

Theodicies, Adams, and the Recognition of Goodness

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Baylor University Philosophy of Religion Conference (February 6, 2009)

“I cannot assign to the *Theodicy*, that mathematical and broad development of optimism, in such a capacity, any other merit than that it later gave rise to the immortal *Candide* of the great Voltaire. In this way, of course, Leibniz’s oft-repeated and lame excuse for the evil of the world, namely that the bad sometimes produces the good, obtained proof that for him was unexpected.”
– Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation* (II, 582-3)

1.0 Introduction

“When confronted with an event like the Holocaust or the death of millions in the Congo over these last years, is it not *obscene* to claim that these stains have a deeper meaning through which they contribute to the harmony of the whole?”
Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*, 180

2.0 Adams on Horrendous Evils, Theodicies, and the Recognition of Greater Goods

Horrendous evils are “evils, the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant’s life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole” *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (HE) 26.

The inadequacy of global goods:

(1) Not agent-centered

“Divine love for created persons would mean that God does not have merely global goods... and/or does not pursue them at the cost of not being good-to the individual created persons God makes” *Christ and Horrors* (CH) 45.

“My claim is that *Divine love would not subject some individual created persons to horrors simply for the benefit of others or to enhance cosmic excellence*” CH 45 (emphasis in original).

(2) Not agent-centered *in the right way*

“I assume that for an individual’s life to be a great good *to him/her* on the whole, it is not enough for good to balance off or defeat evil *objectively speaking*. The individual involved must him/herself also recognize and appropriate at least some of those positive meanings” HE 82 (emphasis in original).

“We may thus distinguish between *objective* and *recognized* meaning, so that relation to some great enough good might objectively defeat evil within the context of an individual’s life without *their knowing* about those connections” HE 81 (second emphasis mine).

“My notion is that for a person’s life to be a great good to him/her on the whole, the external point of view (even if it is God’s) is not sufficient. Rather, the person him/herself must value, and actually enjoy, his/her relations to enough goods and to goods that are great enough” HE 145-6.

Recognition of Goodness (RG):

A horrendous evil, *HE*, is successfully defeated only if for every participant *p* in *HE*, *p* recognizes, values, and enjoys at least some of the goods that (i.) are good-for *p*; (ii.) balance-off the evil of *HE*; and (iii.) *p* accrues in virtue of *p*’s participation in *HE*.

3.0 Three Challenges to RG

3.1 Global goods can satisfy RG

(iii*): *p* accrues *only* in virtue of *p*’s participation in *HE*

3.2 Justified Failures of Horror Defeat

3.2.1 Possible Reason 1: Damages

3.2.2 Possible Reason 2: Divine Justice

Creeping Kantianism: “the fact that the consequences amplify far beyond their capacity to conceive and hence to intend...is not something for which humans are responsible” (CH 36).

3.2.3 Possible Reason 3: Creaturely Freedom

You be the judge:

- (A) The amount of goodness in uncoerced creaturely freedom and autonomy;
- (B) The ratio of the value of (a) to the value of universal horror defeat;
- (C) What sorts of (and how much) Divine “coercion” are compatible with creaturely freedom.

Two libertarian wiggles and a lingering value problem

3.2.4 Possible Reason 4: Size-Gap

“If this should mean God’s causally determining some things to prevent everlasting ruin, I see this as no more an insult to our dignity than a mother’s changing a baby’s diaper is to the baby” (HE 157).

The alternative paths objection to RG

3.3 The Real Motivation for RG: The Nature of Human Persons

“I am committed to the existentialist assumption that meaning-making is an essential and distinctive function of persons” (CH 195).

“I take a page from Tillich and other neo-orthodox twentieth-century theologians to contend that *meaning* is the issue and *horrors* are the problem” (CH 205).

“On my conception, horrors afflict persons insofar as they are actual or potential meaning-makers,” participation in which threatens one’s ability to “make positive sense of his or her existence later on” (HE 28).

Job: “My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5, NIV).