

The Connection Building Theodicy

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I. Introduction

The problem of evil is the apparent conflict between the belief in an all good, all powerful God and the existence of the tremendous amount of evil we find in the world. A theodicy is an attempt to offer a plausible set of reasons for *why God* allows evil. Some common theodicies that are often repeated are that God allows moral evil (sin) because God wanted to create creatures with free will, or that the evil in the world is a result of the fall of Adam and Eve. Although perhaps partial answers to the problem of evil, these theodicies face serious difficulties if viewed as complete explanations for why God allows evil. For example, the free will theodicy cannot easily explain what philosophers call natural evil – human and animal suffering that is a result of natural causes, such as disease, famine, and the like. Further, it cannot easily account for the existence of moral and spiritual darkness, which seems to inhibit the exercise of free will; nor can it easily account for the extent of moral evil – as C. S. Lewis famously stated, why God has given his creatures such enormous permission to torture each other. Even combined with the traditional fall theodicy – the idea that the evil in the world is the result of the free choice of Adam and Eve – it still faces serious problems. For example, why would an all good God allow the sin of pair of humans have such devastating consequences on the rest of us and the world. Don't we, as a society, try to prevent cocaine addicts or alcoholics from devastating the lives of their children? Couldn't God have given Adam and Eve's children a strong "genetic" resistance to the infection of original sin? I am not arguing here that the fall did not happen, only that, among other problems, it pushes the theodicy question back one step to why an all good God would allow the fall to have such consequences. Further, modern science overwhelmingly shows that life has been on earth for at least a billion year, and hence death and suffering were here long before Adam and Eve. I am not arguing here that the fall did not happen, only that, among other problems, it pushes the theodicy question back one step to why an all good God would allow the fall to have such consequences.

In light of the many problems with these theodicies and others, in this paper, I will develop a new theodicy that I call the connection building theodicy, which others have encouraged me to call the "love" theodicy. I do not claim that this theodicy offers a complete account of why God allows evil; I only claim that it offers significant insight into some of the reasons why an all good God would create a world with the evils we find around us. Other theodicies, such as the free will theodicy and the soul making theodicy, also offer significant insight. However, I believe that all theodicies are incomplete, and even when taken together they do not offer a complete account of why God allows evil. God's reason for allowing some evil, I suspect, will always remain a mystery, at least in this life.

As with most theodicies, this one assumes what is known as the greater good principle, which purports to simply explicate the minimal conditions that our concept of goodness requires of the actions of a being who qualifies as being "good." Roughly, with some qualifications I will leave out, the greater good principle states that:

A perfectly good being would eliminate all pointless evil that he/she could--that is, all evil that is not necessary for the existence of a greater good or the prevention of a greater evil.

A major motivation for this principle is human cases in which we think that a person is morally justified in allowing evil. For example, an all good doctor in the civil war would be justified in causing a soldier intense pain by sawing off his leg if that was the only way to save his life from a gangrene infection. On the other hand, a doctor today would typically not be justified in doing this, because with today's medicine harming the patient in this way is not necessary for the greater good of saving a person's life.

Applied to God, the Greater Good Principle (GGP) can be written as:

(GGP) An all good God would allow a particular evil E only if E was necessary for the existence of a greater good G or the prevention of a greater evil.

By saying that an evil E is necessary for the existence of a greater good G, we mean that not even God could bring about G without allowing E. For example, in the traditional free will theodicy, God must allow humans to choose evil in order for humans to have morally significant libertarian free will – that is, an undetermined choice between right and wrong. If God prevented us from choosing evil, then God would eliminate this sort of free will. Note this principle does not say the greater good will actually be achieved: only God's allowing the evil is necessary for the greater good to exist. For example, if God did not allow person to freely choose evil, then the good of a person freely choosing good over evil could not exist. Yet, that person might not as a matter of fact choose the good over the evil, and hence this good might never be realized.

Since a theodicy attempts to explain *why* God allows some particular types of evil, the Greater Good Principle, therefore, requires that an adequate theodicy meet the following three conditions:

- i) It must delineate the types of evil that it is trying to explain and the greater good G that is supposed to be made possible by God's allowing these types of evil.
- ii) It must be plausible to consider G a greater good, that is, a good that outweighs the types of evil in question.
- iii) It must show, or make it plausible to believe, that it is *impossible* for the greater good G to exist without God's allowing the types of evil in question.

This is a very difficult set of criteria to meet. But, by the greater good principle, a theodicy must meet these criteria if it really is going to explain why God allows a particular types of evil.

II: Some Thoughts on the Purpose of Developing Theodicies:

In some circles, the whole point of developing a theodicy is called into question. Indeed, we are often told that the project of developing theodicies is not only misguided, but even harmful since it trivializes evil, taking away not only the deep mystery of evil but also its "evilness" by implying that it is really not so bad since it has some larger redemptive purpose. In response, I first point out that denying that God's allowing evil has a larger purpose radically takes away from God's goodness. It says, for instance, that God allows babies to be killed and tortured for no reason when God could easily have prevented it. Moreover, for many of those who do suffer, it says to them that their sufferings are ultimately pointless, without any redeeming purpose.

This, I suspect, is entirely unhelpful to many who suffer, who need meaning and hope. So, I really do not think it is an option for a Christian to deny that there is a redemptive purpose in God's allowing evil.

Second, something can be intrinsically very bad – such as certain forms of wickedness in the world – even though, by God's grace, it ultimately leads to a greater good. For example, Paul states in Romans 5:18 - 6:1 that because of sin, grace has abounded. But, as Paul emphatically states, the fact that sin led to grace – which he takes to be a great good – does not mean that sin is not intrinsically evil. I suspect that those who are offering this objection have confused the intrinsic value or disvalue of something with its extrinsic value or disvalue.

That said, it is all too easy for Christians to provide overly simplistic answers to why God allows particular cases or types of evil, or inappropriately to present someone who is suffering with various reasons for their suffering without first empathizing and taking seriously the suffering the person is going through. At some point, however, it is pastorally helpful for a person to see some redemptive value in their suffering. Having a vision of the redemptive value not only helps a person endure suffering, but also to act in morally courageous ways within the suffering. First, this is testified to by scripture— such as the book of James where the author encourages the Christians to joyfully endure suffering because suffering produces fortitude (James 1:1-2). Further, both Jesus and the apostle Paul, we are told, were able to endure great suffering because they had a vision of an eternal good resulting from it. Hebrews 12: 1-2, for instance, encourages Christians to follow the example of Jesus who endured the cross “because of the joy set before him” and Paul tells us that “we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen by at what cannot be seen; for that which can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” (2 Cor. 4: 16 - 18). This is also a theme of the heroes of faith recounted in Hebrews 11.

Further, however, this need for a larger redemptive vision has much extra-biblical testimony to support it. Not only have I found this to be true in my own life, but people whom I have known who have suffered greatly have said the same things, and it is supported by others who have endured terrible suffering. Psychiatrist and Nazi concentration camp survivor Victor Frankl, for instance, claimed that seeing some larger purpose was the key to surviving the extreme sufferings of the concentration camps.

Besides the above pastoral purposes, theodicies more generally help alleviate the problem of evil by presenting some plausible reasons why God might have allowed evil. They thereby undercut the atheist contention that there is no good reason why an all good, all powerful God would allow evil. But, theodicies serve another purpose besides this. They also all shed light on the meaning of life and help us in our development of a coherent theology. For, it is evil that presses home the question of why we are here. If there were no evil, then the answer to why we exist would be simple: to enjoy life. But, the existence of evil eliminates this simple answer. Rather, the answer to why we are here must be intimately tied with the answer to the question of why God allows evil. Every theodicy attempts to provide at least a partial answer to this question, and thus indirectly attempts to provide a partial answer to the meaning of life. [False substitute problem]

It should also be noted that what we think God's purposes are for creating this world will have an enormous influence on how we live our lives. For example, suppose one thought that our purpose here on earth is to evangelize and thus help save other people from eternal hell. If one really took this purpose seriously, then one would subordinate all other concerns in life to that purpose: for example, if one thought that raising a family would interfere with evangelism—which it often would because it takes an enormous amount of time and energy—then one would forsake raising a family and instead devote all one's time and energy to the project of evangelizing the world. Thus, in the very project of living one's life, one takes a position—whether consciously or

unconsciously— on what the meaning and purpose of one’s life is. Thinking about theodicies simply helps one consciously choose what position to adopt on this question.

All this said, it also seems helpful— both in dealing with one’s own suffering, the suffering of others, and the suffering that has occurred throughout human history -- to partially leave the existence of evil as a mystery. As Paul says, at present we only see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12), which implies both understanding and mystery at the same time. This is more generally true of the intellectual life in general: we ought to try to gain insight and understanding into God and the world, but at the same time always humbly realize how limited our understanding is.

I must confess here that as the years have passed I have come to be more open to the mystery of why evil exists, and to other theodicies as partial explanations for the existence of evil. When I first came up with the connection building theodicy about seven years ago, I thought it could explain all the types of evil in the world. The turning point was when a student of mine said that even humans often had multiple reasons for their actions, and hence one would expect God in his manifold wisdom to have multiple reasons for allowing evil, some of which might be hidden from us.

It is easy when one comes up with, or comes across, what one takes to be a powerful idea to think that it is all-encompassing. This is not all bad, however, since often it supplies the passion to develop and extend the idea as far as possible. One sees this among those who are so impressed with the success of science that they think that everything about the world can be explained by physics and chemistry, all the while neglecting huge holes in their system such as the inability to explain consciousness in such a reductive scheme. One also encounters this within my own fellow analytic philosophers, which can often come across as claiming that all of reality can ultimately be explicated in the clear, crisp concepts for which analytic philosophers strive.

Finally, one encounters this conceptual imperialism even among those who purportedly stress valuing the other, such as some of my friends in continental philosophy. Specifically, it seems to me that they too often attempt to hegemonically extend insights they have found of great value to all of reality and human thought. So, for instance, human attempts to systematically understand reality or God are rejected in the name of infinite play of language or because such attempts are claimed to partake of onto-theology. This of course, fails to value the other of analytic philosophical theology and the whole tradition of systematic theology.

Like everyone else, I suppose my view is at least partially the result of one of the major fields I work in, philosophy of physics. On the one hand, physics has been extraordinarily successful at systematically understanding our world in terms of mathematics. Physics, and science more generally, certainly ranks as one of reason’s greatest triumphs, something I feel all too often postmodern thinkers fail to take seriously enough. Yet, at the same time, the world discovered by physics is deeply mysterious and puzzling, even to the best minds. As the late Nobel laureate Richard Feynmann used to tell his physics students at the California Institute of Technology, “I think it is safe to say that no one understands quantum mechanics. Do not keep saying to yourself, if you can possibly avoid it, ‘but how can it be like that?’ because you will go ‘down the drain’ into a blind alley which nobody has yet escaped. Nobody knows how it can be like that.” As with the physical world, I believe the same dynamic of intelligibility and mystery occur in understanding God and God’s interactions with the world, particularly in the area of theodicy.

III. The Connection Building Theodicy Explained

The basic idea behind this theodicy is that God must allow both moral and natural evil to exist in order for certain sorts of valuable eternal connections to be realized among persons, which are considered *intrinsically* valuable. Moreover, because these connections last an infinite amount of time into the future, their intrinsic value becomes very large or infinite and thus their goodness

outweighs any finite evil required to produce them. A brief rendition of this theodicy can be given by the following diagram:

God Allows Certain types of Moral and Natural Evil because *it is necessary for*:

Various Sorts of freely chosen virtuous responses which are *necessary for*:

Certain Types of Eternal Bonds of Appreciation and Intimacy.

The “Certain types of Eternal Bonds of Appreciation and Intimacy” in the last line are just those types of bonds of appreciation and intimacy that could not exist if there were not any evil in the world. Let’s look at what some examples of what these bonds might be, and why they could not exist if God did not allow evil to occur.

1. Eternal bond of appreciation for being forgiven. This bond not only exists between human beings, but between human beings and God, according to Christian theology. Clearly, the existence of such a bond necessarily requires that one has sinned against another person [moral evil] and that the other person has in turn forgiven the trespass; if God did not allow moral evil, there would be no possibility of forgiveness occurring. For Christians, the preeminent case of such a bond of appreciation for being forgiven is between us and Christ, such as exemplified in the song *Amazing Grace*. Of course, I do not claim that God primarily allows moral evil so that He can forgive us, or that we can forgive each other. That would be a little perverse, much like letting a child almost drown so you can be appreciated for rescuing them. I use this as my first illustration since it is obvious that this bond of appreciation for being forgiven could not exist unless there was moral evil.

2. Eternal bond of appreciation for being aided in times of suffering, especially when that aid involved some sort of sharing in the pain and suffering of the one being helped. Clearly, the existence of this bond necessarily requires the evil of suffering and a corresponding virtuous response by another to that suffering. If there were no suffering in the world, one could not appreciate another person for aiding them in this way. For Christians, the preeminent case of such a sharing in another suffering is that of Christ, who deeply shared in our pain and suffering.

3. Eternal bond of appreciation for being helped out of moral and spiritual darkness. The existence of this bond necessarily requires the evil of living in moral and spiritual darkness and the virtuous response by another of helping one out of such darkness. This sort of bond is particularly deep since it involves contributing to the most significant aspect of a person: their moral and spiritual development. It should be noted, however, that spiritual and moral darkness can come in many degrees and forms. Anywhere people are unaware of significant moral and spiritual truths, they are living in spiritual darkness to some extent. Bringing the gospel to people is one way of helping them out of

spiritual darkness. But, even those in other cultures who are not Christians can help their fellow humans out of moral and spiritual darkness, by teaching them such things as ethics, and the various spiritual truths of which they are aware. Such spiritual truths could include that there is a God or that there exists some higher way to follow that transcends self-centered desires, such as the Chinese Tao or the Mahayana Buddhist non-attachment and compassion for all creatures.

In sum, the greater goods envisioned by this theodicy are those eternal positive bonds of intimacy and appreciation formed between two beings based on one being significantly contributing to the other's life either by aiding them in times of suffering, forgiving them for a wrong done, or helping them out of moral and spiritual darkness.

These connections should not be thought of as some thing over and above the act of love between the two people. To help see the point here, consider an analogy. Your parents have a special connection with you, namely they were the ones who gave birth to you and raised you. No matter what happens in the future, they will always be connected with you in that way. Even if you come to dislike them and therefore cut off all relationships with them, the connection would still remain. Why? Because the connection between them and you that we are talking about is not some third fact (such as an ongoing relationship) but simply the fact that they gave birth to you and raised you. And since the past is the past and therefore cannot be changed, this connection is forever: they will always be your parents.

Similarly, if you are kind to someone in this life, that fact will last for all eternity. Suppose, for instance, you save a drowning child. For all eternity, it will be the case that you were the one who saved the child from drowning. Thus, there would be a certain sort of eternal connection between you and the child.

It should be stressed that this theodicy does not claim that deep bonds of appreciation or intimacy cannot exist without evil. All the theodicy claims is that the above types of bonds could not exist without evil. For example, if Alice bakes a cake for Jane, Jane can appreciate Alice for her generosity even though no one suffered or sinned. But some kinds of relationships of connectedness and appreciation could not exist without evil. In a world in which there were no moral evil, for instance, forgiveness would not exist and hence no one would appreciate another for being forgiven. Or, in a world in which no one lived in moral and spiritual darkness, there could not exist any appreciation for being helped out of such darkness by someone else, nor any feeling of special connectedness with another for being the instrument of one's enlightenment or salvation. And similarly, in a world in which there was no suffering, there would be no appreciation for someone sacrificially helping another person in that time of suffering by deeply sharing in it with that person and bearing some of the load. Given that such connections are good, then it follows that if God created a world in which there was no suffering or moral evil, a certain class of goods—namely those kinds of connections of appreciation mentioned above—would be missing.

Further, it is important to stress that an advocate of the connection building theodicy need not hold that God creates evil in order for these connections to occur. Rather, God creates a world that operates according to natural law, to a significant extent independently of any direct influence or intervention to make it a morally better place. Further, God has left the

responsibility for the state of the world to a significant extent up to us. To a significant extent, God will intervene in the world in order to make it a *morally* better place—that is, a place with less evil and suffering-- only at our request. That is, to a significant extent, it is we human beings who must make God *morally* present in the world, such as through compassion for others, through prayer, or being responsive to God’s spirit working through us. It is because God decided to take this partly “hands off approach” that evil occurs.

Now, the big question is, why did God take this “hands off” approach when God knew that it would result in enormous amounts of moral and natural evil? According to the greater good principle, the answer is that this hands off approach allows for certain greater goods to be realized—such as free will, and the various connections described above— that would not otherwise be realized, and that these goods outweigh the evils that occur because of pursuing this policy. The connection building theodicy attempts to provide one important set of great goods that could only be realized by God’s taking this hands off approach. It does not purport to provide all the reasons that God creates this sort of world in which so much evil and suffering occur.

To elaborate, this “hands off” approach is necessary for certain kinds of connections, such as those involving helping each other out of moral and spiritual darkness, or helping other people directly or indirectly through such means as prayer. As mentioned above, for instance, if God did not allow people to live in moral and spiritual darkness, then we could not help each other in this regard. The reason for this is that connections of appreciation can only form between humans (and between humans and other beings, such as animals) only insofar as we are *responsible* for one another’s welfare. If, for instance, God directly provided all good things to each of us, then there would be no room in such a world for us to help bring joy to one another. Or, if God did not allow people to suffer, or humans to exist in a sinful state, in bondage to sin and spiritual darkness, then there would be no opportunity for one person helping another out of such bondage and darkness. Thus, this theodicy helps explain why God has created a world in which we are so interdependent – that is, a world in which the welfare of each of us depends on the actions of others, both in the past and in the present. One preeminent case of such dependence is that between parents and their children.

Now this “hands off” approach has as a likely, unpreventable byproduct, certain evils, such as the Holocaust. God decided that the goods obtained by taking the “hands off” approach was worth the risk of the resulting evils. How this all works is given below:

1. Hands off approach is necessary to allow for the occurrence of certain kinds of intrinsically valuable, eternal connections (along with perhaps other great goods not covered in this theodicy).
2. This hands off approach has as a likely byproduct evils such as the Holocaust.

Finally, it should be noted that these bonds of appreciation and intimacy not only occur between humans, but between humans and God, between humans and angels who come to their aid, and between humans and the rest of creation. In scripture, this is illustrated by the angel who fights against the prince of Persia for twenty one days in order to come to Daniel’s aid (Daniel 10:13, 20 - 21); it is also illustrated by Romans 8: 18 – 21, which implies that it is through human beings that all of creation will be redeemed.

IV. Careful Development of Theodicy:

It is useful at this point to provide a more careful development of this theodicy using the greater good principle and the three criteria for an adequate theodicy presented at the beginning of the paper. First, we note that the basic idea behind this theodicy is that the occurrence of evil develops connections between people that have special intrinsic value.

This can be summed up in terms of the following assumption:

Special Value Assumption: There is a particularly valuable sort of connection created between two or more persons (or beings) when one person willingly shares in and helps alleviate another's suffering, helps them out of spiritual and moral darkness, or forgives them.

Given this background, we can explicate the connection building theodicy in terms of the three criteria or theodicies listed previously:

i) *Delineating Evil E and Greater Good G.* The connection-building theodicy is primarily designed to account for natural evil, but it is also able to account for moral evil. The greater good G that is supposed to be achieved is the type of valuable connection explicated in the *Special Value assumption* above.

ii) *Why G is a Greater Good.* One reason for thinking that these connections are a greater good goes as follows. According to the Special Value Assumption, these connections have some special intrinsic value. But, given that we will live forever as all theistic religions assert, this good is an eternal good as explicated above. Thus, it will keep accumulating the longer we live and thus end up being of infinite worth, even if it is of only small worth over our life-span on earth. Accordingly, its ultimate worth will outweigh any finite evil in this life. [To see how this accumulation of worth could occur, consider an analogy. Suppose you have a very minor toothache, but to get rid of the toothache you will have to undergo a very painful operation. If you found out the toothache was only going to last a week, or even a year, you probably would not undergo the operation. But, if you found out it would last the rest of your life, you probably would undergo the operation; and you certainly would if you found out the toothache would last for all eternity. Why the difference in the three cases? The answer seems to be that the "badness" of having the toothache increases with the amount of time you have it, and so eventually this "badness" becomes so great that it is worth undergoing the painful operation to remove it. Similarly, the "goodness" of this special connection will keep accumulating for all eternity and eventually outweigh any finite evil in this life-time necessary to produce it.] As St. Paul said in 2 Cor. 4: 17: "Our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all."

iii) *Why G Could Not Exist Without God's Allowing E.* Since the connections that are supposed to be the greater good simply consist of (eternal) connections of appreciation and intimacy for being aided in times of suffering, for being helped out of spiritual darkness, and for

being forgiven, these could not exist without God's allowing evil. If, for instance, God did not allow people to suffer, it would not be possible for one person to aid another by sharing in and carrying part of the burden of another's suffering.

V. Explanatory Power and Implications of Theodicy

Finally, it is worth considering the explanatory power of the connection building theodicy along with some of its implications:

i) Makes sense of why we live in a world in which we can have so much responsibility for and impact on another's welfare;

ii) Helps explain why God does not intervene more often in world, and mostly in response to prayer;

iii) Helps explain why God uses weak, inefficient human beings to spread the Gospel instead of sending angels; further, more generally it helps the existence of moral and spiritual darkness, and why God has even allowed Christians to some extent be in spiritual darkness. The reason is that God has left it up to human beings to aid each other in knowing God along with more general moral and spiritual truths. This allows for certain sorts of bonds of appreciation to be formed. For instance, why did God allow faulty Biblical manuscripts to be widely used for over a thousand-year period? If God did not do this – e.g., if God guaranteed that the correct manuscript were available from the beginning – then there would not be any bonds of appreciation for all those people who labored in trying to obtain the most reliable New and Old Testament manuscripts. Similar things could be said for why God did not do more to prevent the many other types of moral and spiritual darkness that plague our world.

iv) Makes sense of the importance of prayer – prayer is the means by which we can help others “non-locally” and in other ways that go beyond normal means; Further, it explains why prayer generally requires such persistence to be effective, as taught throughout scripture. (For example, see Luke 11:5-13). The connection building theodicy explains why. If our prayers required little effort or persistence on our part, then there would be little appreciation from others for helping them through prayer since it would have required so little effort on our part.

v) Explains why God uses intermediaries – such as angels, as illustrated in Daniel 10, Luke 1:26, 2:8-15, Acts 12:6-7, etc. – in answering prayer, and why God often works through other human beings, such as doctors, since this creates more connections of appreciation and intimacy.

vi) Explains what the Apostle Paul could mean when he says about how some Christians will receive greater rewards than others in heaven. These rewards could be greater connections of appreciation and intimacy with those we have helped.

vii) Provides a partial explanation of the meaning of our earthly existence: Among other things, this world is a place designed to allow for the development of those special connections--such as that formed by helping someone else in times of suffering--that cannot occur without the existence of evil. (Hence, this is our only opportunity to form these connections since they cannot occur in heaven.)

The connection building theodicy implies that God generally works indirectly in the world through human beings or other intermediaries to bring about his kingdom, since this maximizes connections. Even some scientific pursuits, such as discovery of the polio vaccine, can be seen as developing positive connections: all those who have benefited from the vaccine are positively connected to all those involved in discovering the vaccine, including the supporters of the research. Indeed, with perhaps some qualifications, every good deed one does creates and expanding array of positive connections into the future, even if the persons indirectly benefiting from your good deed does not yet aware of the your contribution. Further, this theodicy suggests that God has set things up in such a way that we have much to learn from other world cultures and religions, and they from us, since this would tend to maximize connections. Finally, the connection building theodicy directs us toward full engagement with this world in helping other people, while at the same time making the engagement of eternal value.

In the following subsection, I address further objections to and questions regarding the connection building theodicy. However, because of time considerations, I will only address those if they come up in the question and answer period.

Vi. Further Questions and Objections:

There are several major objections to the connection-making theodicy that I shall list below along with possible replies to these objections.

Question/Objection 1: *Is it really believable that such connections outweigh the evil necessary to produce them?*

Response: The key to this response is that one must take an **eternal** perspective, as St. Paul does in the passages cited below. Assuming that we will live forever as most theistic religions assert, these relations of appreciation and connection can last forever. But, given that we will live forever as all theistic religions assert, this good can be eternal good as explicated above. Thus, it will keep accumulating the longer we live and thus end up being of infinite worth, even if it is of only small worth over our life-span on earth. Accordingly, it ultimate worth will outweigh any finite evil in this life.

Question/Objection 2: *Can this theodicy really at least partially explain why God allows horrible evils such as the Holocaust? Or what about whole populations being wiped out by a natural disaster such as a flood?* *Response:* One answer goes back to the hands off approach discussed above in our main explication of this theodicy. Even evils such as the Holocaust can be

partially redeemed in the sense that they result in great goods that could not otherwise exist. The Holocaust allowed for a whole variety of connections that would not otherwise be possible. Aware of the risk of seeming to trivialize the tremendous suffering the Jews endured during the Holocaust, let me list some of these potential connections. First, given that Christ shares in the sufferings of the whole world, the Holocaust allows for particularly deep connections between its victims and Christ, even if the victims were unaware of it. (See question/objection 6 below.) Second, the Holocaust allows for a particularly great degrees of forgiveness: the worse the evil that someone commits against another, the greater the amount of forgiveness that is possible. And, as Jesus said, those who are forgiven much, love much. Third, the Holocaust led to an enormous number of people who worked at all levels, politically, through writing, and the like, to try to prevent it from happening again. We an future generations owe these people a debt of gratitude and *appreciation* for their work for making our world a better place, even though we might not be aware of what they did.

This is not to say that all the horrible evils of the Holocaust can be accounted for by this theodicy. I am sure some evils will remain a mystery. I simply claim that it provides one of the reasons why God takes a hands-off approach to the world, even to the extent of allowing the Holocaust.

Question/Objection 3: *Opportunity Cost Objection.* Although the occurrence of evil is necessary for the types of bonds postulated by the connection building theodicy, these bonds are obtained at the *cost* of other bonds being formed that do not require suffering or moral evil. For example, although having a child that is seriously ill all during her childhood allows for bonds of shared suffering and special care to form, it eliminates other bonds based on shared health and wholeness, such as enjoying a beautiful hike in the mountains.

Response: There are at least two responses. First, one could plausibly claim that because pain and suffering strip a person down to their core, bonds formed by pain and suffering are by nature deeper. Moreover, because being with and caring for someone during times of suffering requires special sacrifices, the amount of appreciation will be deeper and greater, thus making them more prized from the perspective of eternity. Second, from the perspective of this theodicy, this life here on earth is our only chance of forming these bonds that require suffering and evil, whereas we will have all eternity to form those bonds based on shared joy. So, God's allowing evil and suffering does not cause us to lose out on these other types bonds as the objection implies, but in some cases merely postpones their formation to the next life. But, if God did not create a world in which there was pain, suffering, and moral evil we would never have the opportunity to form those kinds of bonds that these evils require, and thus these great good of these sorts of bonds would be lacking for all eternity.

Of course, one will always miss out on certain *tokens* (or even very specific types) of the bonds of shared joy. If, because of illness, one can't share the joy of hiking in the mountains with Jane, the particular bond – that of sharing the joy of hiking in the mountains with Jane while here on earth – will be missing for all eternity. However, the more general type of bond will not be missing: that of having bonds of shared joy with Jane, because these can be obtained in heaven, if not hear

on earth. Thus, advocates of the connection building theodicy must hold, the existence of the sorts of bonds that only a world in which there is suffering can allow outweighs the loss of these more specific tokens or types of bonds of shared joy

Question/Objection 4: *Pain and suffering often lead to none of the above bonds of appreciation being formed, or even negative bonds being formed.* For example, often people suffer and then die without anyone coming to their aid, and often when someone hurts another a negative bond of hate is formed, certainly not one of appreciation.

Response: Several responses can be offered. First, one could simply admit that all the theodicy claims is that moral and natural evils are necessary for the *possibility* of these bonds occurring but is not committed to claiming that they will always occur. There *possibility* of occurring is sufficient reason for God's allowing the evils. Second, there are many connections formed due to evil and suffering that we might be unaware of, especially those involving angels helping us behind the scenes or God the Son taking our pain and suffering on himself during his Passion. (See Isaiah 52-53 about the Suffering Servant.) Finally, concerning the negative connections, these can be redeemed through forgiveness. If you hurt me, and I forgive you, a new positive connection of forgiveness is formed. For example, the person forgiven will greatly appreciate the person that forgave them for the act of forgiveness, and no doubt it does great good for the person doing the forgiving. This is one possible reason why forgiveness is so important, as stressed by Jesus: unlike any other action, forgiveness can redeem bad connections by, so to speak, encapsulating them in positive connections. Finally, one could respond to the above objection by claiming that the negative connections are an unfortunate byproduct of people living in moral darkness, or even appeal to aspects of the standard free will theodicy.

Question/Objection 5: *What if one is not aware of the help that one has been offered, say Christ sharing one's suffering?* The answer is that one need not be aware of it in this life, but eventually when "all things are brought to light" (John), we will become aware of it, and thus the connection of appreciation will become an eternal part of themselves.

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Question/Objection 6: Isn't it the case that being in the presence of God we will not remember this life? I would answer no. We will remember this life. Three reasons for thinking this: 1. If we did not, we could hardly be said to be the same person--imagine forgetting everything and starting over....2. Scripture: Several different scriptures say that everything will be brought to light: Mark 4.22, Matt. 10.26, Luke 12.3, 1 Cor. 4.5, 1 Cor. 13, + Idea of Judgment day (How can we be judged with no memory of our lives?) . [e.g. Luke 12.3: "What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs." 3. No compelling evidence against it.