

HAUNTED BY GOD:
The Privation Theory and Existence Itself

By

Ikranrin Makan

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Department of Philosophy
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Approved: Mark Mercer
Supervisor

Approved: Sheldon Wein
Reader

Approved: Steven Baldner
External Examiner

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Ikranrin Makan

Master of Arts in Philosophy

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Saint Mary's University

Abstract

My aim is to show that if the privation theory of evil is true, then at any moment in which there is actual evil in the world necessarily there exists a thing whose essence is identical to its existence, namely, Existence Itself or God. I first argue that theodicies and the problem of evil itself are unsatisfactory because they fail to demonstrate any correspondence to reality as such. This is mainly due to current discussions of the problem of evil assuming two fundamental aspects that go unacknowledged, namely, *evil* and *God*. Second, I set out the core theory of the privation theory and defend it against objections. Third, I defend what I call the “Evil to God” argument and show that it forestalls the problem of evil since actual evil necessitates the existence of God. My hope is to contribute to the discussion of the problem of evil by revitalising often ignored concepts of evil and God.

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Memento mori.

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1 Preface: God and the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil has often been a stumbling block to belief in the classical conception of God as all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful. Evil poses the serious threat of either showing that God does not exist, or, at best, that He lacks one of His characteristics. Hence, God is either all-good and all-knowing but is not all-powerful; or He is all-knowing and all-powerful but is not all-good. Whatever the combination, it will fall short of the classical conception of God: If God is all-powerful, would not He be able to eliminate most, if not all, of the evils in the world? And if God is all-knowing, then would not He know that there will be gratuitous evils in this world and thus eliminate them, or would not He have created another world with no gratuitous evils? And If God is all-good, then, surely would not He desire that evils, at least the gratuitous ones, be prevented from occurring? Yet, here we are in this actual world with all these evils. And it seems there is tension between theistic commitments and the commitment to the existence of evils in the world. This raises the question of whether it is rational to believe in an all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful God, in light of all the pain and suffering.

Now it is no good for theists, or any one for that matter, to deny the existence of evil as a response to the problem of evil—that simply makes the case against the existence of God stronger. If the theist insisted on denying that there are evils *prima facie* or on asserting that evils are an illusion, then he would have to explain what these apparent evils are and why they cause real effects. For it seems obvious that there are evils in the world. Consider the 2004 earthquake off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, which triggered tsunamis across the Indian Ocean destroying coastal cities and lives. The earthquake and tsunamis together killed

230,000 people across 14 countries.¹ More recently, in 2015, there was a magnitude of 7.8 earthquake in Nepal, which destroyed nearly 900,000 homes and killed an estimated 8,800 people.² How could God, if He exists, permit all this? Why did God not prevent these evils if He is all-powerful?

Consider the Cambodian genocide by the Khmer Rouge in the mid-1970s, killing an estimated one to three million people—equivalent to the population of Toronto being wiped out. Why would God allow millions of innocent people to be slaughtered? Some would think that it is gratuitous. William Rowe considers “gratuitous evils,” cases of evils where there seems to be no good reason for their occurrence. One example is of the fawn badly burnt in a forest fire and finally, after a week, death relieves it of its suffering. What possible moral justification could God have for allowing this and other gratuitous evils? These cases then suggest that either God, as classically conceived, does not exist, or He is not all-powerful.

1.1 Theodicies, Defense, and “Evil to God”

In response, general theists have employed a number of different strategies to reconcile the existence of evil and God. By “general theist” I mean those who hold to the orthodox conception of God one who is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing. Some general theists have responded by appealing to what is now known as the Free-Will Defense, made famous

¹ Hannah Osborne, “Boxing Day Tsunami: The facts about the 2004 Indian Ocean disaster,” in *International Business Times*, updated March 24, 2017, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/2004-indian-ocean-earthquake-tsunami-facts-1480629>.

² Chris Huber, “Worst natural disasters of 2015,” in *World Vision*, updated December 15, 2015, <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-response-news-stories/worst-natural-disasters-2015>.

by Alvin Plantinga.³ Others have responded by appealing to the Soul-Making theodicy of John Hick, following Irenaeus.⁴ Still others have sought different paths to solve the problem of evil, a prime example being the skeptical theists response.⁵ But one response that has frequently been overlooked and deemed incapable of lending a helping hand to the problem of evil is the privation theory of evil. Of what use is a theory of evil in responding to the severe threat evil poses to the existence of God, one might ask. Bill Anglin and Stewart Goetz responded by saying:

...very little progress can be made in any philosophical discussion unless the participants know what they are talking about. Thus it is crucial in considering the question of God and evil to have a correct analysis of the concept of “evil”. Only in the light of such an analysis can we go on to a profitable investigation of the question of God and evil...⁶

The issue is that without having carefully defined concepts, discussions of the problem of evil are futile or, at the very least, extremely slow. It is through analysis of concepts that the conversation can advance into something beneficial. For example, it was the analysis of the concept “all-powerful” that furthered the conversation of whether God could prevent all evils without losing some good, and whether God could do the logically impossible—making you

³ Alvin Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense,” in *God and The Problem of Evil*, ed. William L. Rowe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 91-120.

⁴ John Hick, “Soul-Making Theodicy,” in *God and The Problem of Evil*, ed. William L. Rowe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 265-281.

⁵ Michael Bergmann, “Skeptical Theism and Rowe’s New Evidential Argument from Evil,” in *Noûs*, vol. 35, no. 2, (2001): 278-296.

⁶ Bill Anglin and Stewart Goetz, “Evil is Privation,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1982): 11.

exist and not exist at the same time in the same way, for instance. So the answer to the question regarding the usefulness of a theory of evil is this: if the privation theory of evil is true, then, as will be shown, it forestalls the problems of evil. J. L. Mackie seems to have been aware of this when in his now famous paper “Evil and Omnipotence” he noted that “...if you accept [the privation theory or evil as illusion] this problem [the problem of evil] does not arise for you, though you may, of course, have other problems to face.”⁷ While Mackie is correct on this point, he nevertheless misunderstands the privation theory, as we shall see (Chapter 3.3). The privation theory of evil impedes the problem of evil because evil ultimately requires something that must maintain the essence/existence composition of those that suffer evil, so I argue (Chapter 4).

The privation theory has either taken a back seat during discussions of the problem of evil, or, when it is indeed brought into the discussion, it is ridiculed and dismissed as implausible. Is there then any hope for the privation theory? It is my goal to demonstrate that there is more than hope for the privation theory. Over the next few chapters I will articulate a privation theory of evil, which is influenced by Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic tradition (though, at times, my interpretations of it may differ from other privation theorists) and defend it against common objections. If the privation theory is true, then two important points of discussion follow: (1) Since evil is a privation of some good, it requires existing *xs* that can suffer, whose essence and existence are distinct; necessarily a thing whose essence is identical to its existence—namely, God—is required to account for existing *xs* that can suffer; and (2) the problem of evil is forestalled. An important aim of this thesis is to

⁷ J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” in *God and The Problem of Evil* ed. William L. Rowe (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 79.

undermine many of the arguments employed in contemporary discussions of the problem of evil, both atheistic and theistic.

In chapter 2 I draw out two of the main underlying assumptions, namely, the nature of evil and God in discussions of the problem of evil and show why these assumptions make theodicies and the problem of evil arguments problematic. Though, often unacknowledged, occasionally one will find discussions on the nature of evil, but such discourse often turns into theodicies. I suggest that these unacknowledged presuppositions hinder progress in dealing with whether evil is truly evidence against the existence of God.

Consequently, in chapter 3, I develop the privation theory, which stresses the importance of existence. Then I contrast the privation theory against both the negation-per-se view and Manicheanism (which holds that evil has metaphysical reality), and show why each of the latter two is inadequate to account for evil. I raise common objections to the privation theory from positive instances of evil and provide responses. Here I introduce additional precision and qualification to the privation theory, that of the different types of privation within the theory. Finally, I conclude with a possible response to the problem of evil.

Chapter 4 is an argument for the existence of God from evil, which I call the “Evil to God” argument. The conclusion reached is that God is Existence Itself, the thing whose essence is identical to its existence. The argument is a sort of cosmological argument but distinct in that it begins with evil requiring existing things; it suggests that evil is only suffered by those things that have its essence and existence distinct. And that this distinction is a real feature in reality not just a mere distinction. The distinction is such that existence is a causally dependent power insofar there is nothing within the essence of things that makes them exist, and hence their continual compositions of essence and existence are possible only because necessarily there is a thing whose essence and existence are identical. The privation theory implies that

only actual existing things can suffer evil and that for evil to exist it requires actual existing things. The argument then is that actual existing things have their essence and existence distinct which then requires something that has their essence identical to their existence that will maintain the composition of essence/existence in all other things.

I then make the distinction between an essentially ordered causal series and an accidentally ordered causal series to prevent confusion and to dispel the notion that the “Evil to God” argument depends on temporal causal events (this would be an accidentally ordered causal series). The “Evil to God” argument uses an essentially ordered causal series. After that, I defend each premise in the “Evil to God” argument. Then I draw out the dissimilarities between the conception of God as Existence Itself and that of God as a person or a disembodied spirit—those who hold the latter view I call “Theistic Personalists,” following Brian Davies. Many theistic personalists hold to the classical attributes of God but reject the notion that God is that which has His essence and existence identical. Historically monotheism has held this view, hence the term “classical theism” which accurately describes those who think that God is that whose essence is identical to His existence.

One thing to keep in mind, this thesis is a bottom-up approach inasmuch as it begins with what evil is and then works its way up to the classical God. I demonstrate that any evil is wholly dependant on the classical God at every moment because evil requires actual existing things. Actual existing things derive their existence or act-of-existence at every moment from God. Some might object that such a project is doomed from the start; but, I beg to differ. I think it can be shown that God exists by using the privation theory as a starting premise. If at the end, the reader finds my conclusion obscure, unconvincing, or erroneous, I take comfort in the fact that the two views I attempted to defend and marry were thought to be consistent by major Christian, Muslim, and Jewish philosophers for hundreds of years. Of course, this

does not make the positions true but it does offer reassurance in a time when traditional views of evil and God are scorned.

I want to clarify what I am not doing. I am not defending the Christian God or the Jewish God or the Islamic God per se. Neither am I providing a theodicy—an argument for the truth of theism by providing explanations for why evil exists in the world; nor am I giving a defense, an attempt to show that there is no logical inconsistency in between the existence of God and evil. My thesis ultimately is an offensive move in the sense of attacking rather than defending because it attempts to show that the nature of evil is such that it requires the existence of the classical God. The problem of evil then is turned on its head and becomes the problem of the classical God: if evil exists then the classical God exists.

2. The Problem of Evil and the Problem of Theodicies

A common formulation of the problem of evil is: (a) If God is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful, then evil does not exist. (b) But evil exists. (c) Therefore, God does not exist. The reason for (a) is that if God is all-knowing then he will know where there is evil; if he is all-good then he will want to eliminate evil; and if he is all-powerful, then he can eliminate evil. It is a simple modus tollens. Deny the consequent and the negation of the antecedent follows validly. The challenge for general theists has been to show that (a) is false. Some have argued that the existence of evil and God are logically compatible, on the grounds that God intends for humans to perform morally significant actions. Even if God is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful, there are certain actions he cannot perform because it is logically impossible. One such action is that of creating free creatures and determining their actions.⁸

The arguments from evil against God and theodicies share two common assumptions which make them unsatisfactory. Both assume the nature of evil and the nature God. Most literature within the problem of evil make pro-active arguments against God, or give defenses for God's existence in light of evil, or theodicies. My main concern here is with drawing out the two assumptions and providing reasons why theodicies are unsatisfactory. First let us briefly explore some contemporary theodicies.

2.1 Soul-Making Theodicy

⁸ Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense," 91-120.

John Hick argues that the evil in the world is justifiable if evil serves as a “vale of soul-making” wherein imperfect humans grow in their moral goodness through trials.⁹ Humans were not created in a state of moral perfection and then fell from that state; rather, they are imperfect finite creatures that realize their potential moral goodness through personal responsibility, overcoming temptation, and practicing virtues. For Hick, God creates humans with libertarian free-will since they are at an epistemic distance from God. It is through the use of free-will in times of evil that humans develop moral goodness. Hence, evil exists because soul-making is a greater good and in one sense necessary to the evolutionary growth of human virtues.

2.2 Free-will Theodicy

Here the idea is that agents possessing libertarian free-will are valuable to God.¹⁰ Libertarian free-will can be understood as the idea that the agent is self-determining. There is no external or internal determination of their actions. As such, even God cannot make agents with libertarian free-will do what is right, as this would be contrary to the definition of having such a freedom. If God values that agents rightly act of their own self-determination, then there will be the possibility of evil as a result of some agents misusing their freedom. A related argument is the Free-Will Defense that provides reasons for thinking that the existence of

⁹ Hick, “Soul-Making Theodicy,” 265-281.

¹⁰ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

evil and the existence of God are indeed compatible. This is the argument that there is logical consistency in holding both beliefs.¹¹

2.3 A Response to the Evidential Problem of Evil

William Rowe considers “gratuitous evils,” cases of evils where there seems to be no good reason for their occurrence, as evidence against the existence of God. The well-known example is of the fawn badly burnt in a forest fire and finally, after a week, death relieves it of its suffering. What possible moral justification could God have for allowing this and other gratuitous evils? These cases then suggest that either God does not exist, or He is not all-powerful.¹²

Aquinas anticipates a very similar objection to the evidential problem when he writes, “Further, a wise provider [God] excludes any defect or evil, as far as he can, from those over whom he has a care. But we see many evils existing. Either, then, God cannot hinder these, and thus is not omnipotent; or else He does not have care for everything.”¹³ Here Aquinas is raising the objection that if God were all-powerful then He would have removed any or all evils, or as many as He can. But this is not the case since there are evils which are preventable.

¹¹ Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense,” 91-120.

¹² Stephen Maizten has similarly argued that if God exists then He is morally obligated to intervene and cannot “unilaterally transfer” the moral obligation of relieving suffering to humans, who are far weaker than Him. He provides an example of child suffering. Maizten argues that God is morally obligated to prevent evil like that from which no good comes. Since God is all-powerful, He cannot remove His obligation to prevent evils and pass that onto humans, who are much weaker. If God is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful why would He allow instances of pain and suffering that can with no cost be prevented and which add no positive value to a person’s life? Cf. “Perfection, Evil, and Morality,” in *Ethics and the Problem of Evil*, ed. James P. Sterba (Indiana University Press, 2017), 141-154.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, Indiana: Christian Classics, 1948), q. 22, a. 2, arg. 2.

So either God is not all-powerful, as previously thought, or He does not care about His creation. Aquinas's reply is to distinguish between care of particular and of universal. Caring for something particular is to pay close attention to every deprivation and to remove it, without considering the universal good.

Hence, corruption and defects in natural things are said to be contrary to some particular nature; yet they are in keeping with the plan of universal nature... Since God, then, provides universally for all being, it belongs to His province to permit certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered...¹⁴

Aquinas's suggestion is that evils generally are permitted for the sake of the whole good because God has universal care for all things.

2.4 Unsatisfactory Theodicies

When it comes to evil or pain and suffering, the quantity of it in the world makes no difference. That there is at least one x suffering is as good an argument as one with ten x s suffering. Theodicies are supposed to show reasons why evil and God are compatible, especially in the cases of gratuitous evils that are prevalent in the world. They are attempts at solving the problem of evil often by providing reasons for why evils occur in the world. As

¹⁴ Ibid., ad. 2.

we saw in the above sections, different kinds of theodicies have been presented. Though they are different they all share a similarity which is an assumption that either somehow the mind of God is known or that God exists. The similarity exists because all theodicies are attempting to answer the question of why is there evil in the world if God exists or why does God allow evil in the world if He exists.

Take the Soul-Making theodicy for instance. It assumes that God created humans in the first place and secondly that humans were created in a state of imperfection. And then it goes on to argue that evils are justifiable because it is through trials and tribulations that agents become virtuous. Why do we need the first two assumptions for the latter to be true? God's existence is first assumed and then the Soul-Making argument proceeds. We can know from experience that it is through trials and tribulations our characters develop for better (hopefully). And if this is true, then God does not need to exist the Soul-Making argument to function. God seems to be an unnecessary addition. The development of virtues through evil can be argued for without ever needing to appeal to the existence of God. Others, though, have suggested that because the Soul-Making argument fails to account for young children and animal sufferings, it is unsatisfactory.

The Free Will theodicy and the above response to the evidential problem of evil are only satisfactory if one already assumes the existence of God; but if one is an atheist no amount of Free Will theodicy or universal good argument will satisfy. Why think that libertarian freedom is the kind of freedom God wants? Why think that God desires agents who freely act rightly? Why think that God is the kind that has universal care? There are theological assumptions in these theodicies which go unappreciated. These theological assumptions do some of the hardest work in theodicies. And it seems that without these assumptions the theodicies would not function well. For instance, the Free Will Defense is supposed to show

that the existence of evil and the existence of God are not incompatible. However, this is only true if evil is not understood in a Manichean manner and if God is not constantly battling evil for supremacy. The defense takes for granted the nature of evil and God which complicates the discussion.

The starting point of theodicies often is with the existence of God. In other words, God is assumed to exist and to have certain descriptive features. These are theological doctrines deeply embedded in these arguments. Hence, for an atheist, though the theodicies may be plausible they are wholly unsatisfactory. But why hold that such a God exists in light of all these evils? There seems to be more at play than just purely philosophical reasoning. This is not to dismiss theodicies as whole but rather to suggest that purely on a philosophical basis one cannot derive at many of these theodicies. Since many theodicies assume theological concepts.

Contemporary criticisms of theodicies have brought in animal suffering as a way to show that they fail to account for why such evils happen. The Soul-Making theodicy fails to provide reasons for why animals suffer. If evil is the means through which agents become virtuous is it necessary that non-rational animals be subjected to pain and suffering since they cannot exercise what they do not possess, libertarian free will. The suffering of animals is a means to end. It seems cruel to think that sentient creatures are made to suffer solely for the development of one creature, namely, humans. But suppose the response is that animal suffering is part of the larger scheme of the “vale of soul-making” wherein agents are able to exercise their libertarian free-will to help liberate animals suffering. So it is not that animals are objects without value but rather humans are given the capacity to alleviate the suffering of others.

To this, Stephen Maitzen argues that if God exists then He is morally obligated to intervene and cannot “unilaterally transfer” the moral obligation of relieving suffering to humans, who are far weaker than He.¹⁵ Maitzen points out that since God is much stronger and wiser than humans, He is morally obligated to prevent evils from which no good comes. Further, since God is all-powerful, He cannot remove His obligation to prevent evils and pass it onto humans, who are much weaker. If God is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful why would God allow instances of pain and suffering that can with no cost be prevented and which add no positive value to a person’s life? So this idea that animal suffering exists for the humans to alleviate seems more of an excuse than justification.

This criticism from animal suffering or even from young children suffering evil can be laid against most theodicies unless the theodicy specifically set out to provide reasons for those evils. Joel Tierno suggest that there is a difference between a defense and a theodicy.¹⁶ A theodicy is an argument for the truth of theism by providing a reason for the evils in a world created by God. On the other hand, a defense is an attempt to show that there is logical consistency in holding that there is evil in the world and that God exists. Tierno argues that there is greater burden placed on theodicies precisely because they sets out to convince the opponent of the rationality of theism by providing explanations for evil. This seems to be correct. But add to this, the theological and philosophical assumptions that play a significant role in theodicies that go unacknowledged. What you have then are arguments that do not in the slightest manner convince the atheists because there are these major presuppositions left unargued. It would not be a stretch to propose that if Zeus replaced the God of most

¹⁵ Maitzen, “Perfection, Evil, and Morality,” 141-154.

¹⁶ Joel T. Tierno, “On Defense as Opposed to Theodicy,” in *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 59, Issue 3 (2006): 167-174.

contemporary theodicies, there would not be much lost. The arguments themselves would not lose much traction. How so? Because the underlying assumptions about God do much of the heavy lifting. Brian Davies points out that the contemporary notion of God is far from the classical view of God. The contemporary notion Davies calls “Theistic Personalism.”¹⁷ Theistic personalism is the idea that God is fundamentally a *person* who is timeless, immaterial, all-powerful, etc. The disagreement between the two is not over the classical attributes of God, but rather over the nature of God as such. To give some examples of philosophers who conceive of God in a theistic personalist manner, take first Richard Swinburne, who defines God as “a spirit, that is, a non-embodied person who is omnipresent.”¹⁸ And that the nature of God is such that “God’s essence is an eternal essence. God is a being of a kind such that if he exists at any time, he exists at all times.”¹⁹ Swinburne is a theist philosopher, but it is not only theists who think this way. Take Maitzen, an atheist philosopher who accepts Alvin Plantinga’s conception of God: “a personal agent whose essence includes perfection—that is, unsurpassable greatness—in knowledge, power and goodness.”²⁰ Or take Paul Draper, another atheist philosopher, who understands theism as: “[t]here exists an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person who created the Universe.”²¹

These philosophers take God to be a *person* who is non-embodied and who has existence necessarily, whereas the classical conception of God is the one who has their essence identical

¹⁷ Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

¹⁸ Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 92. Earlier in the book, on page 7, Swinburne writes, “I take the proposition ‘God exists’ (and the equivalent proposition ‘There is a God’) to be logically equivalent to ‘there exists necessarily a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things’.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁰ Maitzen, “Perfection, Evil, and Morality,” 141.

²¹ Paul Draper, “Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem For Theists,” in *God and the Problem of Evil*, 9.

to their existence. Furthermore, the classical God is not a person that is embodied or a person that is a spirit, or a being, or a unique being, or the highest being existing within the same category as other beings.²²

2.5 Underlying Assumptions

As illustrated above, many of these presuppositions about God also pervade arguments against the existence of God from evil, i.e., Maitzen's question of whether God has moral obligations to intervene or prevent evil. Maitzen argues that God cannot unilaterally hand over responsibility to humans who are far weaker than He is. But the answer lies in whether God is a being that intervenes occasionally to tweak faulty parts of the world (a deistic God) or whether God continually sustains the existence of all created things. The result will provide us with an answer to the question whether God is under moral obligation like other beings or whether He is not under obligation.

The other unacknowledged assumption within most discussions of the problem of evil is the nature of evil. It matters greatly how we understand the nature of evil if we are even to have a productive conversation about the problem of evil. Without proper or at least common definitions of terms the conversation is stale. But it is commonplace to start talking about evil and God as if both atheists and theists have done their due diligence on precisely what they are speaking about. The following is a provisional construction of the problem of evil—call it *Unwanted Argument*:

²² See, *STI*, q. 3. a. 1; *STI*, q. 3. a. 5.

- (i) Evil is unwanted.
- (ii) We would do everything we can to rid the world of evil.
- (iii) God is all-powerful, all-good and all-knowing.
- (iv) Therefore, if God exists then He would remove all evil in the world.
- (v) But there is evil.
- (vi) Therefore, God does not exist.

Evil is unwanted because it causes suffering. Moral agents are inclined to alleviate evil when they see it. An all-knowing God would be aware of evils and know how to prevent them. An all-good God would want to rid the world of evil. An all-powerful God could rid the world of all evil. Yet there is evil. The existence of evil raises doubts about the existence of God. The argument is deductively valid.

Yet if evil is, as the Manicheans see it, a metaphysical reality, then many of the responses fail. They fail because God would be locked in a constant battle with evil for control of the world. It would be an order versus chaos situation. Do we posit that evil is a kind of demi-god? Presumably atheists do not see evil as some God or as an actual entity that roams the world looking for prey since that would directly contradict naturalism. And most theists would reject the Manichean view. At this point, one might suggest that substituting “evils” with “gratuitous evils”, evils which are preventable, changes the argument. The argument might slightly change but the deep problem remains. What is the nature of evil per se? It becomes inevitable that some basic understanding of the nature of evil is necessary if we are to engage the question of whether evil can function as an argument against the existence of God.

Nonetheless, some think that the problem of evil can be formulated without taking a position on the nature of evil and that those conversations are meaningful insofar as they provide insights into the discussion. And this is true, one can form an argument from evil just as shown above. There is nothing invalid about the formulation as such. Many debates about the problem of evil occur without either side acknowledging the enormous implications of differing assumptions about the two crucial aspects: evil and God. For that reason, some think that the nature of evil is irrelevant to the conversation. However, this is a simplistic view at best and foolish at worst. These discussions cannot provide substantive insights because we do not know what evil is or have a common definition; consequently the conversation is meaningless. It is analogous to thinking that the existence of holes is an argument against the existence of God. Call the following formulation, *Holes*.

- (i) Holes are unwanted
- (ii) We would do everything we can to rid the world of holes.
- (iii) God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing.
- (iv) Therefore, if God exists then He would remove all holes in the world.
- (v) But there are holes.
- (vi) Therefore, God does not exist.

The argument is deductively valid. But there is a problem. It would be absurd to think that God does not exist from *Holes*. True as it may be of our utter dislike of holes due to young children or animals falling into them and dying. The argument fails to establish the conclusion. Just as “gratuitous evils” can replace “evils” so similarly “gratuitous holes” can

replace “holes”. Either way the problem is that the argument has no correspondence to reality. What reasons are there for thinking that holes are not arguments against the existence of God? At least two things are required to answer the question. The first is what is the nature of holes? Do holes really exist? What are holes? The second is what is the nature of God? Is it a being among beings? Or is God something wholly different? These are two critical things assumed in the *Holes* argument. Similarly, in the problem of evil arguments the nature of *evil* and *God* are also assumed, but for some reason they go unacknowledged in the discussion of the problem of evil. Yet it is a problem that is ignored. Just as one would not take for granted the nature of holes so one would think that the nature of evil would not be taken for granted. The problem of evil arguments fail to establish any essential connection between God and evil. For all we know, there is no real bearing on reality since it might turn out that once the nature of evil is established, the problem disappears.

Both theodicies and the problem of evil arguments have these presuppositions and therefore are unsatisfactory. Theodicies cannot establish their explanations without some revealed knowledge/theology whether that is Holy Scriptures or visions or whatever else that might be. Theodicies at best are for the believer or theist in their struggle to understand the world in the face of evil. Therefore, theodicies are unsatisfactory to the atheist because the atheist reject revealed knowledge/theology by God or reject the existence of God simpliciter. Philosophically it seems difficult to provide a substantial theodicy without sneaking in theology. Unfortunately, the theology part does perform a major task in the arguments. The Skeptical theists are correct here in holding that one should remain skeptical of providing reasons for evil since ultimately one cannot know why God allowed evil. The problem of evil arguments are also unsatisfactory because the nature of evil and of God are assumed. The arguments do not establish any real correspondence to the actual world since they do not

show any essential connection between evil and God. Just as it would be absurd to take the *Holes* argument as a serious objection to the existence of God, the problem of evil as it stands is not to be taken seriously. Without a proper understanding of evil it is impossible to have a fruitful discussion on the apparent problem it poses.

3 Privation Theory

In this chapter I will develop the privation theory of evil (PT) in detail, and show one of the ways in which it forestalls the problem of evil. The PT has been defended by Augustine through to Aquinas and onwards as the correct theory of evil because it avoids two extreme views of evil, namely, the Manichean view, which holds that evil has metaphysical reality, and the negation-per-se view, which holds that evil simply is the lack of some good. Another advantage the PT has is its ability to deny that God created evil, but still affirm the existence of evil; thus, God is, in one sense, innocent of the evils in the world. But this is beyond the scope of my thesis. Generally, I take “bad” or “badness” to refer to evil.

3.1 What is the Privation Theory of Evil?

The PT is an attempt to answer the question: what is the nature of evil? It argues that evil is something that lacks metaphysical reality, for it is the privation of some good or excellence naturally due to the x , which ought to be there.²³ For this reason, evil always requires a thing that has actual metaphysical reality. That which is good for an x is determined by x 's nature and hence required for its perfection. “Perfection” means that the components required for the flourishing of x are present. Or in other words, an x is perfect according to its essence if it is able to reduce its potencies to acts—here I assume real essentialism.²⁴ This is the position

²³ Aquinas, *STI*. q. 48. a. 1, especially his reply to objection 2; in *STI*. q. 5. a. 5, Reply obj. 3.

²⁴ David Oderberg, *Real Essentialism* (New York: Routledge, 2007); specifically, chapters 1 - 3. Further, RE holds that essences are irreducible to their parts, for it is within the unity of the essence that the parts

that things in the world have essences, that these essences are discoverable, and that understanding essences is crucial to understanding the world. Now, that which is good for an x is not subjective to the x . A man is perfect insofar as he has all that is required of a functioning human being, which presupposes that being human is the essence or nature of a man. Evil then is a deprivation of some form or good required for the perfection of an x . To use a stock example, the evil of blindness is the privation of sight in a thing that by nature ought to see. The lack of sight would be an evil in a man or a dog but not an evil in a table because tables by nature do not have the capacity for sight. Hence blindness in a man or dog is evil because there is an absence of something good naturally due to the thing.

The good or excellence of an x is determined by the essence of the x . For example, if John is human then by being human John ought to have two legs and two arms. These two things, the having of legs and arms, are some goods naturally due to John by virtue of being human. That John cannot grow wings and soar is not evil because it is not in the nature of John qua human being to have wings.²⁵ To give another example, that Jim is born congenitally blind is evil, even if for Jim it is perfectly normal to not have sight (since he was born with no capacity for sight), because Jim qua human being ought to have sight. Jim's lack of sight deprives him of the full goodness of human nature. This analysis applies to other living things as well. If there are privations of excellence in an x that naturally belong to the essence of the x , then there is evil. It does not matter that x qua itself does not have some good—it only matters that x does not have that particular good qua its essence: x qua E not x qua x . For example, the lack of a brain (anencephaly) in a child is evil because he is a human being and

function. See also, Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Heusenstamm; Piscataway, NJ: Editiones Scholasticae; Transcition Publishers, 2014).

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, trans. Richard Regan, ed. Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), q. 1 a. 3. co.

not because the child is himself. But if we were to suppose that anencephaly in the child is evil qua the child being himself, then the lack of a brain in the child would not actually be evil because to be that child would mean to lack a brain.

To illustrate the point of privation, take a donut as an example. Let the hole in the donut represent evil. The hole exists so long as the donut itself exists. But if the donut is eaten, the hole disappears. It would be impossible to show the hole in the donut without showing the actual donut. Likewise, the nature of evil is such that without an actual *x*—that which does not lack metaphysical reality—evil does not exist. But if an *x* exists, then evil exists insofar as the *x* lacks some good natural to it. The PT argues that when an *x* deviates from its inherent *telos*—the end to which a thing is directed—which is determined by its essence, it is evil. The end or *telos* of an *x* depends on the essence of the *x*. As David Oderberg states, “In a thing’s nature is the end to which its operations are directed, whether it be essential behaviour of a water molecule or of a mammal.”²⁶ Hence it is evil when a sparrow feeds on her young for nourishment instead of collecting moths for them to help sustain their existence. Sparrows, if they have young, should collect food to feed their young and not eat their young. It is the parent sparrow’s end to nurture its young, otherwise the young are prevented from achieving their *telos*. Furthermore, if an *x* fails to attain its inherent *telos* or the purpose towards which it naturally strives, there is evil.

One inherent *telos* that is shared by all existing things is the preservation of existence. Thus if there were a drought in India that caused starvation and ultimately death, then the drought would be evil because the people affected were unable to feed themselves and be

²⁶ David Oderberg, “All for the Good,” in *Philosophical Investigations*, vol. 38, no. 1-2 (2015): 77.

nourished in order to sustain their health. Death resulted in them not being able to achieve their inherent *telos*, namely, the preservation of their existence.

An important aspect within the PT is the convertibility of good and existence, meaning they are interchangeable. Good and existence are conceptually distinct but they refer to the same thing. Think of it as Gottlob Frege's *sense* and *reference*—Venus being referred to both as the morning star and the evening star. Now, I am aware that the principle of convertibility may sound strange to contemporary philosophers. The usual response to the principle of convertibility is that things are neither good nor bad in themselves, and are either good or bad according to their functionality. And if we really had to give status to things, they would be neutral. But for the PT-ist something is good to the extent that it exists. Good is not a moral or a value judgement; rather, good is non-moral—it is a metaphysical truth about existing things. When something is said to be good it does not transfer any moral status. This is not as strange as it sounds, since even consequentialists view “good” or “right” as whatever is useful or whatever action produces the most hedons.²⁷ For the PT, then, good is the actualization of some potency. Goodness in objects generally obtains by virtue of some potency being reduced to actuality. Thus a knife is good by virtue of being real and being an instance of a kind. In other words, the knife is good to the extent to which it conforms to its essence. This eliminates the notion that objects are only good or bad by virtue of their function, i.e. that knives are good only because they can cut vegetables.

The argument for the convertibility of good and existence is as follows: The essence of goodness is that it is desirable, but a thing is desirable only insofar as it is perfect. Desire here is taken in the broad sense of being disposed to certain ends. Natural objects have desires

²⁷ This is noted by Oderberg in “Being and Goodness,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4 (October, 2014): 354.

inasmuch as they are directed to some end. But the objects are not necessarily conscious or striving after their ends. The objects are naturally inclined towards those ends. That water tends to boils at 100 °C, or that opium when it is ingested tends to cause sleep, or that knives tend towards cutting, are instances of desires in natural objects or artefacts. Hence, desire in the broad sense is not restricted to agents, such as humans, who can desire in a stricter sense, say, of wanting that Audi A4 in the showroom or wanting to marry their high school sweetheart. “Perfect” identifies something that is completed in some way, as when some potency is reduced to actuality.²⁸ Things always desire or are directed toward their own perfection. And a thing is perfect only insofar as it is actual or has its potentials actualized, and it is actual only insofar as it exists. Thus, things are perfect to the extent to which they exist. Hence, the puzzle set is perfect or complete insofar as each individual pieces is actual and placed in the proper area. Good is then a principle of perfection since good is that through which things are perfected or completed.

For something to have its potency reduced to actuality it first needs to have existence; for without existence there would be no actualization, and without actualization there would be no perfection. Existence is that which allows for actualizations. Things are perfect insofar as they are actual, and are actual insofar as they exist. Hence, existence is what allows there to be perfection; for without existence nothing would be actualized, and without actualization there would be no perfect thing. To be perfect requires good, and that is why good is a principle of perfection. But we have just seen that to be perfect requires existence, for without existence there is no perfection. Thus, existence and good are convertible since both are principles of perfection. Wherever existence is found, good is also found. Goodness,

²⁸ Oderberg, “Being and Goodness,” 345-6.

however, “presents the aspect of desirableness, which being [existence] does not present”;²⁹ thus leading to the idea that good *is* what all things desire.³⁰ This is not to be mistaken with thinking that something is good because it is desired; rather, it is that something is desired because it is good. The desire for good is such that it is directed towards the perfection of the *x* doing the desiring. This will play an important role when dealing with moral evils (See chapter 3.6).

An objection can be raised concerning the desire of non-existing things. Could not someone desire something that is non-actual or lacking, say an Audi A4, or even some virtue? But a moment’s consideration should make it clear that what is being desired is not something non-existing per se or a non-actual thing, for that would be nothing, which is no desire. What is desired is either actual or has representational actuality, which will perfect the *x* desiring it. If it has representational actuality, then the *x* projects whatever it lacks as actual. Hence, the desire is not non-actual or non-existing per se as the objection claims; rather, what is desired is desired as if it were actual. So the desire for an Audi A4 is a desire for something actual (the actual Audi A4 in the show room or on Television). The desire for some virtue is actual in some way—knowing someone who possesses the virtue or knowing what the virtue is—and thus even if the moral good is lacking in the person doing the desiring it still has representational actuality. The point is that any desire is a desire for some actuality and without actuality nothing can be desired.³¹

The PT takes existence to be fundamental due to the fact that without actual or real existing things there would not be any evil in the world (the universe at large), and insofar as

²⁹ Aquinas, *ST1*, q. 5, a. 1.

³⁰ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 1, co.

³¹ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 1, a.1, co.

things have existence they are good. Privation then is contingent upon existence for the fact that without existence there could not be any privation of some good.

This is in stark contrast to Manichaeism, which holds that evil has metaphysical reality or has “positive reality.”³² The problem with Manichaeism is that if evil has actual existence, then it would be good, since existence is interchangeable with good—as noted above. There is an obvious contradiction in holding that evil is good. For either evil would not be evil but good, or we would have to deny that evil exists in any way at all. The general theist—which includes non PT-itsts—is unwilling to admit that evil is good, and for valid reasons. The PT holds that evil is precisely evil because of the lack of some good which ought to be there; evil lacks metaphysical reality and can only exist insofar as an actual x exists. It would be a mistake, however, to think that evil is ultimately good because it depends on an actual existing x . In other words, if one considers that an x that exists, which is good, is the cause of evil—meaning without x there would be no evil—then evil, because it depends on x and x is good, is good. This argument, however, is a *non sequitur*. First, if evil is a metaphysical privation of some good it cannot in principle be good for it is the lack of good. Second, there is no transitive relation of good from (i) x is good to (ii) the evil suffered by x is good. There would be a transitive relation if by “evil” we did not mean the PT but some other theory. If one still held that evil had actual existence, then one would have to reject the classical God—who is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful—but if one rejected the classical God the problem of evil does not arise. If, however, one denies that God created positive evil, then evil would exist either by itself or because it was created by another being. Either of the two options means

³² Samuel Newlands, “Leibniz on Privation, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil,” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2014): 284.

that God is no longer all-powerful and, thus, there is no problem of evil, since evil can be accounted for by another being or by evil itself.

The opponent however can assert that I have begged the question against the Manichean since I rejected her theory of evil based on my theory of evil. And in one sense, it is true that I have rejected Manicheanism on the assumption that the PT is true. This is for two reasons: (i) there is no problem of evil if Manicheanism is true; and (ii) most, if not all, cases of evil disappear if we accept Manicheanism. Since evil now has positive reality many cases of evil like blindness or deformed limbs (or no limbs for that matter) are not evil because these kinds of “evil” suggest privation of something. Blindness indicates a lack of sight; deformed limbs indicate a lack of proper functioning limbs.

For these reasons, the PT rejects the Manichean conception of evil. Instead, evil, because it lacks metaphysical reality always, and in all cases, requires actual existing *xs*; there cannot be evil if there is nothing in existence that can somehow be affected by evil or suffer evil, insofar as it deprives it of some aspect of reality. Hence, that there is a massive anticyclonic storm on Jupiter known as the Great Red Spot is not evil because there are no known existing sentient beings that can be affected by the storm. However, if a hurricane devastated the east coast of the USA, we would definitely say it caused evil; more precisely, it would be a natural evil. This is because there would have been *xs*—humans or animals—that were affected by the hurricane.

A common misconception about the PT is thinking that it denies that evils exist. But, as rightly noted by G. Stanley Kane, the PT does not commit the crime of denying evil:

Its proponents [those holding to privation theory] offer it as an account of the nature of evil. As such, the theory deals with something that is clearly recognized to be a real

part of human life and experience. To assimilate the theory of evil as privation to the denial of the reality of evil is to confuse a theory of *what* evil is with a denial *that* it is. Whatever other errors the privation theorists might have made, this is one which they did not commit.³³

The question, “Does evil exist?” can then be understood in two ways. The first signifies the existence of a metaphysical entity, as in the case with Manichaeism; in which case evil does not exist since evil does not have metaphysical reality. The second signifies whether there exist metaphysical privations; in which case evil exists.³⁴

The PT is often confused with what I call the negation-per-se view of evil.³⁵ The negation-per-se view of evil ignores the nature of the thing and argues that evil is simply the negation of good; it pays no attention to whether the negation of good is in line with the essence of the thing *x*. For instance, on the negation-per-se view it would be evil that John cannot grow wings and fly because growing wings and flying is a much faster means of transport than running or walking. This does not consider that John qua human cannot grow wings and fly. Again, on the the negation-per-se view it would be evil that I currently do not have a daughter because having an existing daughter is better than not having one.³⁶ As a result, evil is the “limitation” or negation-per-se and not due merely to any privation of some good natural to an *x*.³⁷

³³ G. Stanley Kane, “Evil and Privation,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1980): 44.

³⁴ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 1, a.19.

³⁵ Aquinas, *STI*, q. 48, a. 3.

³⁶ Newlands, “Leibniz on Privation, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil,” 281-308. Interestingly, Newlands argues that Leibniz held to this view of evil, even though Leibniz thought he was defending the traditional PT.

³⁷ Newlands, *ibid.*, 301.

Besides the obvious reasons for rejecting negation-per-se view of evil, namely, that it is not fine-grained enough to distinguish between goods required for the perfection of an x and goods unnecessary for the perfection of an x , is that things are immediately considered evil for lacking some good. Thomas Aquinas saw that affirming the negation-per-se view of evil will imply that all things in the world are evil because they lack some good that belongs to some other thing, as in the case with John and wings.³⁸ John cannot grow wings because he is human, but this does not make John evil nor does it imply that an evil has befallen John. That I do not have X-Ray eyes like Superman does not make that privation an evil, because it is not something I, as a human, am intrinsically endowed with.

Finally, the magnitude of evil is measured in proportion to the deprivation of good. Recall that for the PT good and existence are convertible. Hence evil is not measured against a pure form of evil or something absolutely evil, but rather in respect to the privation of some good naturally due to an x . The reason that evil is not measured against a pure form of evil or something absolutely evil is that in principle it is impossible. There cannot be a pure form of evil that exists by itself since any evil will require an actual existing x . If it has existence, then it is good. A possible objection here is the example of Lucifer or Satan; some general theists might consider Lucifer to be pure evil. This, however, is mistaken because the same principle of existence that applies to other existing things applies to Lucifer as well. If Lucifer exists, then insofar as he exists, his existence is good; for existence is more fundamental than privation—privation is dependent upon existence. The x itself cannot be absolutely evil since x 's existence itself is good. But if x ceases to exist, then the evil parasitic on x ceases as well. For instance, the congenital blindness Jim has ceases to exist in reality when Jim dies. The

³⁸ Aquinas, *ST1*, q. 48, a. 3.

closest thing to pure evil in one sense would be death, death being contrary to existence. But again pure evil cannot exist since evil is privation and pure evil would be nothing. And so how evil something *is* is measured by how much good is being deprived.

3.2 Objections to the Privation Theory of Evil

Now that the main groundwork for the PT has been completed, the question is will the PT withstand contemporary criticisms and worries? In answering the criticism, I will introduce additional precision and qualification to the PT. There are three common objections brought against the PT. The first comes from a misunderstanding of it by either confusing it with the negation-per-se view or missing the mark. Often this criticism looks as though it levels the PT but in reality it attacks a straw man. The second objection is what I call “instinctive objections”; this is the one that instinctively bring counter-examples that seem to disprove the PT; nevertheless, in reality, the counter-examples support the PT. The third common objection is what I call “positive objections.” This is much stronger than the first two, and at first glance seems to do damage. Positive objections more often understand what the PT is and as a result raise interesting objections. This is what I will deal with most.

3.3 Mackie: The Privation Theory Commits a Naturalistic Fallacy?

As mentioned earlier, J. L. Mackie says that if one holds to the privation theory then the problem of evil is no problem.³⁹ I think this statement is true. However, on a more careful reading, one realizes that Mackie misunderstands the PT and his objection that the PT commits a fallacy similar to the naturalistic fallacy is false.

Mackie confuses the negation-per-se view and the PT when he asserts that “[s]ome have said that what we call evil is merely the privation of good, that evil in a positive sense, evil that would really be opposed to good, does not exist.”⁴⁰ It seems as though Mackie is referring to the PT, but on closer inspection it becomes clear that he has confused the two theories. Evil in the PT is simply not the privation of good or “merely the privation of good” but of some good due to an *x*; otherwise, it would be the negation-per-se view. Nonetheless assuming, *arguendo*, that Mackie was not confused, how is the PT-ist to respond to the criticism that believing in PT is similar to believing that good is anything that helps evolutionary progress and that evolutionary progress is good? According to Mackie this is similar to a naturalistic fallacy. In believing both:

- (1) Evil is the privation of good, and
- (2) The privation of good is an evil,

the PT-ist commits an error. Before responding it is clear that (1) and (2) must be modified if they are to have any force, otherwise the PT-ist would outright reject them because they would be a caricature of his position. The issue with Mackie’s original version is that it is too

³⁹ Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” 78-79.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

coarse-grained and, thus, unable to distinguish between whether the privation of good in x was one in which it was *required* for the perfection of the x or it was not. This interpretation of Mackie would mean that he completely misses his target, and if so we can simply move on. If, however, we modify the original version to accurately illustrate the PT position, we get

(1*) Evil is the privation of some good due to an x .

(2*) The privation of some good due to an x is evil.

The modified version is different from the original in that it qualifies what the privation of good is in regards to, whereas the original simply states that it is the privation of good. So, does the PT commit a fallacy akin to the naturalistic one, as Mackie claims? Only if the “is” was not a necessary identity. The copula in (1*) is the “is” of necessary identity, namely, that the left-hand and right-hand designates the same thing. This means that the “is” in (2*) is also a necessary identity. Hence there is no fallacy to begin with since in all possible worlds in which there is evil, it is necessarily the privation of some good due to an x and vice-versa. It is similar to a rigid designator in that their identity is necessary if one of the sides obtains at all. So then it turns out that Mackie’s objection falls apart when it is seen that the PT is a necessary identity.

If Mackie insisted that his concern is over whether the PT identifies something normative with something non-normative, then the reply is that the PT has not committed such a fallacy. “Evil” is not a normative concept; it is a term used to describe a metaphysical state, namely, the privation of some good due to an x . Consequently, evil is objective and not subjective. That John does not consider his blindness as evil, does not make the blindness any less evil.

It is still evil no matter what John thinks about it. It should be clear that the PT argues that evil is lacking some good according to the essence of an x . Evil *is* evil by virtue of lacking some property due to the nature of x and not that it is subjective to the preferences of x .

3.4 Cancer: It is Evil

A concern about the PT is that it cannot possibly account for some evils, specifically, things we take to be evil but are clearly not deprivations, for example cancer. This is what I call an “instinctive objections.” The argument is that if the PT is true then evil does not have metaphysical existence, but surely cancer is evil. When John suffers cancer he does not lack anything but rather there is an addition to him, namely, an increase in rapidly growing abnormal cells. Does not this show that the PT is false? At face value it does seem that the PT is disproved by cancer because cancer is an addition to John, but this would be to confuse “privation of existing” and “process of inducing privation”¹¹ of some good due to an x . This distinction will serve to be important when it comes to objections from positive instances. The term “privation of existing” refers to either death or the absence of some thing due, resulting, say, in blindness or anencephaly. The “process of inducing privation” is still privation of some good required for an x since it leads to the privation of the good required for the perfection of an x ; however, the process can be phenomenological or a felt-experience, as when acid falls into one’s eyes leading to blindness. The acid damages the external and internal structure of the eyes, which can cause blindness. When the damage is

¹¹ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2; *ST*, II, q. 18, a. 8, reply 1.

occurring it burns the individual's eyes, it is a felt-experience, but it leads to the deprivation of sight.

It is a metaphysical privation but the route to it elicits a phenomenon. So the counter-example of cancer confuses “privation of existing” and the “process of inducing privation.” If cancer is seen solely as the “privation of existing” or under a negation-per-se view, then obviously PT would be wrong. But if cancer is seen as the process of inducing privation then it is no problem since cancer leads to, among other things, death. Using cancer as an objection is also mistaken because, first, cancer is a disease, which is to say that it is a disorder of something good. Second, cancer is rapidly growing abnormal cells. The “abnormal” is an indication that cancer is a deviation from that which is normal, and the normal is determined by the essence. Cancer also hinders John from attaining or striving towards his inherent *telos*, to maintain his existence. Hence we conclude that cancer is evil because it is a deviation from that which is good.

An important point to note is that even though cancer is evil it is *not* in itself evil. In other words, cancer is not pure evil because insofar as cancer *exists* it is good. Moreover, inasmuch as cancer is able to produce rapidly growing abnormal cells properly—meaning that it does not fail in that effort—it is good. The PT differentiates still another way in which something can be evil.⁴² This third distinction is “particular evil” and it is when some particular good is deprived for the sake of some other perfection. In other words, *x* suffers evil—deprived of some particular good—due to some other good that *x* naturally lacks for its perfection but which *y* possesses and requires for *y*'s perfection. For example, when a lion preys on a zebra it is a particular evil, because the zebra is deprived of existence, but its deprivation is required

⁴² Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

for the continual existence of the lion. Cancer can be seen as both that which suffers and the one that causes the suffering. Cancer is the cause of particular evil when it is growing in Jim's brain because the degeneration of Jim's brain is not required for Jim's perfection, but it is required for the perfection of cancer; the perfection of cancer in the sense that without the cancer destroying Jim's healthy cells there would not be cancer. Nevertheless, the cancer (or any other disease, say, Ebola) can be the one that "suffers" particular evil when doctors attempt to eliminate the cancer or Ebola by seeking to destroy their existence. Cancer and Ebola are, then, in this case the zebra that the lion hunts and kills for its perfection. From this it is clear that cancer poses no threat to the PT.

3.5 Crosby: Annihilation of x

John F. Crosby criticises the PT for failing to account for all evils. Crosby rightly understands the PT as the position that takes existence as fundamental and upon which evil is parasitic; or, as he puts it, evil is a "certain kind of absence in a being—not just any absence—but an absence of what belongs in the being, or of what is due to the being; thus a being having some privation is de-privated, or wounded."⁴³ He asks how, if evil is a privation of some good, unable to subsist without some actual existing x , could an annihilation of all creatures on this planet by a large meteor be evil. Since the annihilation would be a complete corruption of something good or existent the annihilation would be in stark contrast to the PT, which argues that evil as a privation cannot bring a full corruption of a good since it would mean the non-

⁴³ John F. Crosby, "Is All Evil Only Privation?" in *American Catholic Philosophical Association*, Vol. 75, (2001): 198.

existence of the good, and if it is non-existent then there would be no good upon which evil can act. Crosby writes, “One might say that in the case of a wounded being one can readily identify the bearer of the evil, but that such a bearer of evil is hard to find in the annihilated being.”⁴⁴ The crux of Crosby’s objection is that the PT’s reliance on existence leads to its demise.

Crosby goes on to argue that the PT cannot say where the privation has occurred in the above scenario. If it is true that the PT requires an actual existing x and if this x —which is capable of suffering privation—ceases to exist, as with the meteor, who is the subject of this privation?⁴⁵ Who, in one sense, is suffering the privation or the lack or is the “bearer” of this privation?⁴⁶

The PT-ist is stuck in a dilemma. Surely he wants to affirm that the meteor or the annihilation of all the creatures on this planet is evil, but he also wants to affirm that pure evil cannot destroy something good. How can it be true, then, that evil can bring a total destruction of something good and at the same time it be true that evil cannot bring a total destruction of something good? It seems that the PT-ist must affirm one and deny the other; yet, affirming that the annihilation is evil contradicts the PT. But affirming that evil cannot destroy something good is at odds with this situation of the meteor. Which of the two options should the PT-ist choose? Neither. It is a false dilemma. The solution is actually much simpler. Crosby ignores a very important aspect of the PT, namely, that the existence of things is good in and of itself. The meteor, insofar as it is a real existing meteor, is good.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 198- 200. Aquinas raises a similar objection about the destruction of good by evil in *ST1*, q.48. a.4 “Further, evil, as long as it lasts hurts, and takes away good. But that from which something is always being removed, is at some time consumed, unless it is infinite, which cannot be said of any created good. Therefore evil wholly consumes good.”

⁴⁶ Ibid., 199.

Therefore, it is not evil *simpliciter* that brings about the destruction of all living creatures but rather something good that brings about the destruction.⁴⁷ Just as in the case of cancer it is something good (metaphysically)—something that is actual—that brings the destruction or privation.

Crosby's argument that the PT cannot say exactly where the privation has occurred is false. The occurrence of evil is precisely the lack of life—the privation of existence. The creatures that once existed are now no longer in existence because of the meteor. At t1 there were sets of *xs*, which were good by virtue of their existence. At t2 the sets of *xs* are annihilated by a meteor. Thus at t3 there are no sets of *xs*. The evil in t2 and t3 is the process of inducing privation and the privation of existence.

To suggest that the PT necessarily requires another thing *y* to experience the process of inducing privation in some good experienced by *x* is absurd. *x*, in one sense, is capable of suffering evil by itself. Nevertheless, there are situations where some privation in one thing is able to affect another thing, though the latter is not suffering privation per se. For instance, the mourning of a loved one. The privation of existing happens to *x* but *x* is mourned by *y*. Crosby however wants to make the PT so that the PT always requires another *y* for it to be truly privation, but this misconstrues the PT.

Those who suffer evil are the ones who were destroyed by the large meteor; they are now dead. Crosby's point that evil is the destruction of good is false since the meteor, insofar as it exists, is good. Nevertheless, it is true that the effect of the meteor is evil; this the PT does not deny. And the sufferers of the annihilation by the meteor are the creatures who perished.

⁴⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1. q.49. a.1.

Thus their lack of existence is evil. Hence, Crosby's criticism fails to do any damage to the PT.

3.6 Calder, Crosby, and Kane: Positive Instances of Evil

The objection taken to be the most forceful criticism of the PT comes from instances of physical pain. Pain is the phenomenological experience when, for example, one places one's hand on a hot stove or when a knife slices through one's finger while one is chopping a tomato; pain is a "felt quality."⁴⁸ The three main accounts of this objection come from John F. Crosby, G. Stanley Kane, and Todd Calder. All three are skeptical that the PT does enough to account for all evils in the world. Pain, for example, seems self-evidently evil but not privative. The argument is that pain is *not* a mere lack of feeling, like numbness, but a positive quality. This is most clearly seen when comparing a limb that is paralyzed or numb to one that is throbbing with pain. The throbbing pain in the limb is a felt quality wholly different from the mere lack of feeling in the other limb; there is something more happening when the pain is being experienced.⁴⁹ To be sure, whether pain is evil in itself is contested since it is evident that sometimes pain functions as a warning sign to the body of potential harm. That is why nerve damage can be dangerous; you cannot feel the pain you would normally feel when you put your hand on a hot stove, which can lead to you burning your

⁴⁸ Todd Calder, "Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?" in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4, (2007): 373.

⁴⁹ See Kane, "Evil and Privation," 49-52; Calder, "Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?" 373-4; Crosby "Is All Evil Only Privation," 200.

hand.⁵⁰ Calder and Crosby however think that viewing pain as good and not evil is an equivocation of intrinsic and instrumental value. Surely pain is intrinsically evil even if we admit that it often has instrumental values like when it warns us of potential damages.⁵¹ To use Kane's example, suppose there are two index fingers one which is paralyzed and the other throbbing with pain. All things being equal, the index finger with throbbing pain is in far worse condition than the paralyzed one, and the PT-ist must admit that. And if this is admitted the PT-ist acknowledges that pain is not simply a privation or "departure from the state of good health."⁵² It then seems rather difficult to marry pain and the PT because if the PT is a theory of evil generally, it should be able to account for all evils, but it is clear that it is unable to account for instances of pain, which are evil. The worry is that by not acknowledging pain as evil, the PT is going against a self-evident truth.

Let us take a closer look at the criticism from instances of pain. The opponent wants to show that not all evils are privations:

- (1) Pain is evil.
- (2) If pain is a phenomenological experience, then pain is not privation.
- (3) Pain is a phenomenological experience. Thus pain is not privation.

⁵⁰ Bill Anglin and Stewart Goetz, "Evil is Privation," in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1982): 5-7; See also Patrick Lee's reply to whether pain is evil intrinsically in "Evil as Such is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 81, no. 3, (2007): 474-75.

⁵¹ Calder, "Is the Privation Theory Dead?" 374; Crosby, "Is All Evil Only Privation," 208 n. 3.

⁵² Kane, "Evil and Privation," 50.

(4) Therefore, not all evils are privations.

It is true that pain is obviously not a mere lack of feelings, and denying this is going against common experience. The pain of accidentally hammering one's finger is a felt-experience. There is no lacking of any sort taking place. How then can the PT consistently hold both that evil is privation and that pain is not a privation? The first problem with this objection is, unfortunately, the common mistake of not distinguishing the PT from the negation-per-se view. The objectors are well aware that the PT is addressing the nature of evil, and so then to mix it up the negation-per-se view is regrettable. Of course, if one takes evil to be privation *simpliciter* then the PT faces a serious issue of making sense of pain, since pain is not a lack of feeling but an addition of feeling. But the PT never argues that evil is privation *simpliciter*; rather, it argues that evil is a privation of some good that ought to be there. Right from the start the PT would reject (1) making the objection miss the mark, but perhaps not so for the negation-per-se view. Let us modify (3) to strengthen the argument.

(1) Pain is evil.

(2) If pain is a phenomenological experience, then pain is not privation.

(3*) Pain is a phenomenological experience. Thus, pain is not the privation of some good which ought to be there.

(4) Therefore, not all evils are privations of some good which ought to be there.

Does pain show that the PT is wrong in thinking that evils are metaphysical privations of some good? Not at all. The PT-ist will agree that there is nothing about pain itself that is a deprivation of sensation; rather, pain is phenomenological. Further, the PT-ist also affirms that pain is evil. Nonetheless, the conclusion that not all evils are privations of some good which ought to be there is rejected. The inference from (2) and (3*) to (4) is unjustified. There is no reason for *not* thinking that something can be phenomenological and still be a metaphysical privation of some good. An important distinction, which was made in response to the counter-example from cancer (section 3.4), between privation of existence and the process of inducing privation is key to understanding how the inference from (2) and (3) to (4*) is invalid. The privation of existence is when something ceases to exist or when a thing lacks something it ought to have by its nature. The process of inducing privation, on the other hand, is rather the route through which an *x* is led to the privation of some good required. The process itself can be phenomenological but the result leads to the privation of some good, as when acid is poured on one's eyes. It is painful and it leads to lack of sight. Pain instances are the processes through which privations come about, and for this reason are evil. The process itself is metaphysically a privation as when the index finger is throbbing with pain, because of the privation of some good, i.e. the proper-functioning of the finger. It is for this reason that people take pain medications, for example. The medication tends to diminish the pain and bring back proper-functioning, so that the person can go about their daily routine without any disruption from pain.

Let us suppose that there are two women, Carol and Hannah, sitting together at a table. On their table are two cups: in one cup is coffee and in the other is poisoned hemlock tea. Drinking the coffee will stimulate the brain in a positive manner making the person more alert, and drinking the poisoned hemlock tea will cause severe headaches and excruciating

stomach cramps. Carol decides to drink the coffee and Hannah decides to drink the poisoned hemlock tea. Both will experience positive feelings or qualities, but only one's experience is evil, namely, Hannah's. The reason is that Carol's coffee induces positive qualities which enhances that which is natural to her and does not impede her from proper-functioning, whereas Hannah's poisoned hemlock, even though it induces positive qualities, impedes her from proper-functioning. Thus phenomenological experiences are not sufficient for evil, though they can result in the privation of some good. Pain then is evil because it belongs to the process of inducing privation.

It might be replied that pain in and of itself is evil, and does not require the further analysis of the process of inducing privation, so it is still evident that not all evils are captured by the PT. It is unclear though how pain in and of itself can be evil without reference to the subject x in which it inheres, since pain occurs in the presence of the lack of some good. To argue that pain in and of itself is evil would be to assume that pain can subsist without a subject in which it inheres. How so? The telos of pain is to warn the subject of damage or hurt and so pain is always in reference to the subject in which it inheres. So intrinsically pain is good relative to its telos, but evil relative to inhibiting proper-function. Thus pain is evil because it inhibits some functioning and always inheres in a subject—not that pain is evil, and thereby can inhere in a subject. Pain is part of a well-functioning nervous system as it “contributes” to the “flourishing of the animal.”⁵³ Insofar as it does so well it is good, similar to the cancer example.

Recall that the PT differentiates two further ways in which something can be evil.⁵⁴ The first is complete evil and that is when an x is deprived of some good required for its perfection,

⁵³ Lee, “Evil as Such is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby,” 276.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

as in the case of blindness. The second is particular evil and it is when some particular good is deprived for the sake of some perfection. Similarly, pain is evil in this second sense; it is a particular evil. Pain in itself is not required for the perfection of an x , since it is possible for an x to exist without ever experiencing pain and the lack of pain experience thereof would not entail that x is less perfect. However, in the actual world it is unlikely that an x lives its whole life without experiencing pain. Pain is a means to help maintain a creature's existence in this actual world. It is a privation of some particular good for the sake of the complete perfection of x . For that reason, pain is a warning sign of any potential harm towards x . For instance, if I accidentally hammer a nail through my index finger I will experience pain in my index finger. This lets me know that I have injured my finger and that it needs attention. Pain deprives me of a particular good (say, serenity) for the sake of my perfection, namely, the having of all my fingers. Without the pain, I could bleed to death, or if I notice the injury too late (because I did not feel pain) it could lead to infection and ultimately death. More importantly, pain is a particular evil necessary for this actual world to help maintain the existence of x s. As Patrick Lee says, "Given that we live in a world where there are physical injuries, pain sensations are part of the animal organism's function as it is designed to function: they are part of the animal organism's functioning in a way that maintains or promotes its survival and flourishing."⁵⁵ Therefore, the inference from (2) and (3) to (4*) is invalid.

Does this however confuse instrumental and intrinsic values? Is pain after all instrumentally good but intrinsically evil? As I have argued, pain cannot be intrinsically evil since pain is part of a well-functioning nervous system which requires a subject, and so

⁵⁵ Lee, "Evil as Such is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby," 274.

inasmuch as pain is actualised it is good. And pain, because it is a particular evil and belongs to the process of inducing privation, cannot have the intrinsic value of being evil. There is no equivocation, as Calder has argued, since pain intrinsically cannot be evil but rather is good, and pain's function is good inasmuch as it promotes an *x*'s flourishing.

As a result, pain is not a stumbling block to the PT. The concern that the PT cannot account for pain is shown to be false by the consideration that pain is part of a well-functioning nervous system and is evil only if it leads to privation. There, however, remains one more attack. This is from positive moral evil, an attack which both Calder and Crosby make. Some moral evils are not simply privations or disorders; they are more than that. These moral evils are positive instances of evil desires, ones filled with intentions or desire and not privations. Crosby uses the example of Cain murdering his brother, Abel, in cold blood to assert that Cain's act is not a mere privation but extends beyond it.⁵⁶ It is not only a privation of brotherly love but an active aggression. Crosby suggests that Cain's motivation for the murder is contrary to good and it cannot solely be expressed as wayward good but a hatred of good itself. This wayward-ness is more than a mere departure from goodness; it possesses an antagonistic nature towards good. It is Cain's pride in desiring to be the only person pleasing to the eyes of God that lead him towards passionate hatred of Abel's existence. Calder similarly suggests that when a murderer engages in murder, she "kill[s] without justification."⁵⁷ Consequently, to understand the murder, reference must be made to the intention possessed by the murderer. Clearly it was not the lack of some good that led to murder but a positive malicious intention had by the murderer. This cannot be regarded as privation.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Crosby, "Is All Evil Only Privation?" 203-07.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Before responding, I will discuss a few initial problems with the argument from positive moral evils. First, the PT affirms that evil desires are often acted on, as it is with murder. And the PT has never seen moral evils as objections to the theory, even though Crosby, Calder, and others think otherwise. Second, and often, opponents of the PT stumble over the term “privation” and assume that it simply means negation. So when criticising the PT, the opponents continuously assert that evil desires and actions are not privations or negations. There is something the PT does not or cannot capture in moral evils due to moral evils not being privations of some good, so the argument goes. The point, however, of using the term “privation” is to indicate the lack of something good which ought to be there by its nature. Thus the blind man is lacking the full goodness of human nature since he is deprived of a sense, namely, sight. The same is true of the child born with anencephaly; insofar as the child is a human being, certain properties should flow from the essence of a human being. If there are some deficiencies in some properties—as in the case with anencephaly—then the child lacks some good due to her qua human being. The point is that a defect (which is a privation) can have an effect which itself is defective (deprived of some good). Nonetheless, it does not make the child less human than one with a fully functioning brain. How this applies to evil desires and actions will be seen in a moment.

When it comes to evil desires, the PT affirms that they are indeed evil. Yet they are evil because the desire arises from a deficiency in the intellect or appetite. The intellect apprehends that which it perceives as good insofar as it is perfective of the one doing the desiring, and the will then executes an action towards attaining the object of desire. Whatever the intellect desires, it desires for the perfection of its nature—desires are always directed to the perfection of the one desiring (see section 3.1). Evil desires are evil because they arise out of the intellect failing to apprehend real goods which are perfective, and instead the intellect

desires apparent goods which are not actually perfective to one doing the apprehending. There is a privation or deficiency in the intellect; this can be the result of excessive emotions depriving the intellect of proper reasoning, or the result lacking of knowledge, or because of other factors inhibiting proper reasoning. For instance, angry John may desire the killing of Jim in a fit of rage as pay-back because Jim cut him off during rush hour. This is excessive emotion hampering John's intellect in desiring what is actually perfective to his nature, and instead causing him to desire that which is really not perfective—killing Jim. For this reason, the PT-ist argues that evil cannot be desired for its own sake. Any desire is a desire for something which it apprehends as perfective to its nature. It can only be perfective insofar as it is actual. But if, *arguendo*, it were possible for evil to be desired for its own sake, then nothing would be desired since it would be a desire for the non-actual. So evil desires are good relatively, insofar as they are actual or have representational actuality since actuality cannot in principle be privation. However, desires that arise out of deficiencies in the intellect or appetite are privations of the full goodness of intellect or appetite and thus are evil.

What of evil actions? Is it possible on the PT for there to be evil actions? After all, actions have real effects and thus cannot be privations; hence, we are led to the absurd conclusion that no action is evil. Or does not the PT have to affirm that since all actions are directed at some good, all actions are good and not evil? But if this is true, then the PT fails *prima facie* to account for evil actions. The PT, however, answers that evil actions are indeed evil. Following Aquinas, the PT-ist argues that to understand good and evil actions, actions must be viewed under the light of good and evil things.⁵⁹ The reason is that both actions and things are actual and not simply non-actual insofar as they are real and do have effects. Goodness

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *ST II*, q. 18, a. 1-3.

in things is proportionate to their actuality. As mentioned above, the blind man or child born with anencephaly is lacking in the full goodness of human nature since each is deprived of some properties due to them qua human being. Both are said to be good relative to their existence or actuality, but are said to be evil inasmuch as they lack some perfection. Every action is good inasmuch as it has actuality—so, good relative to their actuality—but is evil because it lacks some perfection of its nature. The perfection lacking in action can be the effects of real goods. Evil actions result due to morally evil desires which arise out of the deficiencies in the intellect or appetite. As a result of the privations of some good in the intellect, evil actions occur. Evil actions occur due to privations of some good; to use Aquinas' example, when a blind man walks, he is unable to walk properly and stumbles because of his lack of sight—even though he has the power of walking.⁶⁰ Evil actions are themselves privations of proper actions as they are a consequence of evil desires which themselves are privations of proper desires.

Cain, by willing an evil act, the murder of Abel, is not doing so for evil's sake, which we have seen is impossible. As noted by Crosby, Cain was jealous of Abel because he wanted to be the only one pleasing in the eyes of God. This situation sheds light on two things. One, Cain viewed that it was good—I would argue that it was an apparent good—to be the only one pleasing in the eyes of God. Two, the murder of Abel was seen as a good through which to achieve some perfection Cain lacked. Thus Cain wills the (apparent) good, which he sees as perfective, but in so doing wills secondarily the death of his brother. Evil desires are evil because they arise out of the intellect failing to apprehend that which is really perfective to the one doing the desiring. For that reason, the PT calls it the privation of due order. "Order"

⁶⁰ Ibid., q. 18, a. 1, ad. 2.

refers to the intellect being properly directed towards real goods that are perfective. The privation of due order and the privation of some good due to an *x* differ conceptually but not in reality. Cain's action and desire are evil because they are privations both in intellect and in action.

Regarding Calder's example of the murderer, the positive malicious intention is not evil itself just as the blind man who stumbles while walking is not *not* walking but rather is walking defectively. So the murderer's intention is evil insofar as it results from a defective intellect desiring that which is not perfective of her nature, but the intention is good relative to having actuality.

The intention to murder is primarily willed because the murderer sees killing as perfective. By murdering she achieves that which she was previously lacking. In other words, the desire for murder is a consequence of desiring a good, say, the pleasure experienced in murdering a person, doing something forbidden by the law, or thinking that it will bring some perfection. Evil itself is not the primary object but a result of some good, which is seen to be perfective. Hence, Aquinas writes in *De Malo*:

Therefore, suppose that persons happen to will to enjoy some pleasure (e.g. adultery or any like desirable thing) so much that they would not shun incurring the deformity of sin that they perceived to be involved in what they will. Not only will we say that the persons will the good that they chiefly will, but also that they will the very deformity that they choose to suffer lest they be deprived of the good they desire.⁶¹

⁶¹ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 12.

Aquinas' point is that even though the evil is a result of some action, the intention first and foremost is good; otherwise, there would be no desiring in the first place. Surely, though, it might be objected, it is absurd to claim that the intention is good when the desire to murder is clear and present. Yet, it is true that the having of desire itself is not evil; people have many desires, most of which are not evil. But evil ends when desired are privations of due order. Again this refers to the intellect failing to apprehend that which is truly perfective of the one desiring. Thus evil desires are still privations of some good, and so are rightly called evil. The privation of due order should not be confused with the negation-per-se view. The PT does not argue that moral evils are caused by lack of desires. But the desires themselves, if they are evil, arise out of the intellect and appetite failing to desire real good.

Returning to Calder's and Crosby's objections, they fail to show how evil actions and desires are *not* privations of due order. And their objections do not show how the deviation from due order is incompatible with evil action or desire. This argument is made by Patrick Lee in response to Crosby. Lee claims that no reason is given by Crosby to think that morally evil acts are other than privations or deviations from due order.⁶² The opponent of the PT must show how moral evils are incompatible with the idea that they are privations of due order, and how moral evils are not privations of due order.

As I have argued, evil desires and actions are primarily good, inasmuch as the intellect and appetite apprehends some perceived goods (which are not real goods) and they are actual. But they are only relatively good because evil desires and actions are a consequence of the intellect and appetite failing to apprehend real goods. The argument is not that necessarily if some *x* desires some good then consequently *x* will commit moral evils. To use

⁶² Lee, "Evil as Such is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby," 282-86.

Aquinas' example, suppose x desires the pleasure of adultery. To attain that pleasure x must commit a moral evil of adultery. x 's primary goal is the *pleasure* of adultery and as a consequence of that x 's secondary goal is moral evil of adultery. Thus if x wills the pleasure of adultery then x wills also the moral evil attached to it, the act of adultery. Nevertheless, x is capable of refraining from his adultery and if so then it will be at the cost of x 's primary goal.

So evil desires and action then are privations of due order. As a result, evil cannot be intended for itself as that would mean intending nothing-ness. Hence, it is impossible to do something for evil's sake, as actions insofar as they are all real are good, though relative to their actuality. The concerns raised from positive instances of evil do not press far enough the issue of why evil desires and actions are evil. If they did, I would argue, they would collapse into the PT.

Some final points of clarification: that evil cannot be intended for itself or that something is not intrinsically evil does not mean that there are no objective moral and non-moral evils. The thrust of the PT is that objectively evil exists—here “exists” again signifies the truth of the proposition, not that there is some positive reality called evil. That the lion injures itself during a chase is not morally evil, it is just evil and objectively so. The PT affirms the objectivity of evil in the world and argues that any deep study of the nature of evil will show that the PT is true.

We shall see in the following chapter what I think is an argument against the problem of evil that has remained in the backdrop until now. This is not a new argument per se but rather it is an argument connecting two arguments—one logically follows from the other—namely, the PT and the real distinction between essence and existence in things.

4 Evil and Existence Itself

We saw in chapter 3 that the PT can withstand certain criticisms, mainly its apparent inability to account for certain types of evils. The PT makes it clear that there are things that can suffer evil. In this chapter, I will show that the PT presupposes the existence of the classical God. I call it the “Evil to God” argument. Henceforth, evil is understood within the PT. This provides an avenue for a positive argument for the existence of God, which I think has not received its due attention. The argument is such that if PT is assumed to be true, and I have given reasons for thinking it is true, then evil necessarily depends on the existence of God. I will argue that evil requires actual existing things that can suffer deprivation. And the essence of these things is distinct from their existence. I then argue that any thing that has its essence and existence distinct could not in principle exist at a moment unless it is caused to exist or, put differently, unless it continually derives its existence from something that does not have its essence distinct from its existence, which is the classical God.⁶³ After stating my arguments, I will respond to objections.

Before proceeding with the “Evil to God” argument, now would be a good time to clarify my terms. As mentioned earlier, I am assuming real essentialism, so “essence” means that which constitutes a thing to be that thing. Causal power refers to a thing’s power to cause an effect. The term “Existence Itself” refers to God, the One Who does not derive His causal

⁶³ It should be noted that this argument is my interpretation of Maimonides, Avicenna, and Aquinas’s argument for the existence of God. See Jon McGinnis, “Avicenna,” in *Great Medieval Thinkers*, ed. Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 149-208; Kenneth Seekin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 6-35; Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968), 51-59.

power of existence from another, but rather is identical to His existence. I capitalize pronouns when referring to God. My reason is to distinguish God from other beings.

4.1 Evil-to-God Argument

If evil is as the PT argues a privation of some good or form due to an x , then we want to know if there is evil in the world. Then answer is simply: evil is all around us. We cannot escape this reality; it affects us directly or indirectly. You open Facebook to find out that there was a mass shooting in Las Vegas. Or you received a phone call informing you that your mother had a heart-attack early this morning. Or you go for a scheduled ultrasound to find out that there are heart complications with your child in womb. Evil affects people of all colours, it cuts across socio-economic classes, it does not discriminate between theists, agnostics, and atheists. It even cuts across species. Birds and mammals are constantly facing some evil whether that is disease or lack of food. Nothing is safe from evil.

These examples illustrate two kinds of evil: *moral* evil (the shooter firing on innocent concert goers); and *natural* evil (your mother's heart attack and your baby's heart not properly developing). That these kinds of evil, and more, occur should be of no surprise to us. We expect it to happen at least once in our lives—in one sense suffering is guaranteed for the ones that survive.

Sometimes due to poor analyses or lack thereof people think evil is a real metaphysical reality or that it is some force that acts upon things or an actual metaphysical entity, when it is not. Properly speaking, evil is the privation of some good due to an x : some potential that is not actualised. So, without at least one x that can suffer evil there could not be evil in the

world. x , for present purposes, refers only to natural things like humans, animals, and trees. The claim is this: if there were no world with at least one x , then there would not be evil in the world. I take this to be true since the denial of the claim leads to Manicheanism, which I have shown is false.

So, evil requires x s that suffer privations. And the world we live in contains these x s. We know what some of these x s are and that these x s are objective and mind-independent. You know that dogs are *canine* and that human beings are *rational animals*. But your knowledge that dogs are canine or that human beings are rational animals is distinct from your knowledge that there are actually dogs and human beings in the world. In other words, what we know about these x s that can suffer evil are two distinct features about them: We know its *essence* and we know its *existence*.⁶⁴ These are two very distinct features of realities.

Imagine a mad scientist creates and develops a fully-grown human and places him within an incredibly advanced virtual reality. We will call the human Adam and the virtual reality the Garden. Adam's mind and senses are confined to the Garden. The Garden has all the animals of the real world but additionally contains all mythical and extinct creatures. Suppose Adam comes to learn all that there is to know about the Garden—all the available facts. He knows the full descriptive definition (essences) for all things in the Garden. With the knowledge from the Garden, the mad scientist asks Adam, "There are three animals: the centaur, the lion, and the dodo; tell me which animal existed, never existed, or currently

⁶⁴ How "esse" should be translated and used is not a settled question. Some translate it as "existence" whilst others use "act-of-existence" to denote the fuller sense of the term "esse". I have consciously chosen to use "existence" over "act-of-existence" because it cuts down the philosophical jargon. But I think the term "act-of-existence" is a more accurate translation of "esse" since it captures that actuality of substance; whereas, "existence" can be confused with simply existing. Nonetheless, I use "existence" and by it mean "act-of-existence". See Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook, C.S.B. (New York: Random House, 1956), 29-35; Ralph McInerny, *Praecambula fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 134 -144.

exists in the real world?” It seems that Adam’s knowledge of the physical reality and of the full descriptive definition of all things in the Garden are unable to provide him with an answer. He cannot say that the dodo once existed solely by knowing the essence of dodos; nor can he say anything about the existence or non-existence of centaurs or lions. Yet if existence is included in the essence of things, then Adam’s knowledge of what a lion is would be identical with knowing that it is—he should know the truth of the answers to the question being asked. Simply by knowing the essence of the lion he should know that it really exists. To think otherwise would suggest that knowledge of something’s essence is distinct from knowledge of their existence. Moreover, there would be the bizarre consequence that Adam should instantly know that he is in a virtual reality just by knowing the essence of a centaur.

Sometimes, though, the distinctions we make are *mere* distinctions and not ones that reflect reality; in other words, not *real* distinctions. For instance, the morning star and evening star are mere distinctions made about Venus. The distinction lies not in reality but in the mind. It is just the way we talk about Venus but it does not say anything about nature of Venus. Another example of a mere distinction is “bachelor” and “unmarried man”. Both of these terms mean the same thing but we use two distinct words to signify them. *Bachelor* and *unmarried man* does not reflect two realities. It is possible that you might not have known that “bachelor” meant “unmarried man”, but once you did grasp what “bachelor” meant you immediately grasped the concept of an “unmarried man”. So is the essence and existence distinction a mere distinction?⁶⁵

⁶⁵ It is debated as to precisely at what point a real distinction is made. Some suggest that a real distinction is made once it has been demonstrated that there can only be in principle one that has their essence and existence identical. See Gaven Kerr, “Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 86, no. 4 (2012): 541- 555 for a thorough defense that the distinction is made after the argument has reached something that has its essence identical to its existence.

It is clear from the example of Adam that within the essence of a thing its existence is not included. Knowledge of the existence of a thing is separate from knowledge of its essence. Otherwise, in grasping the essence one would immediately know whether it exists. It is for this reason the essence and existence is a real distinction. For if it were only a mere distinction then *xs* would simply exist by virtue of their essence. But knowledge of what something is does not transfer knowledge that that something exists. Hence, one can know the essence of a human being but not know whether he exists. Just as you can know the essence of a centaur without knowing whether it exists. One could raise a doubt here and claim that by knowing the definition of a centaur, one can know that centaurs do not exist. Hence, there is no distinction between essence and existence. Suppose the doubter holds this position firmly. Now there is nothing logically impossible about centaurs. With the current rate of technological advancement, it is logically possible that in the future a man could have the lower body and legs of a horse—becoming a centaur. Now, if we then replayed Adam and the Garden thought experiment, would not it still be true that simply by knowing the essence of a centaur Adam would not know whether centaurs exist. Thus, the distinction remains even with mythical creatures.

Another objection could be raised that this requires us to have a full understanding of essences, which we clearly do not have. We are constantly acquiring new information about the nature of things. It is possible that in the future we will find out that existence is after all part of the essence of things. So how do we know that existence is not part of a thing's essence? There is no denying that we are constantly learning more and more about the essences of things, and this should not surprise us. Real essentialism does not claim that essences are known via the arm chair, but that there are characteristics present in the natures of things that are undisputed even if there were more to discover. Still we could be wrong

about some essences. Nevertheless, we know at least some parts of what constitutes a thing. Say, you deny the existence of Adam (assuming for the moment that he truly does exist), you would not have falsely described his nature. It would be that you were wrong about his existence. Hence you had true beliefs about the nature of Adam, that he is a human being, but thought that he did not exist—just as Adam knew the nature of a centaur but he did not know whether it actually exists. Thus denying the existence of Adam does not mischaracterize his essence in any way. You do not know less about his essence than if you knew he existed—his essence, in one sense, remains intact.

An additional reason for thinking that essence and existence are really distinct in *xs* is that *xs* do not exist infinitely—*xs* are contingent things.⁶⁶ This is obvious from the following consideration. If *xs* are the kinds of things that have existence necessarily, then *xs* would exist for infinity. The necessity of having existence is such that *xs* could not in principle cease to exist. Further if, *arguendo*, it were true that *xs* have existence by nature then no new *x* would be able to come into existence. For instance, if human beings had existence by virtue of their essence no new human being could be conceived, as this would mean the bringing forth of something that at time *t1* did not exist but now at *t2* exists. An objector could bite the bullet and assert that properly speaking no new humans are conceived or come to exist. All humans beings pre-exist in the previous member of the series. So, John pre-existed in his parents and they in their parents, and so on and so forth stretching back infinitely. Does not this mean that existence can be or is part of the essence of *xs*? No. First of all, “pre-exists” differs from “exists.” To pre-exist is not the same thing as to exist here and now. The latter is having *actual* existence and the former is having only *potential* existence. These two things are

⁶⁶ I am aware that some scholastics take real distinctions to entail separability between the distinctions. See. Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 109.

conceptually, and in reality, distinct qualities. That I actually know the English language is different from that I potentially know Cantonese. And this is true of existence: that I actually exists here and now is not the same as I potentially existing here and now.

Second, even if pre-existence were part of your essence, it would not equate to your having actual existence as part of your essence. For if you did, then you would not pre-exist but rather exist. Moreover, to pre-exist does not guarantee that you will exist. Your parents could have married other people, which would result in your not having actual existence. Again, this also applies to your parents which makes all the members of the series contingent. But this is what the objector wanted to avoid in the first place. Third, if it were true that existence were part of the essence of *xs* then *xs* could not perish. We know, though, that human beings, dogs, cats, etc, at one some point will die. But this would be false if existence of *xs* was not really distinct from the essence of *xs*. So we know two things about *xs*: (i) that their “pre-existence,” however interpreted, is different from actual existence. Hence it is right to assert that they come into existence. (ii) That *xs* die—this is undeniable. Therefore, existence cannot be part of the essence of any *xs*.

Let us, however, suppose existence turns out to be the essence of some *x*, say human beings. Now we have animality, rationality, and existence. It is true that animality alone is not the essence of human beings. For if it were, then rationality would be an accident and the essence of a human simply would be being an animal. But a human is a *rational* animal. The rationality, to be specific, is a *differentia*; that which differentiates species within a genus. So, if existence were the essence of human beings, then the essence of human being would depend on existence.⁶⁷ That is no more plausible than thinking animality constitutes the

⁶⁷ Feser, “Scholastic Metaphysics,” 246.

essence of human beings. Furthermore, if existence were part of the essence of human beings, then failing to apprehend the existence of some instance of a human being at any moment, say of John, completely mischaracterizes his essence. Yet we know that we have not misconstrued John's essence as a human being if we were unsuccessful in thinking he did not exist. That Adam fails to grasp the existence of dodos by knowing the essence of dodos does not mean that the essence of dodos has been mischaracterized. Thus, existence can neither be the essence of a human being nor be part of the essence of a human being. The same applies to other *x*s that can suffer evil.

Nonetheless, suppose that essence and existence were not really distinct in some particular *x*s then it would mean that particular *x*'s essence is identical to its existence. Put differently, that *x* would be that which has its essence identical to its existence or is *Existence Itself*, to use scholastic jargon.⁶⁸ And in principle there could not be multiple *Existence Itself*. For distinguishing between various things requires something like particular matter that one thing has that the other lacks. For example, differentiating between John and Jim comes down to John being constituted by his particular matter and Jim being constituted by his particular matter. John is made up of some matter that Jim lacks, and Jim is made up of some matter that John lacks. In other words, John's matter is constituted differently than Jim's matter. This is precisely why we know that John and Jim are two different people. So, to distinguish between multiple *Existence Itselfs* there also must be something like matter which allows this *Existence Itself*, *EI*, to be *this existence itself* and that *Existence Itself*, *EI*, to be *that Existence Itself*. Yet if there is an addition of matter to *EI* or *EI* then they would be that which have their essence identical to their existence plus their particular matter. It should be

⁶⁸ The latin is *ipsum esse subsistens*

obvious from this that neither *EI* or *E₂* are *existence itself* but rather they are existence plus some matter, which is very different from the claim that they are *Existence Itself*. Still, there is one other way of differentiating between things, which might allow for there to be two *existence itselfs*. This second way is by the *differentia* mentioned earlier. *Differentia* is what helps separate species within a genus. For instance, it is the *differentia* “rationality” that sets apart human beings from other animals like lion and dogs. Similarly, if we intend to discriminate between *EI* and *E₂* we would need some specific *differentia*. The problem, however, with this is that neither *EI* nor *E₂* would be existence itself since they would possess some extra thing, their *differentia*, which the other does not possess that allows for their distinction.⁶⁹ We would require some way of identifying *EI* and *E₂* without confusing them or conflating them. This is impossible since any time we attempt to distinguish two things which have their essence identical to their existence we posit an addition, whether it be matter or some *differentia*, which makes them no longer that which has its essence identical to its existence but rather that which has its essence identical to its existence plus some extra thing. Thus, there cannot in principle be more than one existence itself. But there are multiple *x*s both within a genus (human beings, animals, etc) and within a species (John, Jim, mad genius scientist, Adam, etc). Hence, no *x* has its essence identical to its existence. So the distinction between essence and existence is a real one in *x*. Note that *x* here refers to natural things like humans, animals, trees, etc.

For any *x* that can suffer evil, *x* has existence either by virtue of itself or derived from another. This I take to be undisputed since the denial leads to a contradiction. It cannot be that for any *x* that can suffer evil *x* neither exists essentially nor derives its existence from

⁶⁹ McGinnis, “Avicenna,” in *Great Medieval Thinkers*, 164.

something else. Also both sides of the disjunction cannot be true at the same time. So, x cannot have its existence by virtue of itself and derive it from another; nor can x have its existence derived from another and also have its existence by virtue of itself. That would be ridiculous. One of the disjuncts is true and the other false. So, if it is true that x has its existence essentially, then that immediately rules out x deriving its existence from something else.

Surely something can come into existence spontaneously or out of nothing, *ex nihilo*? And would that not suggest that x 's existence is self-caused? It would certainly suggest self-causation, but x cannot cause itself to exist since that would mean it must exist before it exists. It is impossible for an x to cause itself to exist or derive existence from itself. In other words, for an x to cause or derive its own existence, it must first exist to then give itself the power to exist. So an x must first exist before it exists to then cause itself to exist. But if it already exists, then it did not need to give existence to itself nor could it make itself exist. A possible objection here is that it is false to say that you cannot cause yourself to exist. x s constantly cause themselves to exist; they go hunting or seeking food and shelter; they keep themselves safe from predators, etc. On the other hand, some x s, like humans, can definitely cause themselves to die or continue existing. So, it seems that some x s do cause themselves to exist. That some x s can kill themselves does not establish that they possess their existence essentially. True as it might be that x s can die, kill themselves, or can extend their lives, there is a difference between "causing" yourself to exist by eating and by finding shelter, etc, and causing the constant composition of essence and existence. An x cannot maintain its essence and existence composition since they are distinct features. There is no intrinsic capacity for an x 's essence that can unite its existence to its essence. This is a more fundamental point that is being argued: that there is nothing within the essence of an x that makes it true that

that x continues to have its essence and existence composite intact. x s are the kind of things that suffer evil and are the kind that cannot maintain their essence/existence composition.

Since x 's essence is distinct from its existence, x does not possess existence by virtue of itself because existence is not included in its essence. Therefore, x must continually derive its existence from something else. Once an x exists, its essence and existence continue to be real distinct features. And since essence and existence remain distinct features for every moment in which x exists, something must sustain the composition of x 's essence and existence. So, not only does x derive existence from something else as a one time deal but x must be have its essence/existence composition constantly sustained in every moment.

Hence, no x can derive existence from itself or cause itself to exist or maintain itself in existence. This includes any part of x . If x were to derive existence from some part or from a collection of some of its parts, those part(s) would precede itself in existence to bring the whole x into existence which would include the part or the collection of the parts. For this reason, x must derive existence from something else and must have the essence/existence composition maintained by something which is distinct from x . So, for any x , its existence is imparted from and is sustained by something distinct, y . Either y has its essence and existence derived from something distinct and so its essence and existence remain distinct at every moment as well, which will require a further cause; or y has its essence identical to its existence or, put differently, y 's essence is its existence. If y 's essence were distinct from its existence, then there would be a regress of continually derived existence which is either infinite or terminates with one that is existence itself.

Since x constantly derives its existence from y , this series constitutes an *essentially ordered causal series* because in an *essentially ordered causal series* all members continually depend upon for their causal powers on something extrinsic to the series. This something in principle

cannot depend for its causal powers on another. Hence, this something becomes the *first cause* by necessity. The “first cause” does not mean first in a temporal sequence or first to begin a series of events or first in that it came before the second and third. But rather “first cause” means one that does not derive or depend for its causal powers on anything else. An *essentially ordered causal series* is concerned with what happens at a single moment and not with temporal series. To illustrate an essentially ordered causal series, take for example the five-year-old playing on a metal swing in the playground. She is suspended one foot above ground. But she has no inherent capacity to remain one foot above ground, unless she is held up by the swing seat. But the swing seat has no inherent power to be one foot above ground either, unless it is held up by the swing chains. But swings chains have no inherent capacity to hold up the swing seat and the five-year-old, unless it is held up by the swing bar. But the swing bar itself has no inherent capacity to hold up the swing chains, the swing seat, and the five-year-old, unless it is held up by the swing legs. And the swing legs have no inherent power to hold up the swing bar, the swing chains, the swing seat, and the five-year-old, unless it was held up by the earth. So, we could say that at any moment in which the five-year-old is held one foot above ground her being there is because of the earth. The earth is the first cause. The parts of the swing are instrumental causes since they derive their powers to hold up the five-year-old at every moment from the earth. Here, we see that an *essentially ordered causal series* is not concerned with temporal series or events. In this swing example, it would be impossible for the instrumental causes to hold the girl up one foot above ground without the first cause imparting the causal power to the instrumental causes to hold the girl one foot above ground. Hence, an essentially ordered causal series must have a first cause. To use Gaven Kerr’s example, an *essentially ordered causal series* is a one-many relation ($w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow y)$) such that “some cause, x , on which a given effect, y , depends is not only itself dependent

on some antecedent cause w , but cannot be understood to be a cause of y without the causal activity of w .”⁷⁰ The posterior activities are wholly dependent on the first cause. The “first cause” here does not mean first in a temporal sequence, or first to begin a series of events, or first in that it came before the second and third. Rather “first cause” means one that does not derive its causal powers from any other. This contrasts with an *accidentally ordered causal series*. In an *accidentally ordered causal series* each member possesses its own causal powers and as a result is not an instrumental cause. Their powers are not transitive and so consequently the causal powers are not dependent on the first cause, as is the case with members in an *essentially ordered causal series* where each member depends wholly on the first cause. For this reason, an *accidentally ordered causal series* can in principle stretch back infinitely since the members’ causal powers are contained within the immediate cause and effect.

The inherent inability for an x to cause its essence/existence composition requires an extrinsic cause y from which x can derive its existence. This y derives its existence from another source z or y has its essence identical to its existence. If y derives existence from z , and z derives existence yet from another, and so on and so forth, then there is an infinite regress of causes. Yet a series with members that have no inherent casual power, like that of existing, constitutes an *essentially ordered causal series*. And extending such a series to include an infinite number of members will have no effect in showing why each member possesses a causal power that is extrinsic to its essence. If this causal series were an *accidental ordered causal series*, then there would be no need for a first cause. As Kerr argues, an *accidentally ordered causal series* is a one-one causal relation, $(w \rightarrow x) \rightarrow (x \rightarrow y)$, such that

⁷⁰ Kerr, “Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered,” 545.

each activity can be isolated and understood without appealing to antecedent causes, in which case the series can extend infinitely.⁷¹ A stock example is of the father who begets a son; once begotten, the son does not require his father to beget his own son. The causal power for the son to beget a further son is not dependent on the father's existence.⁷²

Suppose there is a series of mirrors reflecting a face. Each mirror is reflecting the previous mirror. There is no causal power intrinsic within mirrors to generate faces. They can only do so by reflecting an image from a first source or cause, in this case, a real face. So, this series of mirrors reflecting a face, at any moment in which it is reflecting a face, necessitates a first cause, which, in this case, is a face; one that is itself not reflected. The mirrors derive their causal power to generate a face at any moment from the fact that there is indeed a real face. Now assume, *arguendo*, that this series of mirrors stretch back infinitely. So there's an infinite number of mirrors all reflecting a face. Does this show that a first cause is unnecessary or that positing a first cause makes no sense? No, because even with an infinite number of mirrors stretching back it is still true that an actual face is needed, if indeed the mirrors are reflecting a face. Increasing the number of mirrors does no damage to the argument itself. Something apart from the actual series is required to reflect faces in the mirrors. And once the first mirror reflects a face then henceforth all the other mirrors in the series will do the same. Mirrors have no intrinsic capacity to generate faces.⁷³ Now, there have been some

⁷¹ Ibid., 545.

⁷²For a useful exposition and defense of essentially and accidentally ordered causal series, see Kerr, "Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered," Caleb Cohoe, "There Must Be a First: Why Thomas Aquinas Rejects Infinite, Essentially Ordered Causal Series," 838-856; in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 5 (2013): 838-856; See also, Aquinas, *ST*, q. 46, a. 3, ad. 7.

⁷³ Similarly, a paint brush's capacity to paint a face is only derived through the artist, not by the length of the paint brush. An infinitely long paint brush does not have any more power to paint than a ten-centimeter brush does just because it is longer. Again, it does not matter for an essentially ordered causal series that there is or could be an infinite temporal series or temporal events that occur one after the other, rather, it is concerned with what happens within a single moment. And since within every single moment there cannot be an infinite regress of causally derived powers, precisely because the members of the series in that moment, and any moment for that matter, are instrumental causes and have no inherent capacity for whatever it is they are causing.

philosophers who have wrongly asserted that the cosmological arguments, or more specifically, Aristotle and Aquinas' arguments for a first cause are ridiculous because they posit the impossibility of infinite regress of temporal causes. Clearly, as we have seen, a regress of temporal series has no effect in the argument from an *essentially ordered causal series*.

So similarly adding an infinite number of members in the series where *x*s do not have intrinsic causal powers for existence is impossible and fails to explain why each member exists. But, even if, *arguendo*, it were possible an infinite regress of temporal series of derived causal powers, the series itself would not explain the origination of the causal power of existence. Rather, the derived causal powers would just be assumed since the series itself can only explain inherent causal powers; derived causal powers cannot be explained by positing more members within a series. Therefore, a first cause *y* is necessary to such a causal series. *y* is either identical to its existence or there is another, *z*, that is identical to its existence which ends the regress of causally derived existence. The termination of the causal series cannot be with anything other than one whose essence is identical to its existence. And *y* cannot derive its existence or caused its own existence by some principle within.⁷⁴ Especially since if it were possible for the first cause to be self-caused then something would be more fundamental than the first cause, namely, its parts that cause existence. If the parts were more fundamental, then a further explanation is required for why the parts are united. Nevertheless, without one that has its essence identical to its existence there would be an infinite regress of essentially

For this reason, an essentially ordered causal series necessitates a first cause that does not derive its causal power. I am aware that any analogy at a certain point will fall apart and for that reason I am making use of three separate analogies.

⁷⁴ Avicenna makes a similar point when he says that if parts exist possibly, then the whole (all the parts together) considered cannot exist necessarily of itself. See McGinnis, "Avicenna," in *Great Medieval Thinkers*, 165-66.

ordered causal series. An infinite regress of derived existence must terminate with one that has its essence identical to its existence without which no x would exist here and now. Hence, a first cause y is required to end the regress of an essentially ordered causal series. The claim here that y is identical to its existence is not the same as claiming that y 's existence is had by virtue of its essence. y does not have its existence necessarily by virtue of its essence, but y exists because it is identical to its existence. The former indicates a possession of some property—existence—which requires an explanation for the composite of essence and existence. The explanation will lead to something more fundamental and thus y could not be the cause of existence in things, but would just be a member within the causal series of existence. The latter, however, indicates that y exists by virtue of the fact that y 's essence is identical to its existence. Hence, it is correct to state that y is the first cause of existing x s.

Now, whatever is identical to its existence is Existence Itself. As argued previously, in principle there cannot be multiple *Existences Itself*, for to differentiate between multiple things there must be something, like matter, which allows this thing to be *this* thing and that thing to be *that* thing. However, if there were multiple beings in which essence and existence were identical, then there would need to be something, some addition of a thing, to help distinguish *this* thing, which is *Existence Itself*, from *that* other thing, which also is *Existence Itself*. But then neither would be *Existence Itself* since they would possess some extra thing which the other does not possess that differentiates the two.⁷⁵ Furthermore, an account of why both possess something that the other does not possess would be required. The addition would make both of them other than the first cause since there would be something more fundamental than either. But the first cause of existence is the most fundamental, and it

⁷⁵ McGinnis, "Avicenna," in *Great Medieval Thinkers*, 164.

cannot be so if it enters into composition.⁷⁶ If there were no differences between the apparent multiple Existences Itself, then there is not a multiple.

Could there, however, be two things that are identical to their respective essences—so possessing their existence necessarily due to their essence?⁷⁷ The answer is no, because then their existence would be self-caused and, as explained earlier, something that is self-caused cannot in principle exist, as it would need to exist first before it existed in order to bring itself into existence. And this is impossible. They would be self-caused since there would be no explanation for their distinct existence, if, *arguendo*, they were identical to their existence. So, either existence would be assumed or self-caused, neither of which provide a reason for the composition of *x*s existence/essence. Therefore, without *Existence Itself* there could not in principle be evil in the world since evils are privations of some good that ought to be there in *x*. And the existence of *x* necessitates *Existence Itself*.

The Evil to God argument then is this: that there is evil in the world; that evil requires actual existing *x*s; *x*s have their essence and existence distinct; that which has its essence and existence distinct derives its existence from something extrinsic to it; this series of causally derived existence constitutes an *essentially ordered causal series* where each member within this series have their powers derivatively; an *essentially ordered causal series* must terminate with a first cause; that from which existence is derived must have its essence identical to its existence; *y* is that whose essence is its existence or is *Existence Itself*; therefore *x* receives its existence from *y* at every moment in which *x* exists; therefore without *Existence Itself*, there is no evil; but there is evil, therefore *Existence Itself* exists.

⁷⁶ Aquinas, *ST1*, q. 3. a. 8.

⁷⁷ Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, 44.

4.2 Objections to the Evil-to-God Argument and Conclusion

The conclusion then arrived at is that if there is evil in the world, there is one who is identical to its existence, which is God. A critic might suggest that identifying Existence Itself with God is an unwarranted move on my part. Why should we call Existence Itself “God”? The reason for identifying that which is identical to its existence with God is not unwarranted because God—whatever else God turns out to be—must necessarily be identical to His existence. In fact, since there cannot be multiple *Existence Itself*, it is proper to refer to that which no other thing is like as God.

Does this conclusion, however, mean that any x that exists is a part of God or is God, since God is identical to existence, leading to either panentheism or pantheism?⁷⁸ No. First, the argument states that God is the only one Who is identical to His existence, and not that God is identical to all x s existences. Second, God as the first cause cannot be within the causal series of existence since an *essentially ordered causal series* (EOCS) requires that the first cause not derive its causal powers from another. All members within an EOCS derive their causal powers from another. So if the “first cause” were within the series, then it would not be the first cause as it would derive its causal powers—which in this case is existence—from another. Only if the argument claimed that God were within the causal series would there be concern for panentheism or pantheism. If Existence Itself meant identical to all things which

⁷⁸ This point is discussed at length by Giovanni Ventimiglia, “Is the Thomistic Doctrine of God as “Ipsum Esse Subsistens” consistent?” in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2018): 161-191. Ventimiglia stresses the point that *existence itself* should not be understood as the one whose existence encompasses all other existence but rather that God is the one whose essence is its personal existence. In light of this, he suggests using *suum esse* instead of *ipsum esse subsistens*; however, I think *ipsum esse subsistens* can be used with the clarification that it does not mean that all things share in God’s existence.

exist, then there is reason for thinking of God in a panentheistic or pantheistic manner since God is all and in all things. Yet, neither is this claim nor this argument made. The “Evil to God” argument reaches the conclusion that there is a thing that is identical to its existence, and not that there is a thing that is somehow identical to all things in existence. I am aware that the term “Existence Itself” might suggest I am arguing for panentheism or pantheism, if one is unaware of the argument that it derives from; however, I do not expect someone who is aware of the “Evil to God” argument to misunderstand my reasons why the term “Existence Itself” is employed and why it does not imply panentheism or pantheism.

One objection is to challenge the “Evil to God” argument as a whole and argue that the existence of any x is explainable without having to appeal to a first cause. Provided that a sufficient explanation is given for each member within the causal series, it is then unreasonable to seek further explanation for the existence of the causal series. Following Hume, Joseph Campbell suggests that an infinite causal series is not over and above its members, and hence if each member within the series has an explanation then there is nothing left to explain.⁷⁹ The implication is two-fold: (i) there can be an infinite regress of causes; and (ii) there is no need for a first cause and hence no Existence Itself.

The Evil-to-God argument does not assume that the causal series of derivative existence is over and above its members. For this would involve the inference that each member derives its existence and thus the series must derive its existence. This would commit the composition fallacy. It should be clear by now that the argument is that derivative causal powers within an EOCS require something that does not derive its causal power from another. So, granted that the “Evil to God” argument does not commit this inference, the question is whether it is true

⁷⁹ See, Joseph K. Campbell, “Hume’s Refutation of the Cosmological Argument,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1996): 159-173.

that a causal explanation for each member within an EOCS suffices to explain the series itself. Remember that all members in an EOCS have derivative causal powers from the first cause, such that if the first cause stops supplying the causal power then the series would cease. Suppose it were possible that there is an infinite EOCS, where each member passes on the causal power infinitely. The explanation for each member then is the preceding member. So the cause for *a* is *b*, for *b* is *c*, and for *c* is *d*, *ad infinitum*. Such an explanation does not explain the origination of the causal power, but just assumes it without explanation. Insisting that the origination of the causal power is the preceding member is as helpful as insisting that the reflected image in a mirror originates the other image in the mirror. Just as the reflected image in a mirror requires a face to begin the series of reflection, so too does a derived causal power. Even if it were possible, an infinite series of existences would not explain the origination or the continual existence of the series itself. Without a first cause for an EOCS the series itself would not exist since the causal power is solely derived from the first cause. Thus to posit an EOCS without a first cause is similar to positing an infinite series of mirrors reflecting an image without an actual face that began the reflection.

An opponent can claim that existence adds nothing to the essence of an *x*: that I have a \$10 bill in my pocket or not does not change anything about the \$10 bill itself. The \$10 bill will be a \$10 bill whether it actually exists in my pocket or not. Existence cannot be a causal power, the objection continues, since it does not do anything. If it were a causal power one would have it inherently, but one would not have existence inherently. So if existence is not a causal power, then the “Evil to God” argument fails. If it is a causal power, then the question becomes why could not *x*’s existence be a causal power within an *accidental ordered causal* series (AOCS) and not within an EOCS? Isn’t it true that the son’s existence is derived from the father and that they are in an AOCS? Thirdly, the objector can argue that there is no

such thing as an “existence” that is possessed by x ; rather, x simply exists if it does exist, otherwise it does not. And at best, talk of “existence” is a tautology and does not provide any new information. That we know a bachelor is an unmarried man does not give us any new information, it is just an analytic truth. Similarly, that some x exists means *ipso facto* that an x exists.

Could existence be other than a causal power hence making existence not a predicate? Consider the following. If it were true that existence is not a causal power, then x s that exist would exist infinitely—without beginning or end—and no new x s should be able to come into existence; for the coming into existence indicates that it was caused to exist. But we know that x s do not exist infinitely and that x s can and do come into and out of existence. Therefore, it is false that existence is not a causal power. And if an x 's existence is a causal power but x does not have its existence by virtue of its essence, then x 's existence is not an inherent causal power.

So, it is true that not all causal powers are inherent, as it is the case with the above mirror example. The concern, then, that existence adds nothing to a thing seems to have pointed out a flaw in my premise, but on further inspection it becomes clear that this is misguided. There is a difference between actually having a \$10 bill in my pocket and not having a \$10 bill in my pocket. The difference is simple and, perhaps, for this reason, is overlooked, and this is a mistake. That I *really* have a \$10 bill in my pocket is different from not having a \$10 bill in my pocket. Further, that I can conceive of a \$10 bill in my mind making *that* \$10 bill have some cognitional existence is still different from an actual existing \$10 bill. In one sense, it is true that existence does not add anything further to the essence of a \$10 bill (if indeed it has one)—a \$10 bill will remain a \$10 bill whether it exists in my pocket or not—but there is a distinction between a real existing \$10 and one that just has cognitional existence: the real

existing \$10 bill actually exists. Another thing to remember is that the \$10 bill is an artefact, and *x*s refer to natural things that suffer evil. We do not claim that the artefacts suffered evil in the same sense as when, say, John suffered evil.⁸⁰

Regarding the objection of why existence is a causal power within an EOCS, and not within an AOCS obscures the term “derive.” As I have shown, causal powers which are “derived” are causal powers that are wholly dependent on the first cause’s continual exercise of the causal power; this is because the members do not have their existence inherently. Thus, if the first cause discontinued whatever the causal power it was providing, the whole causal series would cease. Existence cannot be anything other than a derived causal power within an EOCS from the consideration that there is nothing about the essence of *x* such that *x* necessarily has its existence; hence, this makes *x* a composite of existence/essence, meaning its existence is distinct from its essence. Thus *x*’s essence cannot in principle maintain the composition of its existence/essence,⁸¹ and *x*’s existence must be a derivative causal power within an EOCS. This is precisely why existence is a causal power within an EOCS. If, instead, existence were a causal power within an AOCS then the power to exist infinitely would be transferred to each member, but this does not happen. Even if, *arguendo*, it were true that composites of existence/essence regressed infinitely, where existence was passed on over and over, it would still not explain the origination of existence within the series; for composites of existence/essence cannot be the cause of existence as they are merely composites of it and not the ultimate cause of it. Instead, the explanation for existence within

⁸⁰ Within the PT, it is true that artefacts suffer evil in the broad sense insofar as some parts break or fail in some function. Nonetheless, this is not the kind of evil we currently concerned with.

⁸¹ For a contemporary defense of the real distinction between essence and existence, see Oderberg, *Real Essentialism*, 121-151; see also, Gaven Kerr, “Aquinas’s Argument for the Existence of God in *De Ente et Essentia* Cap. IV: An Interpretation and Defense,” in *Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. 37 (2012), 99-133; Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 211-246; and Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, (1985; repr., Houston, Texas; Center for Thomistic Studies, 2011), 32-42.

a series of existence/essence composites must be with a first cause—one that is identical to its existence; and hence it does not derive its existence and is outside of the series. Unless a first cause is posited, existence remains a mystery within a series of existence/essence composites. To, then, object to the concept of existence by asserting that existence is inexplicable would raise the question of how the opponent knows it is inexplicable. I have provided an explanation for existence as a derived causal power and distinct from *x*'s essence, so it is not inexplicable. Nevertheless, if the opponent's claim is that existence has an explanation but not one that we can know, then the response is that an explanation has been provided by showing that composites of existence/essence require a first cause that is identical to its existence, and thus what the opponents need to show is where the argument fails.

Let us consider the objection that talk of "existence" is confused and at best tautologous. As we have seen, talk of existence, though it does not change the essence of something, does capture something true: that something actually exists or it does not. It is true that it does not provide any further information about the essence of a thing, but it tells you whether something has real existence or mere cognitional existence. For there to be evil in the world, there first need to be *xs* that can suffer evil and they must have real existence.

The critic can insist that existence is not a causal power but a brute fact. The response then is, if the opponent argued that existence is not a causal power but a brute fact and therefore does not have an explanation, that I have given an argument for thinking that existence is a causal power. Hence, the objector must address my argument instead of asserting that existence is a brute fact. Yet if the opponent's point is that existence is a state not a causal power, then the question is where that state originated from. Since without explaining the coming of the state—existence—the opponent is assuming existence without

explaining it. It will not do to appeal to prior states of existing thing to explain existence since it begs the question.

Having now responded to the criticisms, there is still the worry that identifying God as the thing whose essence is identical to its existence is meaningless. Anthony Kenny raises this objection in his book *Aquinas on Being*, arguing that the distinction between essence and existence is sophistry and obscure. Kenny distinguishes two concepts of existence to help understand what it means for something to have its essence identical to its existence. There is second-level predicate or specific existence, as in, there is an x such that x is a F. This tells you whether there is an instance of an F and, if there is, then it is true. Then, there is first-level predicate or individual existence, which is about this John or this cat and not about concepts. Kenny's point is that negative statements like "extra-terrestrial intelligences don't exist" become "obscure" and contradictory if existence is understood outside of specific and individual existence—since we would be saying that there are extra-terrestrial intelligences that exist that do *not* exist.⁸² The statement, "Human beings exist" means that there is an x such that x is a human being.⁸³ This tells us that there is at least one thing that falls under the concept "being a human." Now, Kenny argues that the notion that God is *Existence Itself* or that whose essence and existence is identical is dubious. For if we interpret that conception of God as specific existence, then we get something like God's essence is "being God" and that He has "everlasting existence,"⁸⁴ but it remains silent on whether He actually exists. It would be similar to an ontological argument, since it does not follow from "(i) if God exists He has everlasting existence to (ii) therefore God exists."⁸⁵ The matter of whether God really

⁸² Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 43.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁵ Aquinas makes this point in *ST* 1, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 2.

exist cannot be arrived through an analysis of concepts. If, however, it is true that essence and existence are distinct in *xs* and also in God, then, according to Kenny, all it means is that we can know the essence of something without knowing whether it exists; just as we can know what a centaur is without knowing whether it exists.

However, Kenny's criticism that "existence" must be understood as a second-level predicate or it will lead to a self-contradiction is only true if when we "grasp" the concept, say cats, "we necessarily already grasp it as applying to something existing in reality."⁸⁶ However, this is not the case since we can know what a cat *is* but not know whether it exists. Similarly, it is not the case that when we grasp the concept "extra-terrestrial intelligence" it immediately applies to "something existing in reality," or else the statement would be a contradiction. This implies that second-level predicate interpretation of "existence" is not the only way of viewing existence. Hence, the statement that God is identical to His "existence" is not to be seen as a second-level predicate because God does not possess existence but rather *is* identical to His existence.⁸⁷ Neither should "*Existence Itself*" be interpreted as a first-level predicate since it would simply mean if God exists then God would be God. Instead, "*Existence Itself*" means that there is one whose essence is identical to its existence, and thus its existence is necessarily required for there to be composites of existence/essence.

I conclude that the Evil to God argument successfully forestalls the problem of evil. If evil is a problem for the atheist or the general theist, it is not that evil is incompatible with the existence of God since, as we have seen, evil functions as an argument for the existence of God not as evidence against God but rather that evil is a painful reality.

⁸⁶ Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, 252.

⁸⁷ For a full defense, see Kerr, "Aquinas's Argument for the Existence of God in *De Ente et Essentia Cap. IV: An Interpretation and Defense*," 123-25; see also Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 250-56.

I have argued that the discussions of the problem of evil assume two fundamental aspects that go unacknowledged, evil and God. I have suggested that theodicies and even the problem of evil itself are unsatisfactory because they fail to demonstrate any correspondence to reality as such. I then argue that the nature of evil and God must be explored. Hence, in the previous chapters I argued evil is the privation of some good due to an *x* and have provided responses to some of the main objections to the PT. I have shown that evil requires existing *x*s—without which there could not in principle be evil—and these *x*s have their existence distinct from their essence such that their existence is causally dependent on one whose essence is identical to its act-of-existence—Existence Itself. This argument I called the “Evil to God” argument. The reason for identifying God with *Existence Itself* is simply that whatever else God is, or turns out to be, He must be that which is identical to His existence. The “Evil to God” argument shows that there is no problem of evil and instead shows that the existence of evil entails God.

My hope is that this project contributes to the larger discussion about the relationship of God and evil, and to the revival of understanding God as *Existence Itself*. From a historical perspective, the major monotheist religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have all thought that God could not be anything other than Existence Itself.⁸⁸ Hence, I think it would be a shame and intellectually dishonest to dismiss the arguments for God as *Existence Itself* by asserting that that conception of God is pantheistic, or panentheistic, or obscure, or that it is difficult to imagine what it means for God’s essence to be identical to His act-of-existence. There are many arguments from all three monotheistic traditions for seeing God as *Existence*

⁸⁸ For a defense, see Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 3-24; Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 96-129; John F. Wippel, “The Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, vol. 47 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press), 196-217.

Itself, the *Necessary One*, or *Pure Act*. Lastly, I hope my argument piques the interest of both atheists and theistic personalists to wrestle more thoroughly with God as *Existence Itself*—and its vast implications—and the privation theory.

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