

# Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God

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in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 217. For a fuller, revised treatment, see: [\*Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God\*](#).

In the development of these ideas, I am indebted to the members of our Fall 1987 seminar on the problem of evil at UCLA-- especially to Robert Merrihew Adams (its co-leader) and to Keith De Rose, William Fitzpatrick, and Houston Smith. I am also grateful to the Very Reverend Jon Hart Olson for many conversations in mystical theology. This paper was presented at the 1989 Joint-Session of the Mind-Aristotelian Society in Swansea, where Professor Stewart Sutherland was the commentator. I have added a few notes that respond to his comments.

## I. Introduction

Over the past thirty years, analytic philosophers of religion have defined the problem of evil in terms of the prima facie difficulty in consistently maintaining

- (1) God exists, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good and
- (2) Evil exists. In a crisp and classic article *Evil and Omnipotence*, J.L. Mackie, *Evil and Omnipotence*, *Mind* no. 254 (1955); reprinted in Nelson Pike, *God and Evil*, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964, pp. 46-60.

J.L. Mackie emphasized that the problem is not that (1) and (2) are logically inconsistent by themselves, but that they together with quasi-logical rules formulating attribute- analyses — such as

- (P1) A perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could, and
- (P2) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do--constitute an inconsistent premiss-set. He added, of course, that the inconsistency might be removed by substituting alternative and perhaps more subtle analyses, but cautioned that such replacements of (P1) and (P2) would save ordinary theism from his charge of positive irrationality, only if true to its essential requirements. Mackie, *op.cit.*, p.47.

In an earlier paper "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers", Marilyn McCord Adams, *Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers, Faith and Philosophy*, April 1988, pp. 121-43. I underscored Mackie's point and took it a step further. In debates about whether the argument from evil can establish the irrationality of religious belief, care must be taken, both by the atheologians who deploy it and the believers who defend against it, to insure that the operative attribute-analyses accurately reflect that religion's understanding of Divine power and goodness. It does the atheologian no good to argue for the falsity of Christianity on the ground that the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, pleasure-maximizer is impossible with a world such as ours, because Christians never believed God was a pleasure-maximizer anyway. But equally, the truth of Christianity would be inadequately defended by the observation that an omnipotent, omniscient egoist could have created a world with suffering creatures, because Christians insist that God loves other (created) persons than Himself.

The extension of 'evil' in (2) is likewise important. Since Mackie and his successors are out to show that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with each other, Mackie, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-47. they can accomplish their aim only if they circumscribe the extension of 'evil' as their religious

opponents do. By the same token, it is not enough for Christian philosophers to explain how the power, knowledge, and goodness of God could coexist with some evils or other; a full account must exhibit the compossibility of Divine perfection with evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in the actual world (and evaluated as such by Christian standards).

The moral of my earlier story might be summarized thus: where the internal coherence of a system of religious beliefs is at stake, successful arguments for its inconsistency must draw on premises (explicitly or implicitly) internal to that system or obviously acceptable to its adherents; likewise for successful rebuttals or explanations of consistency. The thrust of my argument is to push both sides of the debate towards more detailed attention to and subtle understanding of the religious system in question.

As a Christian philosopher, I want to focus in this paper on the problem for the truth of Christianity raised by what I shall call horrendous evils. Although our world is riddled with them, the Biblical record punctuated by them, and one of them--viz., the passion of Christ; according to Christian belief, the judicial murder of God by the people of God--is memorialized by the Church on its most solemn holiday (Good Friday) and in its central sacrament (the Eucharist), the problem of horrendous evils is largely skirted by standard treatments for the good reason that they are intractable by them. After showing why, I will draw on other Christian materials to sketch ways of meeting this, the deepest of religious problems.

## II. Defining the Category

For present purposes, I define 'horrendous evils' as 'evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which gives one reason prima facie to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole'. Stewart Sutherland (in his comment *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God-II*, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LXIII, 311-23; esp. 311) takes my criterion to be somehow first-person. This was not my intention. My definition may be made more explicit as follows: an evil *e* is horrendous if and only if participation in *e* by person *p* gives everyone prima facie reason to doubt whether *p*'s life can, given *p*'s participation in *e*, be a great good to *p* on the whole.

Such reasonable doubt arises because it is so difficult humanly to conceive how such evils could be overcome. Borrowing Chisholm's contrast between balancing off (which occurs when the opposing values of mutually exclusive parts of a whole partially or totally cancel each other out) and defeat (which cannot occur by the mere addition to the whole of a new part of opposing value, but involves some organic unity among the values of parts and wholes, as when the positive aesthetic value of a whole painting defeats the ugliness of a small color patch) Roderick Chisholm, *The Defeat of Good and Evil*, chapter 3 of this volume, horrendous evils seem prima facie, not only to balance off but to engulf the positive value of a participant's life. Nevertheless, that very horrendous proportion, by which they threaten to rob a person's life of positive meaning, cries out not only to be engulfed, but to be made meaningful through positive and decisive defeat.

I understand this criterion to be objective, but relative to individuals. The example of habitual complainers, who know how to make the worst of a good situation, shows individuals not to be incorrigible experts on what ills would defeat the positive value of their lives. Nevertheless, nature and experience endow people with different strengths; one bears easily what crushes another. And a major consideration in determining whether an individual's life is/has been a great good to him/her on the whole, is invariably and appropriately how it has seemed to him/her. Cf. Malcolm's astonishment at Wittgenstein's dying exclamation that he had had a wonderful life, Ludwig Wittgenstein: *A Memoir*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, p.100.

I offer the following list of paradigmatic horrors: the rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's deepest loyalties, cannibalizing one's own off-spring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, participation in the Nazi death camps, the explosion

of nuclear bombs over populated areas, having to choose which of one's children shall live and which be executed by terrorists, being the accidental and/or unwitting agent of the disfigurement or death of those one loves best.

I regard these as paradigmatic, because I believe most people would find in the doing or suffering of them prima facie reason to doubt the positive meaning of their lives. Once again, more explicitly, most people would agree that a person p's doing or suffering of them constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether p's life can be, given such participation, a great good to p on the whole. Christian belief counts the crucifixion of Christ another: On the one hand, death by crucifixion seemed to defeat Jesus' Messianic vocation; for according to Jewish law, death by hanging from a tree made its victim ritually accursed, definitively excluded from the compass of God's people, a fortiori disqualified from being the Messiah. On the other hand, it represented the defeat of its perpetrators' leadership vocations, as those who were to prepare the people of God for the Messiah's coming, kill and ritually accurse the true Messiah, according to later theological understanding, God Himself.

### III. The Impotence of Standard Solutions

For better and worse, the by-now-standard strategies for solving the problem of evil are powerless in the face of horrendous evils.

**3.1. Seeking the Reason Why:** In his model article *Hume on Evil*, *Hume on Evil*, *Philosophical Review* LXXII (1963), pp. 180-97; reprinted in *God and Evil*, p. 88. Pike takes up Mackie's challenge, arguing that (P1) fails to reflect ordinary moral intuitions (more to the point, I would add, Christian beliefs), and traces the abiding sense of trouble to the hunch that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have no reason compatible with perfect goodness for permitting (bringing about) evils, because all legitimate excuses arise from ignorance or weakness.

Solutions to the problem of evil have thus been sought in the form of counter-examples to this latter claim, i.e., logically possible reasons why that would excuse even an omnipotent, omniscient God! The putative logically possible reasons offered have tended to be generic and global: generic insofar as some general reason is sought to cover all sorts of evils; global insofar as they seize upon some feature of the world as a whole. For example, philosophers have alleged that the desire to make a world with one of the following properties-- the best of all possible worlds, Following Leibniz, Pike draws on this feature as part of what I have called his Epistemic Defense ( *Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers*, pp. 124-25. a possible world a more perfect than which is impossible, a world exhibiting a perfect balance of retributive justice, Augustine, *On Free Choice of Will* III.93-102, implies that there is a maximum value for created worlds, and a plurality of worlds that meet it. All of these contain rational free creatures; evils are foreseen but unintended side-effects of their creation.

No matter what they choose, however, God can order their choices into a maximally perfect universe by establishing an order of retributive justice. A world with as favorable a balance of (created) moral good over moral evil as God can weakly actualize Plantinga takes this line in numerous discussions, in the course of answering Mackie's objection to the Free Will Defense, that God should have made sinless free creatures. Plantinga insists that, given incompatibilist freedom in creatures, God cannot strongly actualize any world He wants. It is logically possible that a world with evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in this world is the best that He could do, Plantinga argues, given His aim of getting some moral goodness in the world. --would constitute a reason compatible with perfect goodness for God's creating a world with evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in the actual world. Moreover, such general reasons are presented as so powerful as to do away with any need to catalog types of evils one by one, and examine God's reason for permitting each in particular. Plantinga explicitly hopes that the problem of horrendous evils can thus be solved without being squarely confronted. Alvin Plantinga, *Self-Profile*, in *Alvin Plantinga*, edited by James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen, D. Reidel Publishing Company (Dordrecht, Boston, Lancaster, 1985), p.38.

**3.2. The Insufficiency of Global Defeat:** A pair of distinctions is in order here: (i) between two dimensions of Divine goodness in relation to creation — viz., producer of global goods and goodness to or love of individual created persons; and (ii) between the overbalance/defeat of evil by good on the global scale, and the overbalance/defeat of evil by good within the context of an individual person's life. I owe the second of these distinctions to a remark by Keith DeRose in our Fall 1987 seminar on the problem of evil at UCLA. Correspondingly, we may separate two problems of evil parallel to the two sorts of goodness mentioned in (i). In effect, generic and global approaches are directed to the first problem: they defend Divine goodness along the first (global) dimension by suggesting logically possible strategies for the global defeat of evils. But establishing God's excellence as a producer of global goods does not automatically solve the second problem, especially in a world containing horrendous evils. For God cannot be said to be good or loving to any created persons the positive meaning of whose lives He allows to be engulfed in and/or defeated by evils—that is, individuals within whose lives horrendous evils remain undefeated. Yet, the only way unsupplemented global and generic approaches could have to explain the latter, would be by applying their general reasons-why to particular cases of horrendous suffering. Unfortunately, such an exercise fails to give satisfaction. Suppose for the sake of argument that horrendous evil could be included in maximally perfect world orders; its being partially constitutive of such an order would assign it that generic and global positive meaning. But would knowledge of such a fact, defeat for a mother the *prima facie* reason provided by her cannibalism of her own infant, to wish that she had never been born? Again, the aim of perfect retributive balance confers meaning on evils imposed. But would knowledge that the torturer was being tortured give the victim who broke down and turned traitor under pressure, any more reason to think his/her life worthwhile? Would it not merely multiply reasons for the torturer to doubt that his/her life could turn out to be a good to him/her on the whole? Could the truck-driver who accidentally runs over his beloved child find consolation in the idea that this middle-known Middle knowledge, or knowledge of what is in between the actual and the possible, is the sort of knowledge of what a free creature would do in every situation in which that creature could possibly find himself.

Following Luis de Molina and Francisco Suarez, Alvin Plantinga ascribes such knowledge to God, prior in the order of explanation to God's decision about which free creatures to actualize (in *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford University Press, 1974, chapter IX, pp. 164-93. Robert Merrihew Adams challenges this idea in his article *Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil*, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977); reprinted in *The Virtue of Faith*, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 77-93. But unintended side-effect was part of the price God accepted for a world with the best balance of moral good over moral evil He could get?

Not only does the application to horrors of such generic and global reasons for Divine permission of evils fail to solve the second problem of evil; it makes it worse by adding generic *prima facie* reasons to doubt whether human life would be a great good to individual human beings in possible worlds where such Divine motives were operative. For, taken in isolation and made to bear the weight of the whole explanation, such reasons-why draw a picture of Divine indifference or even hostility to the human plight. Would the fact that God permitted horrors because they were constitutive means to His end of global perfection, or that He tolerated them because He could obtain that global end anyway, make the participant's life more tolerable, more worth living for him/her? Given radical human vulnerability to horrendous evils, the ease with which humans participate in them, whether as victim or perpetrator, would not the thought that God visits horrors on anyone who caused them, simply because s/he deserves it, provide one more reason to expect human life to be a nightmare?

Those willing to split the two problems of evil apart might adopt a divide-and-conquer strategy, by simply denying Divine goodness along the second dimension. For example, many Christians do not believe that God will insure an overwhelmingly good life to each and every person He creates. Some say the decisive defeat of evil with good is promised only within the lives of the obedient, who enter by the narrow gate. Some speculate that the elect may be few. Many recognize that the sufferings of this present life are as nothing compared to the hell of eternal torment, designed to defeat goodness with horrors within the lives of the damned. Such a road can be consistently traveled only at the heavy toll of admitting that human life in worlds such as ours is a bad bet.

Imagine (adapting Rawls' device) persons in a pre-original position, considering possible worlds containing managers of differing power, wisdom, and character, and subjects of varying fates. The question they are to answer about each world is whether they would willingly enter it as a human being, from behind a veil of ignorance as to which position they would occupy. Reason would, I submit, dictate a negative verdict for worlds whose omniscient and omnipotent manager permits pre-mortem horrors that remain undefeated within the context of the human participant's life; a fortiori, for worlds in which some or most humans suffer eternal torment.

**3.3. Inaccessible Reasons:** So far, I have argued that generic and global solutions are at best incomplete: however well their account of Divine motivating reasons deals with the first problem of evil, the attempt to extend it to the second fails by making it worse. This verdict might seem *prima facie* tolerable to standard generic and global approaches and indicative of only a minor modification in their strategy: let the above-mentioned generic and global reasons cover Divine permission of non-horrendous evils, and find other reasons compatible with perfect goodness why even an omnipotent, omniscient God would permit horrors.

In my judgment, such an approach is hopeless. As Plantinga Alvin Plantinga, *Self-Profile*, Alvin Plantinga, pp.34-35. points out, where horrendous evils are concerned, not only do we not know God's actual reason for permitting them; we cannot even conceive of any plausible candidate sort of reason consistent with worthwhile lives for human participants in them.

#### **IV. The How of God's Victory:**

Up to now, my discussion has given the reader cause to wonder whose side I am on anyway? For I have insisted, with rebels like Ivan Karamazov and John Stuart Mill, on spot-lighting the problem horrendous evils pose. Yet, I have signaled my preference for a version of Christianity that insists on both dimensions of Divine goodness, and maintains not only (a) that God will be good enough to created persons to make human life a good bet, but also (b) that each created person will have a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole. My critique of standard approaches to the problem of evil thus seems to reinforce atheologian Mackie's verdict of positive irrationality for such a religious position.

**4.1. Whys versus Hows:** The inaccessibility of reasons-why seems especially decisive. For surely an all-wise and all-powerful God, who loved each created person enough (a) to defeat any experienced horrors within the context of the participant's life, and (b) to give each created person a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole, would not permit such persons to suffer horrors for no reason. This point was made by William Fitzpatrick in our Fall 1987 seminar on the problem of evil at UCLA. Does not our inability even to conceive of plausible candidate reasons suffice to make belief in such a God positively irrational in a world containing horrors? In my judgment, it does not. To be sure, motivating reasons come in several varieties relative to our conceptual grasp: There are (i) reasons of the sort we can readily understand when we are informed of them (e.g., the mother who permits her child to undergo painful heart surgery because it is the only humanly possible way to save its life). Moreover, there are (ii) reasons we would be cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually equipped to grasp if only we had a larger memory or wider attention span (analogy: I may be able to memorize small town street plans; memorizing the road net-works of the entire country is a task requiring more of the same, in the way that proving Gödel's theorem is not). Some generic and global approaches insinuate that Divine permission of evils has motivating reasons of this sort. Finally, (iii) there are reasons that we are cognitively, emotionally, and/or spiritually too immature to fathom (the way a two-year old child is incapable of understanding its mother's reasons for permitting the surgery). I agree with Plantinga that our ignorance of Divine reasons for permitting horrendous evils is not of types (i) or (ii), but of type (iii). Nevertheless, if there are varieties of ignorance, there are also varieties of reassurance. Contrary to what Sutherland suggests ( *op.cit.* , 314-15), so far as the compossibility problem is concerned, I intend no illicit shift from reason to emotion. My point is that intimacy with a loving other is a good, participation in which can defeat evils, and so provide everyone with reason to think a person's life can be a great good to him/her on the whole, despite his/her participation in evils. The two year old heart patient is convinced of its mother's love, not by her cognitively inaccessible reasons, but by her intimate care and presence through its painful experience. The story of Job suggests something similar is true with human participation in horrendous suffering: God does not give Job His reasons-why, and implies

that Job isn't smart enough to grasp them; rather Job is lectured on the extent of Divine power, and sees God's goodness face to face! Likewise, I suggest, to exhibit the logical compossibility of both dimensions of Divine goodness with horrendous suffering, it is not necessary to find logically possible reasons why God might permit them. It is enough to show how God can be good enough to created persons despite their participation in horrors--by defeating them within the context of the individual's life and by giving that individual a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole.

**4.2. What Sort of Valuables?** In my opinion, the reasonableness of Christianity can be maintained in the face of horrendous evils only by drawing on resources of religious value theory. For one way for God to be good to created persons is by relating them appropriately to relevant and great goods. But philosophical and religious theories differ importantly on what valuables they admit into their ontology. Some maintain that what you see is what you get, but nevertheless admit a wide range of valuables, from sensory pleasures, the beauty of nature and cultural artifacts, the joys of creativity, to loving personal intimacy. Others posit a transcendent good (e.g. the Form of the Good in Platonism, or God, the Supremely Valuable Object, in Christianity). In the spirit of Ivan Karamazov, I am convinced that the depth of horrific evil cannot be accurately estimated without recognizing it to be incommensurate with any package or merely non-transcendent goods and so unable to be balanced off, much less defeated thereby. Where the internal coherence of Christianity is the issue, however, it is fair to appeal to its own store of valuables. From a Christian point of view, God is a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, a good incommensurate with both created goods and temporal evils. Likewise, the good of beatific, face-to-face intimacy with God is simply incommensurate with any merely non-transcendent goods or ills a person might experience. Thus, the good of beatific face to face intimacy with God would engulf (in a sense analogous to Chisholmian balancing off) even the horrendous evils humans experience in this present life here below, and overcome any *prima facie* reasons the individual had to doubt whether his/her life would or could be worth living.

**4.3. Personal Meaning , Horrors Defeated:** Engulfing personal horrors within the context of the participant's life would vouchsafe to that individual a life that was a great good to him/her on the whole. I am still inclined to think it would guarantee that immeasurable Divine goodness to any person thus benefited. But there is good theological reason for Christians to believe that God would go further, beyond engulfment to defeat. For it is the nature of persons to look for meaning, both in their lives and in the world. Divine respect for and commitment to created personhood would drive God to make all those sufferings which threaten to destroy the positive meaning of a person's life meaningful through positive defeat. Note, once again, contrary to what Sutherland suggests ( *op.cit.* , 321-23) 'horrendous evil e is defeated' entails none of the following propositions: 'e was not horrendous', 'e was not unjust', 'e was not so bad after all'. Nor does my suggestion that even horrendous evils can be defeated by a great enough (because incommensurate and uncreated) good, in any way impugn the reliability of our moral intuitions about injustice, cold-bloodedness, or horror. The judgment that participation in e constitutes *prima facie* reason to believe that p's life is ruined, stands and remains a daunting measure of e's horror.

How could God do it? So far as I can see, only by integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person's relationship with God. Possible dimensions of integration are charted by Christian soteriology. I pause here to sketch three In my paper *Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil, Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in Philosophy of Religion* , ed. by Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 248-67, I sketch how horrendous suffering can be meaningful by being made a vehicle of divine redemption for victim, perpetrator, and onlooker, and thus an occasion of the victim's collaboration with God. In *Separation and Reversal in Luke-Acts*, forthcoming in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* , ed. by Thomas Morris, Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1988. I attempted to chart the redemptive plot-line there, whereby horrendous sufferings are made meaningful by being woven into the divine redemptive plot. My considered opinion is that such collaboration would be too strenuous for the human condition were it not to be supplemented by a more explicit and beatific divine intimacy.

(i) First, because God in Christ participated in horrendous evil through His passion and death, human experience of horrors can be a means of identifying with Christ, either through sympathetic identification (in which each person suffers his/her own pains, but their similarity enables each to know what it is like for

the other) or through mystical identification (in which the created person is supposed literally to experience a share of Christ's pain. For example, Julian of Norwich tells us that she prayed for and received the latter ( *Revelations of Divine Love* , chapter 17). Mother Theresa of Calcutta seems to construe Matthew 25:31-46 to mean that the poorest and the least are Christ, and that their sufferings are Christ's. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* , Harper & Row, Publishers, New York 1960, pp.72-75). ).

(ii) Julian of Norwich's description of heavenly welcome suggests the possible defeat of horrendous evil through Divine gratitude. According to Julian, before the elect have a chance to thank God for all He has done for them, God will say, Thank you for all your suffering, the suffering of your youth. She says that the creature's experience of Divine gratitude will bring such full and unending joy as could not be merited by the whole sea of human pain and suffering throughout the ages. *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 14. I am grateful to Houston Smith for recognizing this scenario of Julian's as a case of Chisholmian defeat. (iii) A third idea identifies temporal suffering itself with a vision into the inner life of God, and can be developed several ways. Perhaps, contrary to medieval theology, God is not impassible, but rather has matched capacities for joy and for suffering. Perhaps, as the Heidelberg catechism suggests, God responds to human sin and the sufferings of Christ with an agony beyond human conception. Cf. Plantinga, *Self-Profile*, Alvin Plantinga , p.36. Alternatively, the inner life of God may be, strictly speaking and in and of itself, beyond both joy and sorrow. But, just as (according to Rudolf Otto) humans experience Divine presence now as tremendum (with deep dread and anxiety), now as fascinans (with ineffable attraction), so perhaps our deepest suffering as much as our highest joys may themselves be direct visions into the inner life of God, imperfect but somehow less obscure in proportion to their intensity. And if a face-to-face vision of God is a good for humans incommensurate with any non-transcendent goods or ills, so any vision of God (including horrendous suffering) would have a good aspect insofar as it is a vision of God (even if it has an evil aspect insofar as it is horrendous suffering). For the most part, horrors are not recognized as experiences of God (any more than the city slicker recognizes his visual image of a brown patch as a vision of Beulah the cow in the distance). But, Christian mysticism might claim, at least from the post-mortem perspective of the beatific vision, such sufferings will be seen for what they were, and retrospectively no one will wish away any intimate encounters with God from his/her life-history in this world. The created person's experience of the beatific vision together with his/her knowledge that intimate Divine presence stretched back over his/her pre-mortem life and reached down into the depths of his/her worst suffering, would provide retrospective comfort independent of comprehension of the reasons-why akin to the two-year-old's assurance of its mother's love. Taking this third approach, Christians would not need to commit themselves about what in any event we do not know: viz., whether we will (like the two year old) ever grow up enough to understand the reasons why God permits our participation in horrendous evils. For by contrast with the best of earthly mothers, such Divine intimacy is an incommensurate good and would cancel out for the creature any need to know why.

## **V. Conclusion:**

The worst evils demand to be defeated by the best goods. Horrendous evils can be overcome only by the goodness of God. Relative to human nature, participation in horrendous evils and loving intimacy with God are alike disproportionate: for the former threatens to engulf the good in an individual human life with evil, while the latter guarantees the reverse engulfment of evil by good. Relative to one another, there is also disproportion, because the good that God is , and intimate relationship with Him, is incommensurate with created goods and evils alike. Because intimacy with God so outpaces relations (good or bad) with any creatures, integration into the human person's relationship with God confers significant meaning and positive value even on horrendous suffering. This result coheres with basic Christian intuition: that the powers of darkness are stronger than humans, but they are no match for God! Standard generic and global solutions have for the most part tried to operate within the territory common to believer and unbeliever, within the confines of religion-neutral value theory. Many discussions reflect the hope that substitute attribute-analyses, candidate reasons-why and/or defeaters could issue out of values shared by believers and unbelievers alike. And some virtually make this a requirement on an adequate solution. Mackie knew better how to distinguish the many charges that may be leveled against religion. Just as philosophers may or may not find the existence of God plausible, so they may be variously attracted or repelled by Christian values

of grace and redemptive sacrifice. But agreement on truth-value is not necessary to consensus on internal consistency. My contention has been that it is not only legitimate, but, given horrendous evils, necessary for Christians to dip into their richer store of valuables to exhibit the consistency of (1) and (2). I develop this point at some length in *Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers*, pp. 127-35. I would go one step further: assuming the pragmatic and/or moral (I would prefer to say, broadly speaking, religious) importance of believing that (one's own) human life is worth living, the ability of Christianity to exhibit how this could be so despite human vulnerability to horrendous evil, constitutes a pragmatic/moral/religious consideration in its favor, relative to value schemes that do not.

To me, the most troublesome weakness in what I have said, lies in the area of conceptual underdevelopment. The contention that God suffered in Christ or that one person can experience another's pain require detailed analysis and articulation in metaphysics and philosophy of mind. I have shouldered some of this burden elsewhere, For example in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in Some Fourteenth Century Franciscans, Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter*, edited by William A. Frank and Girard J. Etzkorn, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y. 1985, pp. 21-57. but its full discharge is well beyond the scope of this paper.

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