Evolutionary Theodicy

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EXTINCTION, NATURAL EVIL, AND THE COSMIC CROSS

by Ted Peters

Abstract. Did the God of the Bible create a Darwinian world in which violence and suffering (disvalue) are the means by which the good (value) is realized? This is Christopher Southgate's insightful and dramatic formulation of the theodicy problem. In addressing this problem, the Exeter theologian rightly invokes the Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation, that is, we learn from the cross of Jesus Christ that God is present to nonhuman as well as human victims of predation and extinction. God co-suffers with creatures in their despair, abandonment, physical suffering, and death. What I will add with more force than Southgate is this: the Easter resurrection is a prolepsis of the eschatological new creation, and it is God's new creation which retroactively determines past creation. Although this does not eliminate the theodicy question, it lessens its moral sting.

Keywords: eschatology; natural evil; new creation; Christopher Southgate; theodicy; theology of the Cross

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The groaning of creation trapped in the futility of inescapable suffering punctures Christopher Southgate's heart. This empirical reality does not comport with our trust in a gracious and powerful God. Yet, there is the cross. The central symbol of the Christian faith is a suffering

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and dying man hanging on a cross. Might reflection on that cross help us get a grip on the intractable tragedy that pervades all existence on Earth?

Here is the central problem in Southgate's words: "The Darwinian account of nature therefore poses a theological problem: did the God of the Bible create a world in which violence and suffering [what Southgate labels "disvalue"] are the means by which the good [what Southgate labels "value"] is realized?" (Southgate 2008b, 53) Did God design natural evil into the evolutionary process as an unavoidable means toward a divine end? Is God, then, indirectly responsible for unfathomable creaturely suffering over deep time? These questions take on urgency and drama because of our empathy, because our hearts hurt when other creatures, even nonhuman organisms, hurt.

In what follows I will restate the problem generated by natural evil, examine Southgate's answers, entertain critiques, and then advance my own revised Theology of the Cross. I will show how Southgate rightly invokes the Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation, that is, we learn from the cross of Jesus Christ that God co-suffers with victims of predation and extinction, feeling with creatures their despair, abandonment, physical suffering, and death. Divine compassion includes the Trinitarian experience of creatures victimized by natural evil. What I will add more firmly than Southgate to this picture, however, is the gospel news of resurrection, of the divine promise of new creation. Southgate already believes this, to be sure; but I will more forcefully show that divine empathy revealed in the cross requires eschatological healing if it is to lessen the moral sting in theodicy.

Southgate's theological method is not merely a generic form of faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Rather, Southgate's faith is already formed by love (*fides caritate formata*). His theological explorations, therefore, constitute a continuing prayer to petition the Holy Trinity to make victory, not victimization, the last word.

The Problem: Would a Good God Create an Evolutionary World of Victimization, Suffering, and Extinction?

Here is the problem as it confronts every card-carrying evolutionary theist: how can we let God off the hook for the gratuitous evil and suffering we observe in the natural world? The fact that hungry predators must devour their prey while in the service of natural selection leading to the extinction of entire species is loathsome to the compassionate human heart. No amount of celebrating the evolutionary rise of altruism can make up for the fact that nature still remains "red in tooth and claw," to quote the

famous line of verse by Alfred Lord Tennyson. Who is to blame for this wretched situation?

Not every interpreter of Darwinian evolution views nature as unmitigated suffering. Among today's evolutionary biologists and theistic evolutionists we find many who wish to thank evolution for developing a sense of cooperation and altruism. Even if these positive human dispositions are inherited from our biological past, this in itself does not gainsay the necessity for dealing theologically with nature "red in tooth and claw." A closer look shows that evolutionary theorists cannot rightly claim that evolution's increase in cooperative altruism over time reduces the victimization of natural selection. Rather, cooperative altruism purportedly evolves in service of the survival of the fittest groups. Cooperative altruism is intra-tribal, whereas war and violence still characterizes extra-tribal competition. "Selfishness beats altruism within groups. Altruistic groups beat selfish groups. Everything else is commentary" (David Sloan Wilson and Edward O. Wilson, quoted in Kohn 2008, 297). In sum, creaturely suffering is ubiquitous, unchanged by the development of cooperative altruism.

Southgate gives attention to the nature of creaturely suffering. Physical suffering alone does not account for the tragedy inherent in evolutionary life. Even more dramatic is the victim's loss of fulfillment, the premature cutting off of life's potentials. "There are innumerable sufferers of the processes of predation and parasitism, including organisms for which life seems to contain no fullness, no expression of what it is to reach the potential inherent in being that creature. Indeed the overproduction typical of biological organisms virtually guarantees this. The unfulfilled organisms may be regarded as in some sense the victims or casualties of evolution" (Southgate 2008b, 57). Specifically, what lacks fulfillment is the potential of a creature to become a full self. "*What is vital to a treatment of evolutionary theodicy is to acknowledge that the character of the creation is such that many individual creatures never 'selve' in any fulfilled way*" (Southgate 2008b, 67, Southgate's italics).

When it comes to providing a theological explanation for natural evil such as loss of the potential for selving, our religious ancestors had it easy. They could simply blame Adam and Eve for falling into sin. It was human sin that corrupted an otherwise paradisiacal creation. In the wake of Darwinian evolutionary theory and the concept of deep time, however, we can no longer locate a primordial paradise in history let alone an event such as the Fall. Our biological inheritance still potent in today's DNA indicates that there never was a time when our progenitors were spared from violence. We cannot help but ask: did God create life already violent? In short, today's theologian informed by science seems trapped into asserting that it is the Creator, not the creature, who is responsible for sin, evil, and suffering.

Two not-too-feeble attempts to protect our Creator God from responsibility are being put forth by some of the most learned theologians of our era. Christopher Southgate names their positions: the *Free Process* argument and the *Only Way* argument (Southgate 2018). According to the Free Process argument, our evolving creation experiences freedom; and free action on the part of creatures risks electing evil. Even so, the gift of freedom is a greater good than the sin, evil, and suffering that we so disvalue. Or, to say it another way, the creation is free to make itself, and suffering is the cost that must be paid to purchase this creative freedom.

The Only Way argument is similar though distinctive: the only way for God to achieve goodness is to develop a creative process that includes the possibility, if not the unavoidability, for harm. Accordingly, the only way God could give rise to a biosphere containing value and beauty in life is to guide a process such as natural selection replete with extinction yielding to the survival of the fittest. Extinct species have been sacrificed so that humanity could evolve, and this is the only way God could have created us.

In both arguments, nature is autopoietic (self-creating) and God must rely upon nature's self-creating processes to realize the divine goal approached by the human species. Suffering is a byproduct.

Southgate's assessment of both the Free Process and Only Way arguments is this: they each presuppose that a Fall-based argument is no longer tenable and that any goodness in creation comes in a package deal with what is evil. One package. Both good and evil. This is the only creation we know. At least to date.

Ambiguity

The single package we call "life" is ambiguous. It is not purely evil. Nor is it purely good. God's purposes and the frustration of those purposes come together in a single package. *Ambiguity* is the term we must apply to this situation. Southgate is well aware that this is our plight. "It will be apparent anew how paradoxical the theology of evolutionary creation must be, given the Christian affirmation that a good God has given rise to a good creation, and yet as we have seen the creation is shot through with ambiguity. The purposes of God are, and are not, realized in the life of any given creature" (Southgate 2008b, 71).

Southgate rightly borrows this theological term, *ambiguity,* to describe this package deal. The neo-orthodox theologians of the twentieth century such as Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr insisted that the world we actually experience daily is always ambiguous. According to Tillich, life can be defined as a process characterized by (a) self-identity or self-integration, (b) self-alteration or self-creation, and (c) return to

one's self via self-transcendence. Yet, the daily life we actually experience undergoes relentless disruption, where "self-integration is countered by disintegration, self-creation is countered by destruction, self-transcendence is countered by profanization. Every life process has the ambiguity that the positive and negative elements are mixed in such a way that a definite separation of the negative from the positive is impossible" (Tillich 1951–1963, 3:32). Or, more simply put, life is always replete with both good and evil together: "As freedom develops, both good and evil develop with it" (Niebuhr 1941, 2:95).

Looking through the sunglasses of Tillich and Niebuhr, Southgate's quest for an adequate theodicy counts existentially as a quest for essence that lies beyond the ambiguity of existence. For Tillich and Niebuhr, ambiguity is an observation. For Southgate, ambiguity is a necessity. Southgate seems to be granting ambiguity as unavoidable, even for God. Without identifying a reason to justify the intransigency of ambiguity, Southgate assumes there exists some metaphysical, physical, ethereal, essential, demonic, or even logical reason that organisms cannot selve apart from evolution's competitive struggle for survival. God's geographical positioning system, accordingly, cannot route the divine creator around natural evil in order to drive directly toward life's unambiguous fulfillment. It is the stubbornness of this almost invisible premise that leads Southgate to entertain the Free Process defense and the Only Way defense.

What Southgate is pursuing, to borrow the nomenclature of Paul Tillich, is the unambiguous life. Southgate's theodicy is an attempt to explain how evolutionary ambiguity is unavoidable even for God who intends to create unambiguously fulfilled creaturely selves. To the Free Process and Only Way quests for the unambiguous life we now turn.

The Free Process Defense

To illustrate Southgate's quest, let's look briefly at John Polkinghorne's version of the Free Process defense. The Cambridge professor relies on the self-making dynamic of creation's autopoiesis. "In his great act of creation I believe that God allows the physical world to be itself, not in Manichaean opposition to him, but in that independence which is Love's gift of freedom to the beloved. The world is endowed in its fundamental constitution with an anthropic potentiality which makes it capable of fruitful evolution" (Polkinghorne 1989, 66).

Then, Polkinghorne turns to a corollary, namely, defending God against the charge of deliberately building sin, evil, and suffering into the creation. "The more science helps us to understand the world, the more clearly we see its inextricable entanglement of fertility and wastefulness. I have suggested that there is a Free-Process Defense in relation to natural evil, parallel to the familiar free-will defense in relation to moral evil. Natural evil is not

gratuitous, something that a Creator who was a bit more competent or a bit less callous could easily have eliminated. Created nature is a package deal, with the emergence of new forms of life and the shadow side of malformation and extinction necessarily intertwine" (Polkinghorne 2012, 8–9). In short, living in the ambiguity of good and evil is the price to be paid for God to create freedom—that is, to create life that is self-integrating, self-creative, and self-transcending.

Polkinghorne is by no means alone in proffering such an argument. The free process argument appeals to theologians for whom freedom is one of God's most important intentions. Evolution has determined that we would be free, argues theistic evolutionist Philip Hefner. "The central point to be made here is that freedom, as it has arisen among human beings within the evolutionary contest, seeks to be in harmony with the determinist course of evolution in which humans find themselves" (Hefner 1993, 117). Joshua Moritz makes the logic clear: "The price of moral freedom, rationality, and morality is the inevitability of suffering caused by both free agents and the impersonal, regularly operating laws of nature" (Moritz 2016, 270). Yet, such a theologian still feels he or she must protect God from being the author of evil by asserting that God creates the possibility for evil but not actual evil itself. "The free will defense against moral evil claims that by creating genuinely free creatures, God only created the *possibility* for moral evil, not the *actuality* (and surely then, not the *necessity*) of such evil; similarly, the free process defense claims that by creating a dynamic world, God merely created the *possibility* for natural evil, not its *actuality* (and certainly not its *necessity*)" (DeWeese 2017, 698, DeWeese's italics). God did not require that his children smash the toys or smash each other. Rather, via kenosis, God simply provided the children with this option. Let's turn now to the role of kenosis in exonerating the Creator God.

Creaturely freedom requires God's self-removal or kenosis, according to the free process argument, in order for freedom to occur in an autopoietic world. Nancey Murphy bluntly presents the logic of creation kenosis: "God voluntarily withholds divine power out of respect for the freedom and integrity of creatures. This means, as well, that God takes the risk and suffers the cost of cooperating with creatures . . . to achieve a higher goal: the free and intelligent cooperation of the creature in divine activity" (Murphy 2007, 135). Here is the logic: it is divine absence, not divine presence, which makes freedom possible and, thereby, pain, evil, suffering, and extinction possible.

Once God has said "bye-bye" to the creation through kenosis, according to the free process argument, then the creation is free to create itself in a continuing process of self-alteration. Once God has gone home and left the playground, nonhuman as well as human children are now free to smash the toys and even smash each other as they grow into creative adults. In sum, if you want to buy freedom you must pay by withdrawing divine

presence and risking creaturely evil. This seems to be the logic of the Free Process argument.

The Only Way Defense

Turning from the Free Process to the Only Way argument, Arthur Peacocke provides Southgate with an illustrative example. Central to Peacocke's argument is that suffering-causing natural processes are necessary to the realization of God's plan for the creation. Included in those things which we human beings value and God plans to realize are freedom, self-consciousness, and fulfillment. Such achievements could not have arisen apart from the negatives. Negatives are somehow required for positives, and this requirement for ambiguity puts a constraint on divine action. "There are inherent constraints on how even an omnipotent Creator could bring about the existence of law-like creation that is to be a cosmos and not a chaos," writes the late Oxford biologist and theologian; "and thus an arena for the free action of self-conscious, reproducing complex entities and for the coming to be of the fecund variety of living organisms whose existence the Creator delights in" (Peacocke 2001, 37). Nancey Murphy states bluntly the position combining Free Process with Only Way.

> If God is to have living, intelligent, free, loving partners for relationship, then the universe God created had to be almost exactly as it is with respect to the ways in which nature produces human and animal suffering, and in which creatures are limited and subject to imperfections. Natural and metaphysical evil are unavoidable by-products of choices God had to make in order to achieve his purposes in having creatures who could know, love, and serve him. (Murphy 2007, 140)

In sum, an evolving creation is the only way in which God could give rise to the sort of beauty, diversity, sentience and sophistication of creatures that the biosphere now contains.

As we can see, the Only Way defense puts constraints on God. God cannot directly create a world that looks like the eschatological new creation. God cannot simply declare that the lion will eat straw; rather, God must ask the evolving lion to slaughter wildebeest for eons before the lion enters the new creation where straw is the only item on the menu. Why must countless wildebeest be devoured by lions before God finally creates a friendly straw-eating pussy cat?

Southgate lifts up two constraints necessary to make the Only Way argument into a satisfactory theodicy. The first is an evolutionary constraint: only through a long evolutionary process is it possible for God to bring about complex and diverse life forms wherein divine values could arise. "The suffering incurred in the course of evolution may be regarded as having been necessary to the production of the conditions for the eventual reconciliation of the world to God" (Southgate and Robinson 2007, 89).

The second is a theological constraint: as we see in the New Testament account of Jesus, sacrifice is the unavoidable means to a redemptive end. Creaturely suffering functions as a sacrifice, as a means to a further end. The Christian symbol of the cross enforces the point that "there is an intrinsic relationship between suffering and flourishing in life" (Southgate and Robinson 2007, 90). Suffering, theologically speaking, is instrumental to the divine achievement. Only if these two constraints obtain can the Only Way defense succeed in justifying God in the face of natural evil. Southgate's own theodicy begins with the Only Way argument and then attempts to strengthen it and proceed further.

In brief, the omnipotent Creator God is constrained. "Evolution is not only the sole available option to fill the Earth, but perhaps it is also the only way to give rise to beings that will one day populate heaven" (Sollereder 2016a, 103). Because God is constrained by the parameters of evolutionary creation, God is not responsible for evil and suffering. Is this theologically persuasive? Not generally. "Both the anthropocentric and the non-anthropocentric only-way arguments fail," says Mats Wahlberg (Wahlberg 2015). We must ask: exactly why does evolution exist in such a way that its character puts constraints on the God who allegedly created evolution? The evolutionary constraint premise seems to be *assumed* in the Only Way argument; it is not itself argued for. Thankfully, Southgate's theodicy is not limited to the only way argument; he supplements it with the promise of redemption.

In sum, for Southgate our God does not create evolution as a means toward a further end. Rather, evolution replete with its natural evil derives from constraint. But, what kind of constraint? Is this a logical constraint? A physical constraint? Metaphysical? Is this constraint external to God? Now, I ask: Just where did this apparently external constraint come from?

The Cosmic Cross

Southgate does not answer this question, to my disappointment. But, he does offer something of significant theological value. He offers the cosmic cross to resolve the *cosmic theodicy*. What we have learned about the heart of God through special revelation, through the cross of Jesus Christ, is that God becomes present to the creature who suffers. Rather than cheer with the victors, God weeps with the victims. This implies that Southgate dare not posit as the goal of evolution some sort of future super-creature, some sort of eschatological winner in the battle for the survival of the fittest. A cosmic theodicy of the cross does not baptize the victorious survivors of natural selection. No creature suffers or dies alone.

Let me point out the dramatic shift now taking place. Whereas evolutionary theists tend to interpret God's creative work in terms of the victors in the struggle for existence, Southgate's Theology of the Cross turns our

attention to the victims. Rather than view the fittest who survive as the end of God's creative intention, Southgate points us to God's love for those who do not make it through the filter of natural selection.

How does Southgate turn the corner here? He introduces a most insightful interpretation of evolutionary history. The early history of biological evolution had been closed off to transcendence, because it locked creative processes within biology, within materiality. Evolution was not exactly corrupt; rather, it was limited, limited to strictly natural processes. But this changed with the incarnation. Once God became incarnate in the life, passion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the biological world became open to transcendence. Evolutionary history was opened up to the divine promise of redemption, to the eschatological transformation in which that lion will dine on straw and be sufficiently nourished by it. Southgate is now looking not only at evolution's past but to its future. To tease out the implications, we turn to a detailed review of the Theology of the Cross.

Theology of the Cross in Three Manifestations

Without using the term, Southgate relies on a specific manifestation of the *Theology of the Cross.* Because God is revealed as gracious in the cross, Southgate surmises that God is present to all victimized creatures, feeling their feelings. This is the Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation. Let me explain.

The first manifestation of the Theology of the Cross has to do with revelation. How do we know that our Creator God is gracious? Because this is what is revealed in the historical crucifixion. Yet, there is a catch. This revelation in the cross is not straightforward. Rather, it is paradoxical.

Martin Luther, who coined the idea of the Theology of the Cross, avers that the truth of God is revealed under its opposite. God's power is revealed in weakness, just as God's life is revealed in Jesus' death. The Reformer puts it this way: "The manifest and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness . . . it does [a theologian] no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. . . . 'Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself' (Isaiah 45:15)" (Luther 1955–1986, 31:52–53). The heart of God along with God's willingness to share the sufferings of the world come to articulation in the event of the cross.

With the label *Theology of the Cross* we refer to the paradox within special revelation, namely, God is revealed in, with, and under what is not divine. Specifically, the event of the cross reveals God in a most unexpected and mysterious way. In the cross we see tragedy, defeat, suffering, and death. Yet, to the eyes of faith, the God of meaning, victory, salvation, and resurrection is present. In, with, and under the weakness of the cross, the power of God

is present. In, with, and under the degradation of Jesus, the glory of God is present.

Paradoxical revelation constitutes the Theology of the Cross in its first manifestation. When we turn to the second manifestation, we perceive the presence of God as God in the suffering and despair of God's creatures everywhere. What Jesus experienced as an individual on the cross is a paradigm or, better, a specific representative incarnation of God's ubiquitous presence in the psyches of all creatures victimized by predation, injustice, or despair. Even the death of creatures is a death that takes place *in* God, so to speak. God is no stranger to death, because death takes place within God's trinitarian perichoresis.

It was Jürgen Moltmann who most clearly drew out of Luther this second manifestation of the Theology of the Cross.

> There can be no theology of the incarnation which does not become a theology of the cross. . . . Humiliation to the point of death on the cross corresponds to God's nature in the contradiction of abandonment. When the crucified Jesus is called the 'image of the invisible God,' the meaning is that *this* is God, and God is *like* this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. . . . The Christ event on the cross is a God event. (Moltmann 1974, 205)

In Jesus, suffering and death become events within the divine life (Peters 1993). The suffering and death of the human hypostasis in the second person of the Trinity becomes, due to the perichoresis, internal to God's very life. According to Elizabeth Johnson, "God suffers" (Johnson 2014, 203). God co-suffers with us because the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, "shared the fate of all who die, which is every living thing" (Johnson 2014, 204). In no way can God be convicted of instituting evil and suffering in creation. God is death's victim, not its perpetrator.

This second manifestation of the Theology of the Cross has been adopted by many scholars working in the field of Theology and Science. I call it the *cosmic cross.* The concept of the cosmic cross provides underpinning for a version of divine providence, according to which God works in, with, and under natural processes. According to Robert John Russell, for example, "Essentially what science describes without reference to God is precisely what God, working invisibly in, with, and through the processes of nature, is accomplishing" (Russell 2008b, 214). Yes, God acts in, with, and under natural processes. But, there is more. God not only acts; God is also acted upon. God receives from the world. "*God suffers in, with, and under the creative processes of the world,"* avers Peacocke (Peacocke 1993, 126). What the creation feels the Creator also feels, according to the Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation. To grant that God works in, with, and under natural processes requires divine presence, not kenotic withdrawal.

Two contemporary champions of the cosmic cross are Niels Henrik Gregersen and George Murphy. Gregersen's version of the cosmic cross is called *deep incarnation*, according to which the *decensus* of Jesus includes incarnating within the life of God the entirety of material existence: nature as known to biology, chemistry, and physics. *Deep incarnation* means that "the divine Logos . . . has assumed not merely humanity, but the *whole malleable matrix of materiality*" (Gregersen 2010, 176, Gregersen's italics).

George Murphy adds that the cross is the icon through which the entire cosmos can be viewed as divine creation and redemption at work. "The crosslike pattern of creation means that Christ crucified has cosmic significance," writes George Murphy (Murphy 2003, 33). "The only real Christian theodicy is the passion of Christ. This is not an explanation of evil but a claim that God suffers *with* the world from whatever evil takes place" (Murphy 2003, 87). God's cosmic compassion counts as the second manifestation of the Theology of the Cross. God's co-suffering with the victims of evolutionary predation and extinction require divine presence, not kenotic withdrawal.

Now, let us turn to the Theology of the Cross in its third manifestation. In its third manifestation, we turn to the real presence of the living Christ in the faith of the believer. Whereas God becomes the victim in the second manifestation, in the third manifestation that divine victimization becomes present in the subjectivity of the person of faith. So also does the resurrected Christ become present.

For the relationship between Christ and the soul, let us return briefly to Luther. The Reformer uses the analogy of a marriage between Christ and the soul that leads to an exchange of properties, to the *communicatio ideomata.* This has been dubbed the *happy exchange* among Luther's disciples.

> Faith "unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh [Ephesians 5:31–32] . . . . It follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil . . . . Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's." (Luther 1955–1986, 31:351)

On the one hand, the exchange of attributes (*communicatio ideomatum*) takes place objectively on Calvary in the Atonement. On the other hand, we see Luther here exchanging attributes in the subjectivity of contemporary faith. The universal atonement is applied to each of us individually as a personal event, *pro me.*

Central for reformers such as Luther and Calvin, Jesus Christ is actually present within faith. "Christ is not outside us but dwells within us," writes John Calvin (Calvin [1559] 1960, 3.2.24). We have no alternative than

to describe this presence as, at least in some sense, mystical. Your and my justice is personally if not mystically placed within us as a gift from God, present in faith.

For Luther, contends the late Tuomo Mannermaa, "Christ—and therefore also *his entire person and work*—is really and truly present in the faith itself (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*)" (Mannermaa 2005, 5, Mannermaa's italics). In short, it is appeal to the presence of Christ (*unio cum Christo*) that makes justification-by-faith effective in Reformation theology.

The implication for the Theology of the Cross is this: present in the faith of the believer is Christ the dying victim as well as Christ the resurrected victor. The individual in whom Christ dwells will, like God, feel the feelings of all creatures who suffer. The person of faith does not suffer solely due to his or her own wounds, but also due to the wounds of all creatures of all times and all places. He or she co-suffers, just as God co-suffers. This compassion, this suffering with others, adheres to the cross even in faith. It manifests itself as love. Galatians 5:6: "The only thing that counts is faith working through love."

Kenotic Withdrawal versus Co-Suffering Presence

For Southgate, reflection on the dynamic of loving gives rise to *kenotic ethics*. The person of faith imbued by divine co-suffering love is prompted to care for God's creatures who ride the raft of evolution with us. But I must ask: why would Southgate call this "kenotic" ethics? Kenosis implies withdrawal, absence, staying out of the way. The Theology of the Cross in its second and third manifestations, in sharp contrast to kenosis, requires divine presence, not absence.

Nevertheless, Southgate presses forward with kenotic ethics, clarifying what he means. We should be of the mind of Christ, he says. Specifically, the mind of Christ described in Philippians 2:5-7: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself." Self-emptying on our part expresses the compassion we feel toward God's beloved creatures, both human and nonhuman, both wild and domestic. Might Southgate be approaching the Theology of the Cross in its third dimension here?

Ethicists usually mean that when we love an individual we set aside our own self-interest and devote our actions to the best interests of the *beloved*. To apply the term *kenosis* makes Pauline sense when applied to the mind of the loving person. In sum: the Philippians passage, according to Southgate, says that we behave ethically when we take on the mind of Christ and devote our energies to the good of the person we serve rather than our own self-interest. Excellent.

Yet, we are teetering close to a mud puddle of confusion here. If we retain the mind of Christ for ethical purposes, we remain dry. But if we turn the mind of Christ into an ontology of the first person of the Trinity, then, splash! The mud puddle makes everything murky. If we confuse ethical kenosis with the ontology of creation, we risk a hopeless muddle. We saw earlier how Southgate is attracted in part to the Only Way argument if not, to a lesser extent, to the Free Process argument. Both arguments rely on a God who is absent rather than present.

Let me illustrate with a dispute between Moltmann and Notre Dame's Celia Deane-Drummond. Moltmann makes this mistake in his Gifford lectures. "God does not create merely by calling something into existence, or by setting something afoot. In a more profound sense he creates by letting-be, by making room, and by withdrawing himself" (Moltmann 1985, 88). Deane-Drummond rightly demurs. "Extending kenosis to include God is, in my view, far more problematic if it envisages some sort of spatial withdrawal prior to self-involvement" (Deane-Drummond 2009, 172–73).

What do I intend to say here? Just note that other Free Process theologians similar to Southgate apply the concept of kenosis to God the creator and then proceed to describe God as withdrawing from the created order. This withdrawal, they contend, permits the evolution of freedom and creativity in the cosmos. Here is the difficulty the idea of kenotic creation presents: such a move risks jettisoning Trinitarian presence in favor of deistic absence. If Southgate were to travel this path, he would have to leave all he has said regarding divine co-suffering behind.

There is no warrant, in my judgment, for a theologian to apply kenosis to God the creator. According to Philippians 2:5, the second person of the Trinity kenotically divests the historical Jesus of some attributes of the eternal first person of the Trinity. But Jesus' historical incarnation has the net effect of increased divine presence in the world, not absence. This is because the finitude and humanity of Jesus become present within the divine perichoresis. Neither here nor anywhere else in Holy Scripture do we find God withdrawing from creation. To the contrary, we find repeated testimony of God engaging creation with divine presence. The actual force of the kenotic Christ's mind only emphasizes divine presence; it does not do the opposite.

Fortunately, Southgate employs kenosis for ethics and not ontology here. He advocates that both divine loving and human loving appreciate the distinctive dynamic of creaturely selving leading to self-fulfillment on the part of the beloved.

On the basis of the divine promise of eschatological redemption, I have advocated a proleptic approach to ethics, not a kenotic approach. Proleptic ethics begins with a vision of God's future that orients human

responsibility toward transformative action that attempts to pre-actualize God's redemptive plan. (Peters, 2015, Chapter 12). Similarly, Southgate combines eschatology with ethics. He advocates an eschatological kenotic ethic to be embraced by humans toward animals both wild and domestic. A kenotic ethic empties us of aspiration, appetite, and acquisitiveness. Such a kenotic ethic of care will decrease the human commoditization and mistreatment of God's nonhuman creatures among us (Southgate 2015). Could this be confusing? Kenotic self-emptying as withdrawal can contribute to a proleptic ethic only if accompanied by aggressive action toward transformation based upon an eschatological vision of transformed reality.

In sum, the Theology of the Cross manifests itself in three phases: paradoxical revelation, divine compassion, and human compassion. Of these three, Southgate relies principally on the second with strong affections for the third. The cosmic cross signals divine compassion for, and divine presence with, all creatures amidst their abandonment, suffering, despair, and even death accompanied by extinction.

From Crucifixion to Resurrection and New Creation

Does the Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation all by itself resolve the theodicy problem? No, contends at least one of Southgate's critics. "Southgate asserts that God must redeem non-human suffering if one is to maintain that God is indeed omnibenevolent . . . .[But] how does patripassionism help us 'solve' the theodicy problem? . . . I fail to see how God the Father suffering with creation is any more redemptively efficacious than God the Father staying resolute despite creaturely suffering in bringing the universe to a glorious consummation" (Doran 2012, 421). All by itself, divine compassion or empathy does not heal. The healing comes from resurrection, from redemptive new life that overcomes suffering and death. The Theology of the Cross cannot in itself provide the resolution we are looking for. Only an eschatological new creation can accomplish this.

This requires shifting from creation to redemption or, better, redefining creation in light of redemption. Overcoming the loathsomeness of natural evil let alone human evil cannot be accomplished within the *locus* of creation alone, especially if creation is thought to be a past event. God's redemptive future must be factored in, at least according to Robert John Russell.

> The only possibility for an adequate response to natural theodicy will be to relocate the problem of sin and evil beyond the theology of creation into a theology of redemption, and this will involve two theological moves: 1) the suffering of God with humanity through the cross of Christ must be extended to include the suffering of all life on Earth, and 2) the eschatological hope for a New Creation that began proleptically at Easter with the bodily resurrection of Jesus must also be extended to include the participation of all life in the New Creation. (Russell 2008a, 139)

Like Russell, John Haught passes through yesterday's cross to tomorrow's transformation.

> Going far deeper than the Darwinian understanding of suffering in terms of adaptation, theology may emphasize that the meaning of suffering is—at the very least—that of turning the face of life, especially in its recent mode of human subjectivity and striving, irreversibly toward a new future, one in which pain will be healed and all tears wiped away. (Haught 2006, 203)

It is eschatological healing that resolves the problem posed by natural evil and its history "red in tooth and claw."

Haught makes a radical move here that I applaud. According to Haught, creation is not done yet. It is still ongoing. Creation will not be done, so to speak, until it is redeemed. "The narrative of the universe is far from finished. The universe's incompleteness is a condition that leaves open a space in which wrongness may exist" (Haught 2017, 161). Natural evil and even human evil adhere to the pre-created world, not God's intended creation. The theodicist need not reconcile God's omnibenevolence to creation as it appears to us today, because this cosmos is not yet the creation God intends it to be (Peters 2008, 2012; Southgate 2008a). The completion of creation requires eschatological redemption before it can become truly God's creation.

Theistic evolutionists in the current discussion could borrow from a theological predecessor, Jürgen Moltmann. The theodicy question smacks us in the face with "the experience of the separation of God and the world, of justice and reality, of essence and existence . . . is God the dark power of nothingness?" (Moltmann 1971, 33). If we look for consolation, we must look beyond the cross of Good Friday to Easter Sunday. "Jesus' resurrection is the answer to the cry of the forsaken and the glorious beginning of the resolution of the question of theodicy in the world. The cross of Jesus has lasting meaning only as the conquered, dark past which is on its way toward a glorious future" (Moltmann 1971, 42). Today we must look beyond not only Good Friday but also Easter Sunday to the coming transformation of creation into the new creation, to the fulfillment of all that God had intended when calling into the void and bringing being out of non-being.

Southgate (along with his research partner Andrew Robinson) stands solidly on one foot, but not two. The first foot anchors itself squarely on the Theology of the Cross in its first manifestation—the paradoxical revelation uncovering the almost invisible meaning of all of reality. Under the other foot is resurrection. But Southgate seems to take most of his weight off it. Southgate says that the unavoidable interdependence of suffering and flourishing are "in tune with the central symbol and event of most Christian understanding, the mysterious and good represented by the passion and death of the Crucified One. The Resurrection is also central, but Christian reflection has rarely been content to say that the glory of the victory lies

there" (Southgate and Robinson 2007, 90). Accordingly, resolution of the theodicy problem lies under the cross foot, not the resurrection foot. In my judgment, the resurrection deserves more weight.

It is my own position that theologians should view creation and redemption as a single historical action on the part of the one God to bring into existence a world which can be described as "very good." We, along with our evolutionary past and evolutionary future, belong within God's ongoing creation, a creation which will meet its full and fulfilling completion only in the eschatological future. Only upon the descent of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21–22) will "no more crying or pain" come to pass. Only through the turrets in the walls of New Jerusalem can we see what is meant in Genesis 1:31: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." It is Omega that establishes Alpha. Natural evil adheres to past cosmic and biological evolution because creation does not yet exist in the full sense of God's creative accomplishment (Peters 2015, chapter 4; Russell 2015, 108–10; Jäntti 2017, chapters 2.3 and 3.5).

To say it another way, Jesus' Easter resurrection is an anticipation or prolepsis of the advent of the new creation, which will in effect be the old creation finalized, completed, fulfilled, and brimming with grace. From the perspective of the present, we experience natural evil along with moral evil in the context of promise. "The notion of an unfinished universe still coming into being . . . opens up the horizon of a new or unprecedented future. . . . *Esse est adventire.* In its depths, nature is promise" (Haught 2003, 170, Haught's italics).

Animals in God's New Creation

We have alluded above to Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom. Here it is.

> Isaiah 11:5-9: Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

What is this? A dream? An ideal? A heuristic device? Plans for a new zoo? Or, might it offer in symbolic imagery an oblique yet assuring divine promise for the messianic age to come? Wolf, lion, lamb, asp, and an innocent child wandering through the wilderness with no reason to fear harm. Why? Because the natural proclivities of predators to devour their prey will have been transformed. How can we imagine such a thing? Not

easily. Yet, this seems to be the promise emerging from Israel's prophets and Jesus' promises.

My constructive point is this: Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom *is* the creation. God is still creating it. The eschatological new creation does not replace an old and worn out creation. Rather, the new creation is God's only creation. We are on the way, so to speak, to the completion of God's creative history begun in Genesis 1:1-2:4a and the Big Bang. It is redemption that makes creation "very good."

What might this look like from an animal's point of view? Might we think of the eschatological future as a lion's heaven? With the phrase "pelican heaven," Southgate projects redemption entailing fulfillment for creatures denied fulfillment while in this life (Southgate 2002, 820). This does not persuade Colin Reeves, who holds that "theistic evolution is an uneasy compromise, and its theodical implications are potentially faith-destroying" (Reeves 2017, 724). Reeves's argument against Southgate and similar theistic evolutionists lacks clarity and force. What would make Southgate's theodicy more viable is that the promised eschatological new creation is understood as the original creation, even if that original creation is yet future.

Bethany Sollereder alerts us to a debate on this matter.

> A sharp disagreement arises between Clough and Southgate over whether nonhuman predators will still be predators in the new creation. Clough argues that the peaceable descriptions of the new creation deny us this possibility. Southgate argues that a leopard without its hunting instinct, sharp claws, and sharp teeth would lose an essential part of its identity. . . . Perhaps there is scope for imagining that all the skills and instincts that inform hunting now will still exist, but that there is some reality beyond predation to which these skills will be then pointed: a new relationship between lion and lamb." (Sollereder 2016b, 275)

Do animals selve, as Southgate suggests? Yes, indeed. This signals, according to Sollereder, that eschatological redemption will mark fulfillment, a fulfillment that takes each creature beyond where he or she had advanced in this life. "Redemption, for all animals, is not just freedom from suffering, but the embrace of a new capacity for union with God. The individual fully enjoys God, both knowing and being completely known by divine love. God too, made vulnerable to creation's 'otherness,' finds love's endeavor fulfilled" (Sollereder 2016b, 275). As the lion selves, I forecast it will find straw more tasty than wildebeest, much to the relief of the wildebeest.

If we stop with the Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation, according to which God co-suffers with each creature facing predation or extinction, our theodicy would be incomplete. Shared pain does not in itself constitute healing. Healing is found in the new creation, which is the fulfillment—not the replacement—of the present creation.

Conclusion

Philosophers of religion see theodicy as a problem in logic: how can one reconcile three propositions without incoherence: divine omnipotence, divine omnibenevolence, and the presence of evil in the creation? What the systematic theologian discovers is that logic is not enough. The suffering of God's creatures due to either moral evil or natural evil hurts; it hurts the person of faith who cannot escape the very co-suffering compassion of God which is present in that faith. No logical resolution to the theodicy problem can relieve this empathic pain in the person of faith. Theodicy must find an eschatological, not a logical, resolution.

To rely solely on what I dub the Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation—God's sharing in the creaturely pain of victimization—provides neither a logical nor a historical resolution. Empathic compassion is relevant, to be sure; but it merely spreads the pain rather than lessens it.

Christopher Southgate's theodicy could be strengthened by shifting his ontology from equating creation with past evolution toward a futuristic ontology, an ontology in which redemption retroactively determines just what creation is and has been. Past lambs and wildebeest devoured by wolves and lions will not be created until they are redeemed, until they experience life in the peaceable kingdom where they can truly selve in relation to God. Resurrection beyond death is the door to this new creation, which retroactively will become the only creation.

In this article I have provided a label for Southgate's co-suffering argument, wherein he places the victims of predation and extinction within the perichoresis of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My label is the *Theology of the Cross in its second manifestation*, which acknowledges the divine compassion that co-suffers when creatures suffer. The implication for theodicy is this: God is not the perpetrator of natural evil; rather, God is its victim.

In addition, I have insisted that the theodicy problem as formulated by the person of faith who shares in God's compassion is more existential than logical. The theodicy question is *de facto* a yearning for redemption, a cry for deliverance from ambiguity into unambiguous life with God. It is a thirst that can be quenched only by living in the peaceable kingdom, the new creation.

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