughout the cosmos and into the next world? It is here that the problem of evil hits these hellish religions the hardest, without mercy. Any religion that threatens an evil afterlife must attribute to its god(s) the ultimate responsibility for creating and sustaining evil, one way or the other.

It's not as if religions try to hide this. Many religions want everyone to know all about their hells and how impressively evil they are, and how crucial it is to avoid them and how much the god(s) deserve credit for using them. Their theologies justify those hells with theodicies explaining their necessary roles in the divine scheme of things.<sup>3</sup>

Theologies justifying unnatural hells with pitiless logic don't hold anything back. Puritan Jonathan Edwards was one of the faithful who explained God's ways without restraint or regard for tender feelings. His sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" describes, in agonizing detail, not just what hell is like for those in it, but also how hell is viewed by those in heaven:

That God will execute the fierceness of his anger, implies that he will inflict wrath without any pity: when God beholds the ineffable extremity of your case, and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportioned to your strength, and sees how your poor soul is crushed and sinks down, as it were into an infinite gloom, he will have no compassion upon you, he will not forbear the executions of his wrath, or in the least lighten his hand; there shall be no moderation or mercy, nor will God then at all stay his rough wind; he will have no regard to your welfare,

nor be at all careful lest you should suffer too much, in any other sense than only that you shall not suffer beyond what strict justice requires: nothing shall be withheld, because it's so hard for you to bear. . . .[Y]ou shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is, and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty. (1995, 99–101)

Edwards exhaustingly explains how god's plan for heaven would be less than perfect unless the saved can view the damned suffering in hell. Heaven truly is the happiest place, praise the Lord!

Edwards understood theodicy all too well. He knew better than to place the blame for evil on Satan, the devilish creature ensuring that the Christian God looks good by comparison. Theologians can comprehend what ordinary believers are apt to overlook: Satan and the suffering he causes must be just as much an essential part of God's supreme plan as anything else. Among the faithful, one is instead more likely to hear the legacy of Persian Zoroastrianism in the dualistic Manichaeism of the 3rd to 7th centuries CE rather than its cousin, monotheistic Christianity. Manichaeism depicted a cosmic struggle between two co-eternal divine powers, one good and the other evil. Needless to say, both religions agree that only a terrible fate awaits those on the wrong side of this cosmic contest.

A monotheistic religion like Christianity can't shift evil around metaphysically so easily. It must credit its God for creating all the conditions for any demonic power, if one exists, and for allowing such a power to do its evil deeds. Evils are still only redistributed around this simpler theological scheme, and never eliminated entirely. Religions constrained by monotheistic principles have no other choice than to "resolve" the problem of evil by finally admitting that evil is a necessary and essential component of the grand divine design. As Christian apologist Dinesh D'Souza honestly admits, "hell is an essential part of the Christian scheme" (2007, 271).<sup>4</sup>

#### EVIL IS NECESSARY WITH GOD, OR, IS GOD NECESSARY EVIL?

The difficulty reconciling perdition with paradise is generalizable to a tension between evil and God. So long as God and creation exists, objectively real evil must also exist. The atheological analysis of primary theodicies has exposed that deep relationship well enough. The only way to deny supernatural evil is to deny God.

Theodicies have presumed that so long as God can't be faulted for the reality of evil, then God has been ethically cleared and nothing stains God's perfect goodness. That presumption in fact conveys theodicy, and

God, straight towards a well-deserved condemnation by atheology. Leaving God faultless for evil requires the satisfaction of one of three basic conditions: either God has no relationship with evil and cannot eliminate evil; or God has a necessary relationship with evil (and hence cannot eliminate it); or God has a contingent relationship with evil and could eliminate evil but won't. Three very different theologies emerge from theodicy's work.

The first theology about God and evil is the option of goodness-evil dualism: both the supreme basis of goodness and the supreme basis of evil are co-primeval and equally powerful. This theology abandons monotheism and guarantees that evil is a permanent feature of natural and supernatural realms. The second theology promises that so long as God exists then evil exists, which is presumably a permanent condition. This theology abandons the orthodox theistic view that God someday has a victory over supernatural evil. The third theology is compatible with monotheism, but such a God is evil, and evil is hence supernaturally permanent again.

Theodicies and their theologies couldn't be clearer: with a duo-theistic or mono-theistic God comes plenty of supernatural and cosmic evil, guaranteed. Atheology needn't care whether a believer can figure out how absolve a praiseworthy God of responsibility for evil. Atheology aims at explaining why atheism is more reasonable than god-belief. Assuming that one doesn't find the existence of cosmic evil intrinsically good, why would one want to believe in God? If belief in God is let go, so is belief in vast evil. Which is a more reasonable (and morally worthy) position to take? That God and supernatural evil are real? Or that no god and nothing so evil are real?

Put another way, which sort of metaphysical scheme of things would an ethical person prefer? Choice one contains a Creator God of questionable motives who can't eliminate supernatural evils, evils that might befall us humans in an afterlife. Choice two contains a natural world of questionable fate that contains ordinary earthly evils but nothing supernaturally evil is around, ever. Which choice selects the lesser of two evils? Choosing God is choosing necessary evil. Surely the ethical choice for anyone, all things considered, is the second choice. Don't believe in God.

## NOTES

1. Reliable surveys of issues and theories in theodicy include O'Connor (1998); Rowe (2001); Søvik (2011); and Frances (2013). For a broader perspective, see Neiman (2004). Islam has produced creative theodices; see for example Inati (2000). On Hinduism and Buddhism, see Herman (1993).

2. On the first kind of theodicy, see for example Davies (2011). On the second kind, see Hick (1966); Plantinga (1974); and Swinburne (1998). As for the third kind, only a limited god makes sense of both the world and our ethical standards, according to James (1909). A recent example of this theodicy is the bestselling Kushner (1981).

Regarding the fourth kind, one recent proponent is D'Souza (2012). Although Islam also has emphasized dutiful submission to divine righteousness, Islamic thinkers have pondered theodicies as complex as any Christian systems, and contributed to their development. See a survey by Ormsby (1984).

3. See Kvanvig (1993) and Seymour (2000). Kronen and Reitan (2012) philosophically argue against any divine need for hell.

4. On Manichaeism, see Coyle (2009) and Baker-Brian (2011). On Satan, see Forsyth (1987). Popular Christianity can't resist a grand conflict narrative among relatively well-matched deities; see for example Boyd (2001), or the *Left Behind* book series authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. A sober diagnosis of such enthusiasm for the "end times" is provided by Price (2007).

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