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Horrendous Evils and the Problem of Representation

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Abstract: Marilyn McCord Adams's work on the problem of evil offers one of the most creative and sophisticated religious theodicies. Adams relies upon specifically Christian resources to explain how God is able to defeat horrendous evils within the context of an individual's life by integrating the participant's experience of suffering into their relationship with God. This strategy rests upon the claim that God has participated in a representative sample of human horrors. I argue that traditional interpretations of the relevant Christian beliefs do not support the idea that Christ experienced the disintegration of his meaning-making capacities characteristic of horrendous evils. I contend that for Adams's strategy to be successful, a scenario of 'God hidden from God' must be posited. Genuine divine solidarity with human horrors means that God somehow experiences the anguish and existential confusion associated with divine hiddenness. To elucidate this claim and defend its plausibility, I employ Stump's framework for understanding the nature of union in love. Part of my aim is to distinguish and clarify notions of presence, abandonment, and hiddenness central to this discussion, and argue—contra Stump—that the mutual closeness enjoyed between Christ and God can be constrained without implying a moral fault on the part of God or Christ.

Keywords: Theodicy, Horrendous evils, Marilyn Adams, Representation, Cry of Dereliction

Introduction

Marilyn McCord Adams's work on the problem of evil offers one of the most creative and sophisticated religious theodicies.¹ Adams relies upon specifically Christian resources to explain how God is able to defeat horrendous evils within the context of each individual's life by integrating the participant's experience of suffering into their relationship with God, thus suffusing that experience with meaning and positive significance. This strategy rests upon the claim that God has participated in a representative sample of human horrors. I argue that traditional interpretations of the relevant Christian beliefs do not support the idea that Christ experienced the disintegration of his meaning-making capacities characteristic of horrendous evils.

I contend that for Adams's strategy to be successful, a scenario of 'God hidden from God' must be posited. Divine solidarity with human horrors means that God somehow experiences the anguish and existential confusion associated with divine hiddenness. Some may point to the cry of dereliction as a Christian resource which satisfies this requirement. Part of my purpose then is to provide a philosophical analysis of this line. Much of my argument deals in terminological disambiguation: distinguishing between notions of presence, closeness, abandonment, and hiddenness. I argue that abandonment is best understood as a phenomenological notion, experience of which is insufficient for horror-participation. On the other hand, hiddenness is best identified with a sort of epistemological condition which involves a lack of epistemic access to the domain of facts which contains God's justifying reasons for permission of horrendous evils. While neither abandonment nor hiddenness are (jointly or separately) sufficient

¹ Adams (1999).

conditions for participation in the category of evils Adams identifies as horrendous, I argue that the latter is a necessary condition. To elucidate this claim, I employ Eleonore Stump's categories of what it means to exist in a union of love. I argue that for Adams's strategy to succeed, Christ's death should be understood not only as an interruption in joint attention (as Stump argues), but the mutual closeness between God and Christ is also blocked. Contra Stump, I conclude that this constraining of closeness can be plausibly asserted without entailing a moral fault on the part of God or Christ, thus diffusing the problem of representation and rescuing Adams's strategy.

It should be stated that for my purposes here, I am uninterested in situating my claims within the context of broader biblical narratives or considering the vast commentary literature dedicated to the cry of dereliction. My intentions are wholly philosophical: determining what must be postulated to make sense of Adams's theodicy.² I begin by giving a brief overview of the problem of evil as discussed in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Then, in section two, I summarize Adams's own unique version of the problem of horrendous evils and outline her explanation of how God's existence is compatible with the existence of such evils. In section three, I raise the problem of representation with regard to divine identification with human suffering. In the fourth and final section, I offer a philosophical analysis of the cry of dereliction which seeks to figure out what sort of interpretation is capable of sustaining Adams's thesis. Special attention is given to Eleonore Stump's own philosophical reflections upon the cry

² Anticipated in Bonhoeffer's line, 'only a suffering God can help', the theme of divine solidarity with the oppressed and suffering became something of a slogan in 20th century Christian theology, becoming most fully realized in the work of Jurgen Moltmann and in various liberation theologies. While my focus here is upon Adams's ideas, the application of my argument may be extended to any theologian or philosopher who claims that God (or Christ) has experienced a representative sample of human suffering.

of dereliction and her understanding of the nature of the distance between Christ and God.

I. The Problem of Evil in Contemporary Philosophy

I.1 – Versions of the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil encompasses a general set of questions and arguments concerning the compatibility of God with the existence of evil. The original formulation of the argument can be traced back to Greek philosopher Epicurus who argued not for an atheological conclusion, but for a conception of the gods which understands them to not be actively engaged in the world and human affairs. Contemporary debate on the problem of evil in analytic philosophy can trace its origins back to a landmark essay published nearly 60 years ago by J. L. Mackie.³ In “Evil and Omnipotence,” Mackie formulated what has come to be known as the *logical version* of the problem of evil. Formulated as a deductive argument, Mackie attempted to establish that God’s existence is logically (or metaphysically) incompatible with the existence of evil. According to Mackie, certain theological commitments are inconsistent with the fact of evil’s existence, and thus make religious beliefs “positively irrational.”⁴ Mackie recognizes that there is no explicit contradiction between the propositions (i) God is omnipotent, (ii) God is wholly good, and (iii) evil exists, but argues that certain premises entailed from these assumptions can generate said contradiction. Namely, one must presuppose (P1) “that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can,” and (P2)

³ Mackie (1955).

⁴ Mackie (1955, p. 25).

“that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.”⁵ Given this understanding of divine goodness and omnipotence, the theist must either give up one of these assumptions or modify their understanding of (P1) and/or (P2).

An alternative strategy is to formulate an inductive (probabilistic) version of the argument. According to the *evidential* version of the problem of evil, the existence of God is not logically inconsistent with the existence of evil, but rather, given the great quantity and types of evils we find in our world, God’s existence is made highly unlikely. The proponent of an evidential formulation of the argument often highlights concrete examples of intense and seemingly meaningless instances of suffering found in our world. The argument hinges on the notion of *pointless* suffering: “instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.”⁶ Thus by highlighting cases of manifestly gratuitous evils found in the world, William Rowe seeks to undercut the theodist’s strategy of justifying God’s allowance of some evil by connecting the suffering to some greater good. An effective example Rowe uses focuses upon a case of animal suffering. Imagine a fawn trapped in a forest fire, which writhes in agony for several days before dying in the smoldering ash. Rowe claims that this sort of evil is plausibly interpreted as a “pointless evil”—evil the prevention of which by God would not result in the loss of any greater good—and thus provides rational grounds for disbelief in God.⁷

I.2 – Responses to the Problem of Evil

⁵ Mackie (1955, 26).

⁶ Rowe (1979, p. 127).

⁷ Rowe (1979, pp. 129-130).

In response to Mackie's deductive formulation of the problem, Alvin Plantinga advanced an influential, and many consider successful, argument known as the Free Will Defense.⁸ Broadly speaking, Plantinga's argument engages with an abstract version of the problem of evil, focusing on the compossibility of God with the existence of any sort of evil. This can be contrasted with concrete formulations of the problem of evil which focus upon the incompatibility of God's existence with the types and quantities of evil actually found in our world. One of the strengths of Adams's own account is her refusal to limit her response to evil abstractly considered, but to address the most devastating and concrete forms of evil found in our world.

Regarding the logical structure of the Free Will Defense, Plantinga aims to find a proposition R whose conjunction with the proposition

(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good

is not only consistent with, but entails

(2) The existence of evil.

The Free Will Defense (FWD) accomplishes this by proposing that a world containing significantly free creatures (free to perform good or evil actions) is more valuable than a world which does not contain such creatures.⁹ Plantinga combines this proposition with the further claim that any possible world lacking moral evil would also lack this moral good (the good that comes with significantly free creatures). Thus it is possible that even an omnipotent and perfectly good God could not create a world containing the great good associated with the existence of free creatures without also permitting the occurrence of evil.

⁸ Plantinga (1974).

⁹ Plantinga (1974, p. 85).

The crux of Plantinga's Free Will Defense, however, involves a highly innovative concept Plantinga dubs 'transworld depravity'. Mackie objected to the free will solution on the grounds that God did not have to choose between creating a world full of "innocent automata" and creating a world with morally free creatures who would sometimes choose wrong, because God could have created a world with significantly free beings who in fact "always freely choose the good."¹⁰ Plantinga responds to Mackie by arguing the possibility that for any significantly free person whom God could create, that person might suffer from transworld depravity. If a person P suffers from transworld depravity, then for any possible world God weakly actualizes and which contains P, at some point P misuses their freedom and chooses to do moral wrong.¹¹ If everybody suffers from transworld depravity, then it is not within God's power to create a world containing free creatures but which lacks moral evil.

For Plantinga to successfully defuse Mackie's argument, all that is required is that the above be logically possible. According to Plantinga's definition, to give a defense is not to make a claim about what actually is the case, but only about what is possible.¹² By contrast, a theodicy is more ambitious than a defense, seeking to identify the actual reasons why God permits suffering and evil. Most theodicians operate by trying to find plausible and "morally sufficient reasons" for why God does not act to prevent evil and suffering.¹³ Furthermore, the relationship between the greater goods identified by the

¹⁰ Mackie (1955, p. 33).

¹¹ Plantinga (1974, pp. 102-103). Plantinga distinguishes between two senses of actualization. For God to strongly actualize a state of affairs S means for God to directly cause S to be actual. God cannot strongly actualize S if S involves the actions of a significantly free creature. However, God can weakly actualize a state of affairs if he places an agent P in a set of circumstances in which he knows what P will choose to freely do.

¹² Plantinga (1974, p. 108).

¹³ The classic statement on God, suffering, and the connection to morally sufficient reasons is found in Pike (1963).

theodicy and the evils such goods justify is most often thought to be one of logical necessity. The greater goods could not be obtained by God in any other way than through God's allowance of some particular evil.

One of the most famous theodical proposals is John Hick's soul-making theodicy. In his classic, *Evil and the God of Love*, Hick sought to revive certain Irenaean themes in order to develop a theodicy which emphasizes the necessity of a dangerous and pain-filled environment for the development of morally and spiritually mature persons.¹⁴ According to Hick, God is incapable of creating through divine fiat fully perfected, ready-made human beings, but rather fashions humanity through two distinct stages. In stage one, God creates the physical universe, sets in motion the long evolutionary processes, and finally brings forth out of the many life forms, a creature capable of existing in "conscious fellowship with God."¹⁵ Stage two is trickier. Hick argues that God cannot simply compel free and self-directed creatures into maturity, but must work in cooperation with human individuals, placing them in a context where they can slowly grow and improve their characters. The reason God has not created a hedonistic paradise, but rather a world filled with evils and danger, is because this latter environment is more conducive to helping shape and form human personality to reflect the virtues and character traits God values and intends for human persons to possess.¹⁶

The Skeptical Theist provides yet another alternative response to the problem of evil. Recall that Rowe's formulation of the argument turned on the premise that there appears to be instances of gratuitous evil found in our world. Stephen Wykstra has

¹⁴ Hick (1978).

¹⁵ Hick (1978, p. 168).

¹⁶ Hick (1978, p. 258).

criticized Rowe's evidential argument for violating the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access which states

CORNEA: On the basis of cognized situation *s*, human *H* is entitled to claim 'It appears that *p*' only if it is reasonable for *H* to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if *p* were not the case, *s* would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.¹⁷

That basic upshot when applied to Rowe's argument is that given our limited epistemic state in relation to an omniscient and transcendent God, we should not reasonably expect ourselves to be in a position capable of perceiving God's morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil. As the saying goes, God's ways are higher. We are simply not in an epistemic position to make a claim concerning the existence of pointless evils.

Before moving on to discuss Adams's own proposals, brief mention should be made of another prominent atheological argument advocated for by J. L. Schellenberg concerning divine hiddenness.¹⁸ Like the evidential version of the problem of evil, Schellenberg's argument seeks to demonstrate an incongruity between the world as it actually is and the sort of world one would expect if the God of classical theism exists. If God exists and is omnibenevolent, then presumably God seeks to enter into a loving relationship with each and every human being; and it is a requisite of the sort relationship God wishes to enter into that human beings are in an epistemic condition in which belief in God is rational. The problem, argues Schellenberg, is that the world contains persons possessing nonresistant nonbelief, i.e. people whose nonbelief in the reality of God is not due to any sort of epistemic defect. If God really did exist, God would guarantee that all

¹⁷ Wykstra (1990, p. 152).

¹⁸ Schellenberg (1990; 2007, pp. 204-206).

people willing to enter into a relationship with him would in fact have rational belief in God. The notion of divine hiddenness I develop below pertains not so much to the way Schellenberg deploys the concept in his arguments against God's existence, but to a more particular sort of existential problem which results from people not having the relevant epistemic access to divine reasons or purposes in allowing horrendous evils to occur.

II. The Problem of Horrendous Evils

Adams's own proposals depart from conventional treatments of the problem of evil in several significant ways. First, Adams's concern is with the logical problem of evil, but not with evils considered abstractly. Rather, Adams's attention is directed at a particularly pernicious type of evil which we find in our actual world, and in asking whether the existence of so-called horrendous evils is compatible with the existence of a perfectly good and omnipotent God. Furthermore, in dealing with such evils, Adams's strategy is not to search for morally sufficient reasons which instrumentally justify God's permission of horrors. For one, Adams does not conceive of God as a member of our moral community and thus claims God has no obligations to us.¹⁹ More importantly, when it comes to the problem of horrendous evils, Adams argues that approaches which seek to discover global justifying reasons for God's permission of suffering, as typified in the arguments of Plantinga, Hick, and Pike, fail to guarantee that God is good to each individual person.²⁰ And most significantly, while the majority of theists working on the problem of evil have been content to work with a generic theory of values accessible to a secular viewpoint, Adams believes that to answer the problem of horrendous evils

¹⁹ Adams (2013).

²⁰ Adams (1999, p. 31).

theological resources and valuables of particular religious traditions must be marshaled and utilized.

II.1 – Horrendous Evils Defined

Adams's attention is directed towards the worst types of suffering we find in our world. Evils so horrifying and appalling that they strain beyond hope the theodictist's ability to identify plausible candidates as God's justifying reasons for allowing them. Adams defines horrendous evils as, "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."²¹ What makes horrendous evils so horrendous is not merely the amount or intensity of physical pain suffered, but the effects such suffering have upon human personality. The destructive powers of horrendous evils reach into the deepest dimensions of a person's psyche, wrecking a person's meaning-making capacities, degrading the participant, and leaving them incapable of ascribing personal positive significance to their own life. Horrendous evils have the power to symbolize to its victims that they are "subhuman or worthless."²² Examples Adams cites include, "the rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's deepest loyalties, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation."²³

²¹ Adams (1999, p. 26).

²² Adams (1999, p. 124).

²³ Adams (1999, p. 26). Note there is a subjective component to Adams's definition of horrendous evils. The amount of suffering it takes to wreck a person's meaning-making capacities is relative to the character of the participant in such suffering. What the cold Stoic can endure might crush somebody who has not developed a virtue of fortitude.

Adams's notion of horrendous evils recognizes an important aesthetic dimension in the worst kinds of suffering. Healthy human beings are capable of taking the chaotic flux of experiences in their lives and filtering and ordering such data to fit into a comprehensible narrative. Like artists, our ability to ascribe positive significance to our lives and construct meaning and purpose is dependent upon our capacity to aesthetically organize the material of our lives into a meaningful whole.²⁴ Using aesthetic valuables such as "unity, integrity, harmony, and relevance," we apply these principles to our lives, arranging and integrating our experiences around our goals, ideals, and relationships in order to construct a positive and meaningful life.²⁵ A life polluted with horrendous suffering will lack any sensible congruity or coherent narrative; such evils "overwhelm meaning-making capacities, prima facie stumping us, furnishing strong reason to believe that lives marred by horrors can never again be unified and integrated into wholes with positive meaning."²⁶

II.2 – Horrors Defeated

As mentioned above, Adams finds the abstract arguments of Plantinga and Pike and their quest to find global goods to justify God's permission of evil wanting. Specifically, these approaches are inadequate when it comes to addressing the concrete and deep-rooted evils that we actually find in our world. Instead of seeking morally

²⁴ Adams (1999, p. 148).

²⁵ Adams (1999, p. 146). Adams's account of what constitutes psychic flourishing can be read as a sort of aestheticized version of life satisfaction views. Dan Haybron has recently argued that happiness-psychologically construed-is best understood as a complex emotional condition. In giving an account of what makes the worst types of evils so horrendous, Adams's account could be supplemented by incorporating elements from Haybron's discussion concerning the three basic modes of emotional response one can have towards one's life, arguing that horrendous evils cause long-term psychological damage by severely inhibiting a person's ability to be attuned to their environment, engaged in life's activities, and to feel joy; see Haybron (2008, pp. 105-122).

²⁶ Adams (1999, p. 148).

sufficient reasons for divine permission of suffering, Adams's strategy insists that divine goodness to human persons guarantees that God ensure each individual's life can be considered a great good to him/her on the whole. Drawing upon Roderick Chisholm's distinction between 'balancing off' and 'defeating' evil,²⁷ Adams claims that God's goodness requires: (i) that evils be outweighed by the inclusion of a greater quantity of goods within the context of an individual's life, and (ii) that God defeat horrendous evils by giving such experiences positive meaning, via organically relating such evils to a greater good subjectively appreciated by the individual him/herself.²⁸ God as divine artist must be capable of taking the horror-strewn chunks of our personal narratives and reintegrating them into a context where they can contribute positive value to a beautiful whole.

According to Adams, the only good great enough to overcome the meaning-destroying power of horrendous evils is the incommensurate Good that God is. Horrendous evils may be defeated within the context of an individual's life by integrating that person's experience of suffering into their relationship with God.²⁹ While the deployment of theological values and resources in response to the problem of horrendous evils will undoubtedly be considered a less than credible strategy to the atheologist, Adams notes that "nothing is free in philosophy" and any well-formulated philosophical argument will involve controversial assumptions.³⁰ Referencing the Christian doctrines of

²⁷ Chisholm (1968). Chisholm writes, "When evil is balanced off in a larger whole, we may, when considering the larger whole, regret or resent the presence of evil there." But if the evil is defeated, one would say that "the badness of the part that is bad makes the whole better than what we would have had had the bad part been replaced by its neutral negation" (p. 61).

²⁸ Adams, (1999, p. 31).

²⁹ Adams, (1999, p. 155).

³⁰ Adams, (1999, p. 177-180).

incarnation and atonement, Adams argues that divine solidarity with human participation of horrendous evils creates points of contact between God and a humanity harassed by such evils, opening up the possibility for horror-suffers to recognize their participation in such suffering as “moments of intimacy with God.”³¹

Adams has no qualms about discarding the doctrine of the impassibility of the divine nature, arguing that the divine mind is capable of feeling all of the negative emotions and distresses of a horror-afflicted humanity. However, she recognizes that the divine consciousness is too stable to experience the psychological disintegration characteristic of horrendous evils.³² To establish genuine points of identification/contact between our horror-studded episodes and the divine narrative, Adams highlights the crucifixion of Christ. Armed with a Chalcedonian Christology, Adams argues that through Christ’s death on a cross, God incarnate participated and identified with all the victims of horrendous evils, thus nullifying their power by conferring honor, value, and significance upon such experiences. The cross is a bivalent symbol, opening up the possibility of reversing the negative significance of our personal narratives through re-contextualization and integration into the story of a crucified God.³³

To illustrate her strategy, Adams gives an analogy involving two companions of war who fought alongside each other in the trenches of World War I. While it is true that neither soldier would have enlisted if they had known of the horrors they would face, it is also plausible to imagine that neither soldier would retrospectively wish away such experiences from their lives because their mutual friendship—a significant source of

³¹ Adams (1999, p. 162).

³² It would not be of much help to us, either, if God were incapable of maintaining composure in the face of suffering. Adams (1999, p. 171).

³³ Adams (1999, pp. 167, 174).

meaning and value in their lives—is entangled with their wartime histories.³⁴

Accordingly, one should not view participation in horrors as a necessary means for the enjoyment of beatific intimacy with God. Nevertheless, divine resourcefulness has made it possible for victims of horror to invest positive significance in their horror-filled narratives, rehabilitating their broken psyches and meaning-making capacities in such a way that in the end, they would not wish away their participation in horrors from their life histories.³⁵

III. The Problem of Representation

III.1 – The Problem of Representation

Adams's proposals can be critiqued on several fronts. First, even if one grants that God is not a member of our moral community and thus has no obligations towards us, it remains unclear as to why divine goodness to created individuals does not guarantee prevention of seemingly pointless horrendous evils. For even if God successfully defeats horrendous evils by suffusing such experiences with meaning and positive significance, it is plausible that horror-participants would still wish to know why God did nothing to prevent such evils' occurrence in the first place. Moreover, whether or not it can be said God has moral obligations to love human beings, it does not seem relevant insofar that God does, as a matter of fact, love and value each and every created individual. We may grant that, deontologically speaking, God has no obligations to love or benefit created persons. From an axiological perspective, however, we would expect divine goodness to guarantee that for any horrendous evil S, S is connected to some greater good, G, whose

³⁴ Adams (2013, p. 20).

³⁵ Adams, (1999, p. 167).

obtainment is necessarily dependent upon S. And despite our inability to think up plausible candidates for God's justifying reasons of S's allowance, because we think God freely values each and every human individual, the theodicist maintains such reasons do exist. Rather than abandoning the theodical strategies employed by Pike, Platinga, Hick and the like, it seems more promising to supplement their search for global and generic goods with an account like Adams's which focuses on concrete evils and how they can be defeated within the context of an individual's life.

The worry facing Adams's account, which I focus upon here, concerns what I call the problem of representation. As noted above, even if divine passibility is granted, whatever suffering God experiences will be of a radically different type compared to the psychologically-devastating evils which plague human sufferers. The divine mind is too stable, and is not limited by a finite point of view as human beings are, to experience the psychological trauma associated with horrendous evils. Perhaps, as Adams suggests, God suffers "God-sized" distress, and much like a parent who becomes anxious when they see their children's suffering, the divine pathos involves feelings of anger and grief over the way human beings treat each other.³⁶ Whether or not this conception of God is satisfactory is irrelevant. In the end, Adams's account does not depend upon a concept of a God capable of suffering outside the incarnation.

It is the Christian belief in a God who becomes incarnate that gives Adams's argument traction. In assuming human nature, God chose to experience the world from a finite perspective; made vulnerable to suffering and calamities, it is ultimately Christ's death on a cross which signifies divine solidarity and participation in the worst of human

³⁶ Adams (1999, p. 173). Adams suggests that God is omni-empathetic.

horrors. The problem with this account is that there is good reason to think Christ's suffering and death fails to meet the criteria for what constitutes a case of horrendous evil. Consider a paradigmatic case of horrendous suffering: the sort of child abuse described by Ivan Karamazov. What makes such episodes of suffering so horrific, according to Adams, is their ability to overwhelm a person's meaning-making capacities. Such evils disintegrate human personality, resulting in a shattered, chaotic, and disordered experience of reality. At first glance, it might seem odd to argue that Christ's experience of crucifixion fails to make him a co-horror-sufferer. However, the criterion for horrendous evils is relative to individuals. While it is plausible to think that for many people, being crucified would indeed result in a "blown" mind, traditional interpretations of the relevant Christian beliefs make it difficult to understand Christ's suffering as something comparable to our own.

The main problem is that all four Gospel accounts indicate that Christ has supernatural knowledge concerning the soteriological significance of his death. And if this is true, it is plausible Christ never experiences the sort of existential fear, confusion, and disorientation associated with horrendous suffering. If Christ is aware of the atoning significance of his death, then while he might have endured an excruciating six hours of pain on a cross, he most likely never lost his capacity to interpret and make meaningful sense of his experiences. The potential ruinous effects of crucifixion upon Christ's psyche are (i) already *defeated* insofar that Christ's participation in horrors is connected to the greater good of humanity's salvation (a fact subjectively appreciated by Christ) and (ii) *balanced off* due to Christ's knowledge of an eternal future of heavenly beatitude at the right hand of God. Noting this, participants in horrendous evils may plausibly not

recognize their own suffering in Christ's. God has not really plunged the depths of human despair and misery. Insofar as Adams's theodicy rests upon the claim that God has participated in a representative sample of human horrors, there is reason to doubt her arguments succeed.

III.2 – Divine Hiddenness

The problem of representation implies that a necessary condition for the experience of horrendous evils is divine hiddenness. Construed as an argument against the existence of God, the problem of divine hiddenness questions the compatibility of a loving God with the existence of "reasonable nonbelievers."³⁷ More commonly, however, divine hiddenness is used to refer to an epistemological condition of human beings in relation to God. Given our limited cognitive abilities, we often lack epistemic access to the domain of facts which contains God's justifying reasons for evil's existence. God's purposes, in the context of the problem of evil, are inscrutable. The human mind is often utterly baffled by divine permission of horrendous suffering. When this silence of God is conjoined with participation in horrendous evils, the suffering of the victim intensifies and they may feel abandoned by God.

One of the primary aims of this paper, however, is to maintain a distinction between the concept of divine hiddenness and the notion of godforsakeness/divine abandonment. Divine abandonment is best identified as a psychological state involving a sense of alienation from a god who fails to help in circumstances of distress. One *feels* that God is distant. In section four below, I argue that divine abandonment is insufficient

³⁷ For the classic statement on the problem of divine hiddenness, see, Schellenberg (1993).

for horror-participation.³⁸ Divine hiddenness, on the other hand, refers to the estrangement from God which proceeds from humanity's inability to discern God's purposes in allowing terrible things to happen. While the two often go hand in hand, it is possible for them to be pulled apart. If divine hiddenness, and not merely godforsakenness, is a constitutive feature of horrendous evils, then to make Adams's argument work, a scenario of God-hidden-from-God must be posited. It is not enough for Christ to suffer an excruciating death. Nor is it even enough to say that Christ died feeling abandoned and forsaken by God as the cry of dereliction indicates. If Christ is to be considered a true horror-participant, then Christ must somehow experience the full effects of divine hiddenness. Only if the crucified Christ loses cognitive grip on the atoning significance of his death, and God's actions become indiscernible to him, does it make sense to claim that Christ suffered the type of subjective psychological devastation characteristic of horrendous evils.

In the following section, I offer a philosophical analysis of the cry of dereliction, assessing whether an interpretation of it which incorporates notions of both divine abandonment and divine hiddenness can be affirmed while retaining orthodox commitments to divine goodness and preservation of the union of love between Christ and God. Though I reject Stump's arguments for why the mutual closeness between Christ and God cannot be hindered, her account of the the nature of what it means to be personally present with another person provides a useful framework for understanding the paradoxical scenario of God-hidden-from-God.

³⁸ Nor is it correct to say that divine abandonment is a necessary condition for horror-participation. After all, nonbelievers will not feel alienated from God since they do not believe in God's existence, but this fact does not prevent the non-theist from experiencing horrendous evils.

IV. Divine Hiddenness: Constraining Closeness

IV.1 – Stump on Abandonment

Eleonore Stump has recently offered a detailed discussion and argument for an interpretation of the cry of dereliction which understands the distance between God and Christ as an interruption in shared attention.³⁹ In her explication of Aquinas's view on the nature of union in love, Stump argues that any such union will necessarily include: (i) mutual closeness, and (ii) mutual significant personal presence.⁴⁰ Mutual closeness involves an openness of mind which requires each person of a union to be cognitively available to the other (willing to share important thoughts and feelings). For Paula to be close to Jerome, Jerome must be able and willing to share those thoughts and feelings which are revelatory of important aspects of himself.⁴¹ Crucial to a person's ability to share themselves with another person is that they possess psychic integration. A person is internally divided and thus incapable of sharing certain parts of themselves whenever there is a clash between higher order desires and first order desires, or if a person is self-deceived about their own beliefs and desires.⁴² Because on the Christian view God is understood as all-loving, it follows that God seeks a relationship involving mutual closeness with each and every person.

³⁹ Stump (2012).

⁴⁰ Stump (2010, pp. 109-128).

⁴¹ Stump (2010, p. 120).

⁴² Stump (2010, p. 124). Stump's criterion that one must not be self-alienated in order to enjoy mutual closeness with another person may be challenged. Consider the bond which grows between two members of AA. Presumably there is much inner conflict and turmoil as one tries to overcome alcohol dependence, but the shared struggle plausibly strengthens and is the source of the closeness between two such persons.

Besides the criterion of mutual closeness, Stump argues that a union of love must also include significant personal presence, which requires shared/joint attention. Dyadic joint attention is the shared focus of two persons on each other. In dyadic shared attention, an individual becomes aware of another's awareness of him/herself, and this other person is likewise aware of the first person's awareness of him/herself.⁴³ It is often characterized in terms of a mutual gaze. Stump argues that the doctrine of divine omnipresence should be understood not only in terms of a direct cognitive and causal contact with everything in creation, but it is also the case that God is always in a position to engage in joint attention with any person able and willing to share attention with God.⁴⁴ More importantly for our purposes, Stump argues that Christ's perceived abandonment by God should be interpreted as a rupture in shared attention between God and Christ, and not as a failure to be mutually close.

Shared attention between God and Christ can be hindered in two ways: (i) something about God inhibits the joint attention between God and Christ, or (ii) something about Christ blocks joint attention between him and God.⁴⁵ Stump rejects the first possibility because it violates God's love for Christ, implying that for some reason, God did not desire to enjoy significant personal presence with Christ. If God fails to be united to another person, it is necessarily the fault of the latter. Regarding the second

⁴³ Stump (2010, p. 113-117). Empirical research shows that triadic and dyadic joint attention is extremely important in the development of human cognitive faculties. Researches have suggested that one of the defining features of autism-like disorders is an impairment in a person's ability to share attention.

⁴⁴ Stump (2010, p. 117). It could be challenged that many devout religious believers seek the sort of joint attention with God that Stump describes, but experience only a feeling of abandonment. One is reminded of Mother Theresa, whose personal letters revealed a person who for decades felt deserted by God. Stump's formulation of divine omnipresence seems to imply that situations like that of Mother Theresa's necessarily reveal a character lacking a willingness to share attention with God. But given Mother Theresa's character, this seems implausible.

⁴⁵ Stump (2014, p. 170).

possibility, Stump argues that the moral goodness of Christ makes it difficult to see how Christ could fail to desire closeness with God. Thus whatever the cause of the interruption in shared attention between God and Christ, it not be due to some defect or lack of love for each other.

Stump's own solution employs the concept of mind-reading.⁴⁶ The mirror neuron system gives human beings the ability to experience another person's behavior and emotions in an "off-line" way.⁴⁷ When John watches Ralph do something which causes injury to Ralph's self, John's mirror neuron system is activated and John can know something of what Ralph feels by creating a mental imitation of Ralph's experience. The upshot for Stump is that John's mental simulacrum of Ralph's mental state is unconnected to any of the other desires or mental states of Ralph. When applied to moral evil, a person may come to know through use of their mirror neuron system what it is like in some way to perform morally heinous actions. If God supernaturally amplifies the relevant mind-reading capacities in Christ, then one interpretation of how Christ identifies with human sin is that Christ on the cross mind-reads all of the evil mental states in every human being. It is plausible, Stump argues, to think that Christ's experience of God's forsakenness does not reflect objective abandonment of Christ by God; rather, the ruptured shared attention between God and Christ is generated by Christ's psychic identification with all the evil moral states found in each and every person in the world.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Stump (2014, pp. 173-179).

⁴⁷ Stump (2014, p. 174).

⁴⁸ Stump (2014, pp. 178-179).

While Stump's argument focuses upon Christ's mind-reading capacities in relation to moral evils, her argument may be extended to include psychic identification with all other sorts of human suffering. Without skirting orthodox commitments to divine impassibility, Stump's interpretation opens up the possibility of understanding Christ's suffering on the cross to encompass the feelings of all horror-participants in a simulated form. Still, it is plausible that not even this counts as genuine experience of horrendous evil from Christ's perspective. For one, whatever mental imitation one has of another's pain, the simulacrum created through the mirror neuron system produces much duller feelings when compared to the real experience of pain. Two, Christ's simulation of horrendous evils would still be accompanied by healthy psychological structures, his meaning-making capacities still intact insofar that the positive significance of his suffering is readily ascribable.

IV.2 – Constraining Closeness

Stump's understanding of the nature of Christ's abandonment comports well with what was discussed above. Abandonment involves feelings of alienation and desertion by a god who fails to deliver. Accordingly, her conception of abandonment is not horror-constituting. To use an example of Stump's, the anguish Frodo experiences when in telepathic contact with the Black Riders—causing Frodo to lose the ability to share attention with all of his friends—does not count as an experience of horrendous evil unless it crushes Frodo's meaning-making capacities, and there is good reason to think it does not.⁴⁹ Frodo considers his suffering well worth it if it leads to the destruction of the ring of power.

⁴⁹ Stump (2014, 179).

Divine solidarity with human suffering requires more than an experience of divine abandonment; it requires that God participate in suffering experienced under the specter of divine hiddenness. Stump's account creatively explains how Christ might come to feel abandoned by God. In order to claim that the cry of dereliction indicates more than abandonment—that divine hiddenness should also be incorporated into a proper understanding of Christ's passion and death—one must explain how the mutual closeness between God and Christ can be hindered without violating the union of love shared between Christ and God.⁵⁰

There are two possible explanations for how the mutual closeness shared between God and Christ could be constrained: (i) something about God blocks Christ from receiving God's self-revelation, or (ii) something about Christ prevents him from receiving God's self-revelation. Though Stump rejects both possibilities, I contend both can be asserted without undermining the moral goodness of God and Christ, nor destabilizing the mutual desire of each to be in a union of love with the other. Stump rejects the first possibility on the grounds that it implies God does not desire to be close to Christ, and thus violates the assumption of divine omnibenevolence.⁵¹ Stump claims that mutual closeness between a person and God will never be hindered due to a lack of desire to be close on the part of God. This seems incorrect. It is easy to imagine scenarios in which a person who enjoys mutual closeness with another hides particular thoughts or feelings they have, and not because they are self-alienated, possess a divided psyche, or are in a morally bad state. Consider a case in which a person hides their intentions

⁵⁰ Of course, unless Stump affirms the claim that God is co-horror-sufferer, she will not feel the same sort of pressure to push further for potential break in the closeness shared between Christ and God.

⁵¹ Stump (2014, p. 170-171).

concerning their plan to propose to their partner. Or a parent who keeps secret a diagnosis from their children until they feel the timing is right. There seems to be no reason why one may not temporarily withhold some significant piece of information from a friend and yet still enjoy closeness.

Furthermore, the logic of incarnation itself suggests a human being can be close to God and yet not enjoy epistemic access to the full contents of God's mind and will. Not even Christ knows when the Son of Man will return (Matt. 24: 37). Presumably, Christ does not share in humanity's experience of divine silence because he enjoys a special kind of closeness with God. But if Christ's knowledge of the divine plan and significance of his death is only temporarily blocked by God, and this is done for the sake of human salvation, it is at least not obvious that this state of affairs infringes upon the divine attribute of love.

On the second possible explanation, closeness between God and Christ is inhibited because something about Christ blocks God's self-revelation. Stump excludes this possibility from the realm of plausibility because it implies that Christ turns away from God—lacks a desire to be close to God—and such a state is morally bad.⁵² However, recall Stump's own strategy in explaining how Christ could lack the ability to share attention with God involved identifying something about Christ unrelated to his beliefs and desires. Similarly, it is also possible to identify reasons for why something about Christ might prevent closeness to God, and this something be unrelated to a morally bad will. According to Stump's own formulation, closeness between Paula and Jerome can be inhibited by Paula if she is either (i) unwilling to have communication

⁵² Stump (2014, p. 171).

with Jerome, or (ii) she is willing but unable to comprehend what Jerome is trying to share.⁵³ Employing this second possibility, it is at least possible that at the time of the cry of dereliction, Christ experienced the full effects of divine hiddenness, not because God restricted Christ's epistemic access to divine purposes, but in the event of psychically connecting to every morally ugly mental state *and* feeling of suffering ever experienced—in the extremity of this torment—Christ's ability to understand God's will is simply overwhelmed. Only in this condition, where joint attention with God is interrupted and closeness constrained, can it be asserted that Christ experiences anything like the type of suffering endured by victims of horrendous evils.

The problem of representation may be diffused and Adams's strategy affirmed by insisting that the cry of dereliction implies not only an interruption in the joint attention shared between Christ and God, but also that the closeness shared between Christ and God is constrained as Christ experiences the full effects of divine hiddenness. In short, Christ's death-cry should be interpreted as a genuine why-question, expressing confusion on the part of Christ as to why God fails to deliver. Contra Stump, I have argued that Christ's access to the divine purposes in his death may be blocked and that such a restriction in no way implies that Christ died in a morally bad state, or with a lack of desire to be close to God.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have raised a potential problem for Marilyn McCord Adams's (partial) solution to the problem of horrendous evils. Adams's theodicy rests upon the

⁵³ Stump (2010, p. 120).

claim that God has participated in a representative sample of human horrors. I have argued that there is reason to doubt this. In order for Adams's strategy to succeed, a scenario in which God experiences divine hiddenness must be posited. When applied to Stump's ideas about the nature of a union of love, the necessary conditions under which God could be understood as co-horror-sufferer involves interference of the mutual closeness shared between Christ and God. I argued that such closeness may be constrained without undermining commitment to the moral goodness of God and Christ, or diminishing the mutual desire of each to be in a union of love with the other. I have not argued a general defense of Adams's theodicy, but only sought to establish what can be plausibly asserted in addressing the problem of representation.

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