

Responses to Darwin in the Religious Traditions

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RE-READING GENESIS, JOHN, AND JOB: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO DARWINISM

by Christopher Southgate

Abstract. This article offers one response from within Christianity to the theological challenges of Darwinism. It identifies evolutionary theory as a key aspect of the context of contemporary Christian hermeneutics. Examples of the need for re-reading of scripture, and reassessment of key doctrines, in the light of Darwinism include the reading of the creation and fall accounts of Genesis 1–3, the reformulation of the Christian doctrine of humanity as created in the image of God, and the possibility of a new approach to the Incarnation in the light of evolution and semiotics. Finally, a theodicy in respect of evolutionary suffering is outlined, in dialogue with recent writings attributing such suffering to a force in opposition to God. The latter move is rejected on both theological and scientific grounds. Further work on evolutionary theodicy is proposed, in relation in particular to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Keywords: Karl Barth; *creatio ex nihilo*; Darwinism; *Das Nichtige*; evolution; Fall; Genesis; Gospel of John; hermeneutics; *imago Dei*; Job; semiotics; Shadow Sophia; theodicy

I was delighted to receive the invitation of the International Society for Science and Religion (ISSR) to offer a Christian's response to Darwin. Not that any two Christian thinkers would necessarily adopt the same position. This then is a particular response in a particular era and context, though perhaps fittingly it is the response of a graduate of Darwin's own

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Cambridge College, Christ's, and of a member of the Church of England in which he briefly sought the possibility of ordination.

I come then from that same religious tradition in which Darwin was at least partly reared, though some of his understandings of Christianity are ones that have never troubled me, for instance, his conviction that Christianity teaches that those who do not hold to the faith will be bound for eternal damnation. That is a conviction that draws some support from the New Testament, and from major areas of the Christian tradition. But as an Anglican Christian I draw on Richard Hooker's famous triad of scripture, tradition, and reason, helpfully later augmented by John Wesley's inclusion of the impact of experience. My reason tells me that a loving God would not, ultimately, reject anyone who made, even at the moment of their death, any response of acceptance to the divine love freely offered. My experience, moreover, tells me, as Darwin's told him, that there are people of no faith, indeed of strong atheist convictions, who nevertheless manifest what Christians call the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—and my scripture-informed reason tells me that these must be people touched by God.

Moreover, modern hermeneutical reflection tells us that even scripture is not a pure reason-free category—the sacred texts are always read on the basis of interpretative choices, informed both by cultural context and by personal experience. Even a so-called “literal” reading is a hermeneutical choice. A reading of Genesis to the effect that organisms, as they currently exist, were created in six days was always a minority position within the tradition. In the light of the narrative of evolution that unfolded in the nineteenth century and became a coherent whole in Darwin's work, it becomes a hardly conceivable choice. It would be analogous in my view to choosing to give priority to those biblical texts that imply that the sun goes round the earth. In respect of key elements of Christian theology, especially the doctrine of creation, the area of theological anthropology, and the ever-present problem of theodicy, Darwinism provides one of the most important rational elements informing a contemporary hermeneutic. So not for nothing is this article entitled “Re-reading”—Christians are continually called to re-read their sacred texts and their traditions in the light of new understandings from both within and without the faith.

DARWINISM AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF CREATION

A key insight of Darwin's was that natural processes can give rise to the phenomena of biological function and adaptation, without the need to invoke direct divine design. This was a huge issue for the Anglicanism of Darwin's day, as has been discussed so carefully by John Brooke among

others (Brooke 1991, chap. 6–8). But note that neither of those two very different creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 describes God as designer of a mechanism. Indeed the first account, to which literalist interpreters seem principally drawn, uses two very different, characteristically theological constructions for the divine activity. The main verb of the first verse is *bara*, in its Qal form only ever used for God’s activity—hence, by inference, for what God alone can do, that is, bring an entity into existence from absolutely nothing. Then comes the sonorously repeated claim that God spoke a series of jussives, those great “let-there-be’s”—by which creation unfolded, and in each case “it was so.” Both of these are a far cry from the careful artificer inferred by William Paley from his studies of biological adaptation. It is one of the curiosities of the contemporary debate on intelligent design that in an effort to demonstrate God’s existence by reasoning about the natural world ID so seriously presumes upon the biblical text. A hermeneutic informed by Darwinism will suggest rather that God put in place the processes by which the Earth could bring forth living creatures, and it leaves fascinatingly open, as Genesis also does, the question of God’s further involvement in guiding or sustaining those processes. Key questions lurk in the evolutionary record *in re* the Christian understanding of providence—what for instance was God’s involvement in the asteroid that contributed to the extinction of the dinosaurs? Did God in any way steer or nudge the evolutionary process by noninterventionist special divine action at the quantum level, as Robert J. Russell has from time to time suggested (Russell 1998, 221–23)? These are questions too little explored, in part because of the way creationism has dogged the footsteps of anyone genuinely trying to explore the implications of evolution for an orthodox Christian faith.

So Darwinism allows the re-reading of creation accounts in ways that do full justice to the mystery of divine creative activity—that activity is not like human making, and it is always an error to draw too close an analogy between the two. Moreover, the evolutionary narrative helps enormously with the doctrine of the Fall, which Christian thought has traditionally derived from its reading of Genesis 3. The evolutionary narrative of the long history of life on Earth banishes forever the notion that it was human action, human sin, that caused the presence of violence and suffering in nature. One has only to consider the evidence of arthritis in the bones of dinosaurs, or the exquisite flesh-tearing equipment of million-year-old saber-toothed predators, to see that this cannot be so. Human sin did not cause nature to be red in tooth and claw.¹ So we are set free to read Genesis 3 for its deeper wisdom not about a Fall-event, but about fallenness—those characteristics of humans that Daryl Domning has called “original selfishness” (Domning and Hellwig 2006). Darwinian understandings make a great deal of sense of the classical doctrine of original sin, without the need to ascribe that condition to a single act of rebellion against God. However, “fall” thinking

remains deeply embedded in many theological approaches to natural evil, and I return to it in more detail below.

Darwinian understandings, then, can lead to a re-reading of the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, and the so-called fall story in Genesis 3. I shall consider below what an evolutionary understanding means for our understanding of human being as the locus of divine incarnation, as the creature in which, in the resonant phraseology of John's Gospel, the Word of God could take flesh, in which the glory of that Word could be perceived. And I shall finally analyze in some detail that most difficult area of Christian reflection, the problem of innocent suffering, on which the Book of Job sheds such a strange and disturbing light.

DARWINISM, HUMAN UNIQUENESS, AND THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

What then about the question of theological anthropology—how Christians understand the nature of human being? The scientific debate about human uniqueness rages to and fro. Of course it is easy to accept now, as thinkers 150 years ago would have found more difficult, that the way human bodies are put together is very closely related to that of many other creatures, not only our own nearest cousins the other primates, but also other mammals. We should be very grateful for the similarities between our biochemistry and physiology and that of other organisms, because it is on those similarities that so much of medical research has been based. I am inspired, moreover, rather than repelled, by the thought that the complex of genes that controlled my development as an embryo and gave me this body of mine, is profoundly ancient, and shared with a wide variety of vertebrates. So it is helpful to acknowledge that we are animals, and good too that we remember how dependent we are in all sorts of ways on the rest of the biosphere, from the bacteria in our gut to the photosynthesists that allow us to breathe.

Human relatedness to other organisms, then, is a matter for celebration, and not a threat. What tends to threaten us as humans, however, is not biochemistry, but the thought that our moral and spiritual life might not be distinctive. Again the science is fluid. For every development that suggests that other animals possess sophisticated social and even proto-moral behavior, there is another that reminds us of the extraordinary powers of learning humans possess, and the extraordinary sophistication of human self-consciousness and theory of other minds. Strangely enough, as I was working on this article on a recent train journey, I fell into conversation with a social psychologist who told me that humans are believed to be the only species that cry tears for emotional reasons, rather than through irritation to the eye. Recent work suggests this might have been a great breakthrough in the evolution of human emotional signaling.²

Although so little is known about the way humans evolved, or how humans acquired our current sense of self, or our theory of mind, or our potential for altruism, there are some recent inferences as to the significance of what is often called “cave-art” which may possibly help. I am thinking of the work of David Lewis-Williams and others, and the theological reflections of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen in particular (Lewis-Williams 2002; van Huyssteen 2006). Lewis-Williams has shown how cave-art is best seen not as representational art in the modern sense, but as a reaching into the spirit-world. Van Huyssteen has explored the possibility that religion was an important element in the development of the cognitive fluidity that characterizes modern human intelligence. So a religious impulse, an impulse to respond to the divine love of the creator, comes to be seen, on this view, not as an extra, a spandrel (in Stephen Jay Gould’s terminology) engendered by the evolution of human consciousness, but actually as a key catalyst in that evolution. Put theologically, this could be seen as a hint that responding to God’s calling helped to form the self-consciousness of the modern human, and hence gave rise to an enhanced potential to respond in self-giving love—ultimately for Christians the potential to recognize and respond to the sign of God that is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

But I am very well aware that this argument can be run the other way. To show that religion had its evolutionary uses could explain its existence and its long persistence in the human psyche. If Darwinian science can explain why early humans needed religion, whether to enhance predator detection, or to develop cognitive fluidity, or to ensure tribal cohesion, or to ward off the growing awareness of mortality—whatever theory is adopted—then there is a risk that Darwinian science can explain religion away.

About this type of explaining-away argument I would only remark that I think it is too soon to see how these sociobiological accounts of human cognitive evolution will fare. Palaeoanthropology is a frustrating science, necessarily profoundly underdetermined by its data, and lurching forward as different finds and different theoretical frameworks pull it about. It can be posited with more confidence that twenty years of combining contemporary genetics with real-time brain scanning will tell us a great deal about how genetic inheritance might affect cognitive predispositions, and I think we shall also be wise not to conclude too much too early on that score. I do not think that as a Christian I shall ever be able to persuade Richard Dawkins that the faith by which I live is not a toxic, pathogenic virus in my mind (cf. Dawkins 2003, chap. 3:2). But equally, I do not think that theories about the origins of religion, or its neurophysiological basis, can ever evacuate religious faith of its truth claims. Believers do not offer objective, falsifiable scientific evidence for God, and their claim to the authenticity of their experience of divine revelation cannot be falsified by science.

There are other questions that an evolutionary scheme poses for the understanding of human being, in particular in relation to the famous text in Genesis 1 about humans being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26, 27). This is a statement that has properly become a foundational element in Christian anthropology, and much energy continues to go into exploring how the image of God might be understood. A Darwinian understanding both challenges the notion of the absolute distinctiveness of *Homo sapiens*, and poses uneasy questions as to when exactly the image might have been formed in the human.

As van Huyssteen indicated in his recent Gifford Lectures, drawing on the work of Noreen Herzfeld (Herzfeld 2002, chap. 2; van Huyssteen 2006), the image can be seen in a range of different ways—as substantive, as functional, as relational, as eschatological. My own suggestion is one that coheres with the theology of evolution I outline in my recent book (Southgate 2008, chap. 4). That is based on an understanding of the nature of the triune God as being that of perfectly self-giving love. There is no selfishness in God, but only the perfect transcendence of self in the loving relation of the divine persons. And if the image and likeness of God is understood as being the *imago Trinitatis*, then it can be understood not as the capacity for such perfect self-giving, for that is uniquely the character of the life of God in Godself, but as the capacity to respond with self-giving to an initiative of self-giving love. Each of the persons of the Trinity responds to the self-giving love of the others, and each human is called to respond to, and be transformed by, the self-giving love of God as Trinity. The response may also be to another creature's self-giving, though in turn that creature's transcendence of self-interest will be a response to the loving call of God.

This is a view which is about substance, in proposing that humans have evolved an attribute—that of being capable of responding to love by transcending our selfish impulses—and it is clearly relational, and it is functional. This response is the human vocation, to be worked out in our relationships with each other and the whole creation. It is also eschatological—the image is only now being perfected by the transforming work of salvation in Christ. Also, the idea of reflecting God by responding to God's initiative does more justice, I suggest, to the idea of an *imago* than some other suggestions for the character of the *imago Dei*.

There are resonances here with thinkers from very different elements of the Christian tradition. Vladimir Lossky, writing from within Orthodoxy, holds that “Man created ‘in the image’ is the person capable of manifesting God to the extent to which his nature allows itself to be penetrated by deifying grace” (Lossky 1974, 139). F. LeRon Shults, from the Reformed tradition, also understands the *imago* in terms of theosis. He writes, “the *imago Dei* is not a static likeness between two substances but a dynamic longing that constitutes creaturely personhood, a longing for participation in the peaceful life of the eternal Trinitarian God” (Shults 2003, 138).

My own formulation is altogether congruent with these emphases on participation in the divine life. I note also Hans Urs von Balthasar's perception that there is no true perception of God's glory, the reality of God's life, that does not involve being caught up into that life (von Balthasar 1989, 28). Von Balthasar goes on: "being 'caught up' must be understood in the sense of the New Testament, as man's being given a home through God's glory—so that he is no more a looker-on, but a cooperator of glory" (29). In other words, the true response to God's love is to be caught up into the Trinity's life of love, and to manifest that response in active self-giving.³

I hope this formulation may help to address the questions that evolution poses about human nature—in particular the questions, when and how did the image of God arise, and did it inhere in any of humans' hominid cousins, now all extinct? Wherever we see self-giving, costly relating to others for others' sake, we see the image beginning to develop, and humans should not be afraid to see this proto-image in other primates (cf. De Waal 2005), or indeed in elephants and other animals. I understand there is evidence that Neanderthals looked after individuals past child-bearing age who had broken limbs, and severe arthritis—this is suggestive, implicitly, of self-giving behavior in response to the continual divine offer of love, and hence, arguably, a sign of Neanderthals being drawn up into the life of God.

Clearly, such a view of the *imago Dei*—as the capacity to respond with self-giving to an initiative of self-giving love—will suggest that it developed gradually in humans and is still developing, indeed that it needed for its full fruition the Incarnation and work of Christ. There was no sudden moment when God switched on the image in humans. Rather, a theology of creation based on a Trinity of self-giving love will want to suppose that God is always seeking to call out self-transcendence from God's creatures, each according to its own evolved capacities (Southgate 2008, chap. 4).

For the Christian the special significance of the human is affirmed in particular by the doctrine of the Incarnation—the conviction that it was as a human that God, in the words of the Gospel of John, took flesh and dwelt among us. This is the subject of ongoing work by Andrew Robinson and myself as part of our project funded by the Science and Transcendence Advanced Research Series initiative (Robinson and Southgate 2010; Southgate and Robinson, 2010). Robinson and I have been exploring questions in theology and the philosophy of biology raised by the semiotics of C.S. Peirce, and asking, for example: what kind of sign of God was Jesus of Nazareth, understood by Christians as the Incarnation of God in human form, and described in the New Testament as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15)? Our suggestion is that the life of Jesus contained all sorts of sign-types, but taken as a whole, Jesus' life and ministry could be seen as what Peirce called a qualisign of the being of God (Robinson and Southgate 2010). So Jesus' life is being understood

as so structured and saturated by the being of God as to represent nothing other than its sheer quality. After the great declaration in the Gospel of John that the Logos of God became flesh and dwelt among us, comes the affirmation that “we have seen [Christ’s] glory, glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). That is the fabric of a life that is a qualisign of God—the deep reality, the weight (reading “glory” here in the light of the Hebrew word *kabōd*) of that life is that of utterly gracious gift, of unstinting commitment to truth.

I am reminded in this connection of Kierkegaard’s distinction between learning from Socrates and learning from Christ. To learn from Socrates is to learn the lessons of his teaching; to learn from Christ is to learn Christ, to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14), to have the fabric of one’s life conformed to his life. But to speak of Jesus’ life as a sign of the sheer quality of God’s life in turn provokes in the mind of Darwinian hearers two further questions which Robinson and I look forward to exploring. First, what was necessary in an evolved being so that such a being could lead a life that could be a qualisign of God? Second, what was necessary to have evolved in such beings so that they could interpret such a sign? To pose questions of the classical Christian conviction about the Incarnation in terms that are both evolutionary and semiotic could be very fruitful.

DARWINISM AND EVOLUTIONARY SUFFERING

The most fascinating dynamic in the relation of Darwinian thought to Christian theology is the problem of the suffering of creatures (cf. Southgate 2008, chap. 1–5). It is important to recognize the reality of creaturely suffering. This is not to suppose that nonhuman suffering is exactly like human suffering, or that it contains the sort of crushing of hope that advanced theory of mind makes possible. Nor should we imagine that pain, by itself, is necessarily a bad thing—it is a vital element in being alive as a complex organism. But acute observation of animals does show something more than mere pain—it shows the distress of creatures caught in severe trauma, especially as they experience trauma from which there is no possibility of release. Death from predators is sometimes quick, but sometimes not. It may take a leopard over a minute to bring down a full-grown antelope. A whale may be literally eaten alive by sharks or killer whales, over a period of hours. On a BBC program narrated by David Attenborough for the Darwin anniversary year (2009), there was dramatic footage of young lions close to starvation, calling plaintively for their pride, who up ahead, out of earshot, were calling plaintively back. And one of the young lions just simply did starve to death, out on the open plain. It is impossible not to regard this experience as one of suffering. Neurophysiological studies on creatures in distress show similar patterns of hormone and neurotransmitter release to those found in humans.

So—with all due cautions—it is reasonable to regard creaturely suffering as real, across a certain range of types of creature complex enough to feel such.

Much of the most vigorous recent discussion of evolutionary theodicy has focused on whether to take the road of attributing disvalue in evolution to the influence of a force opposed to God. This is a key fault-line in theology's response to Darwinism. Should Christian theologians accept that the world God created is an ambiguous world, with disvalue intrinsically and necessarily intertwined with value, or should they ascribe the aspects of creation that cause us disquiet to a force countering God's intentions? My own evolutionary theodicy is resolutely based on the former view; I therefore take this opportunity to engage with some of those who have taken the latter. Interestingly, Henri Blocher, though writing from a high and literalist view of scripture, joins the general consensus (*pace* Dembski 2009) that "Romans 8 does not support any theory about animal death resulting from human sin" (Blocher 2009, 166).

Blocher however takes issue with my work on the grounds that "a historical Fall is a nonnegotiable article of faith" (169)—"the nonhistorical interpretation of Genesis 3 is no option for a *consistent* Christian believer" (155). Scientific opinion he regards as being full of conjecture. "On the other side, mature faith is able patiently to endure unsolved conflicts" (160). That his view of the status of different "conjectural" positions differs from mine may be judged from how he develops his prelapsarian anthropology in relation to a traditional list of natural evils:

As is well-known, most germs do little harm to a healthy body—one can easily presume that in the full health of the original integrity [pre-Genesis 3], the immune system of the man and the woman would counter any potentially harmful disturbance. Similarly, humans would enjoy enough strength, and wisdom and possible premonition . . . to avert all negative consequences of earthquakes etc. (Blocher 2009, 166)

However, on the specific issue of animal pain and suffering none of Blocher's scriptural formulations come to his aid, and he is reduced to dissolving away the problem by claiming it as a contemporary sentimentality, based partly on the mistaken supposition that nonhuman creatures can be "selves." Carnivorous behavior and the associated suffering is part of the creation that scripture celebrates—that creation is "superlatively good" (Blocher 2009, 158)—therefore Blocher's position on evolutionary suffering turns out in the end not to be that it stems from the Fall but that it is not of any significance.

One of the clearest criticisms to emerge of my view of the origin of creaturely suffering has been that of Neil Messer (2009). Messer is simply unwilling to concede that the disvalues we see in evolution could be part of God's purposes. He writes that:

the central problem that we face concerning evolutionary evil is this. The scriptures witness to a God who created all that is, and who pronounced the creation “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Furthermore, the Genesis creation narratives and other biblical texts flesh out what we are to understand by “very good” . . . , what they depict is a world of peace and plenty. But this is not the world disclosed by evolutionary biology, which is a world deeply marked by scarcity, competition and violence—by the “struggle for existence.” If in any sense the Christian doctrine of creation and Darwinian evolutionary biology are referring to the same world, then we seem to be faced with a contradiction. (Messer 2009, 148)

To save the unequivocal goodness of God’s creation Messer wants to draw instead on a passage from Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* in which Barth reflects on “nothingness.” Messer seeks to attribute the disvalues in evolution to the impact of this nothingness. He continues:

Barth does not think all evil is caused by sin. In a well-known, difficult and much misunderstood account, he identifies evil as “nothingness” (in German, *das Nichtige*: Barth, 1960, 289–368). By “nothingness,” he does not mean “nothing”; rather, “nothingness” is what God rejected, and *did not will*, in creating everything that exists and pronouncing the creation “very good.” As such, “nothingness” has a strange, paradoxical, negative kind of existence: it is the chaos, disorder and annihilation that threatens God’s creation, and to which God is opposed. Sin is one form that “nothingness” takes, but it also takes the forms of suffering and death. Furthermore, it is clear that not only humanity, but the whole of God’s creation, is threatened and opposed by “nothingness.” Whatever in the evolutionary process is opposed to God’s creative purpose is to be identified with “nothingness”: it is an aspect of the chaos and disorder threatening the creation. (Messer 2009, 149)

In response to this important challenge to my position I have undertaken a careful reading of the relevant passage in Barth. Unfortunately (though not unexpectedly given his famous rejection of natural theology) Barth does not confront in this discussion any of the issues raised by Darwinian thought. His discussion of “the creature” seems very largely a discussion of the freely willing, sinning, human creature, and it is not easy to tell where his discussion spreads more widely. However, as one would expect from such a major thinker, his position is very subtle. Indeed it shows aspects of many of the other arguments in the debate. For example:

1. When Barth says that creation in its two aspects (light and shadow) “is good, even very good, in so far as it does not oppose but corresponds to the intention of God as revealed by Him in the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ” (Barth 1960, 296), he seems close to Rolston’s description of creation as “cruciform” (Rolston 2006, 144). Fascinating though this observation is, I am not clear that in itself it constitutes any form of theodicy.
2. Barth observes in the same passage that “[w]hen Jesus Christ shall finally return as the Lord and Head of all that God has created, it will also be revealed that both in light and shadow, on the

right hand and on the left, everything created was very good and supremely glorious” (Barth 1960, 296), and that “If He Himself has comprehended creation in its totality and made it His own in His Son, it is for us to acquiesce without thinking we know better, without complaints, reproach, or dismay” (297). This is reminiscent of an “answer-to-Job” theodicy—it is not for us to question the ways of the sovereign God (cf. Southgate 2008, 49), or perhaps of an evolutionary theodicy such as that of Denis O. Lamoureux, drawing on the story of the man born blind in John 9—these things happen that God might be glorified (Lamoureux 2008, 297–305). Perhaps rather, Barth is best read as offering a version of these positions based on a trust that all the things that so puzzle theologians will be made clear at the Parousia.

3. Equally, Barth’s affirmation that “It belongs to the essence of creaturely nature, and is indeed a mark of its perfection, that it has in fact this negative side” (Barth 1960, 296) might (especially taken with the sentence just quoted) seem to support the “package deal” understanding of, for example, Niels Gregersen (2001, 201). Creation is a “very good” unity in which the negative must be affirmed along with the positive, and every part indeed affirmed as praising God (see below).

Taking this passage of the *Dogmatics* as a whole, therefore, I am not clear that it can be made to support Messer’s reappropriation of it for evolutionary theodicy. Barth is not as dualist as Messer would seem to imply; rather Barth insists, as we saw above, that creation in all its aspects is good and is God’s. When Messer continues (picking up from the previous sentence of his article):

Whatever in the evolutionary process is opposed to God’s creative purpose is to be identified with “nothingness”: it is an aspect of the chaos and disorder threatening the creation.

The biblical witness, in short, requires us to say of the world we inhabit *both* that it is created *and* that it is fallen; *both* that it is the work of God, pronounced “very good,” *and* that it is badly astray from what God means it to be. Even though, in this world, the “goodness” and the “fallenness” are so closely entangled that they cannot be separated—scientifically speaking, the aspects I have identified theologically as “fallen” are essential to the process that generates what we plausibly call “good”—they must nonetheless be distinguished. This is a difficult, and inevitably somewhat mysterious, distinction to make. (Messer 2009, 149)

I would be inclined to respond that there is plenty of evidence in Barth’s writing that nothing in the processes of nature—not the “ashes,” not the “decay,” not the “worthlessness” (cf. Barth 1960, 297)—and not the suffering either, is opposed to God’s creative purposes. This is confirmed in my view when Barth goes on to write that:

creation and creature are good even in the fact that all that is exists in this contrast and antithesis. In all this, far from being null, it praises its Creator even on its shadowy side, even in the negative aspect in which it is so near to nothingness. . . . For all we can tell, may not His creatures praise Him more mightily in humiliation than in exaltation, in need than in plenty, in fear than in joy, on the frontier of nothingness than when wholly orientated on God.⁴ (Barth 1960, 297)

Barth continues, “It is a slander on God’s creation to charge it with a share in chaos because it includes a Yes and a No, as though oriented to God on the one side and nothingness on the other. Mozart causes us to hear that even on the latter side, and therefore in its totality, creation praises its Maker and is therefore perfect” (Barth 1960, 299).⁵

Even if it is not as truly Barthian as it might first appear, it is worth considering Messer’s scheme with care, and the Table below compares his position with mine.

Messer’s “Barthian” scheme (2009)	God creates as sovereign Lord	Nothingness affects creatures	Creation is subject to disvalue such as violence and suffering	God comprehends the nothingness, and brings good out of its evil effects
Southgate (2008)	God creates as sovereign Lord	This creation is under a constraint— only an evolutionary process can give rise to creaturely selves	Intrinsic to creation, therefore, is competition and therefore suffering	God values every creature, suffers with their suffering, and invites them towards self- transcendence

Thus formulated, the schemes are not that far apart. Messer’s eventual choice of the “Barthian” scheme rests on his desire to privilege Christian doctrine over science—in particular, his reluctance to concede that God could be responsible for disvalues in creation.

However, Messer’s invocation of Barth’s “nothingness” as the cause of disvalues in evolution is not only, as I have tried to show, a contestable reading of Barth. It also privileges one particular element of doctrine, the goodness of God and of God’s creative work, at the expense of other central doctrinal elements. In particular the sovereignty of God, so beloved of Barth and his followers, is much threatened. Barth himself continually reasserts God’s unimpaired lordship (Barth 1960, 290–92). What I would want to ask Messer is: if creatures who do not (on our present understanding) have freedom of will commit acts of violence on each other and inflict suffering on each other, contrary to God’s will, and God is unable to prevent this, then can this God really be regarded either as the *creator ex nihilo*, or

indeed as the sovereign Lord of creation? Put simply, we are left supposing that such a God apparently desired to create straw-eating lions, and was unable to do so. Such a God was reduced to bringing good out of the evils occasioned by predation and extinction.

If on the other hand more weight is put on Barth's assertion that God's providence "comprehends" the effects of this "alien factor," nothingness (Barth 1960, 289), then God's lordship may be reasserted, albeit in a rather mysterious form.⁶ However, if God is taken to be the One who "comprehends" the alien factor, but allows its effects, this God faces the "ontological" aspect of evolutionary theodicy (Southgate 2008, 9, 14) with renewed force. Such a God could have dispelled the effects of nothingness, but chose not to.

The only way to mitigate this charge against the goodness of God would seem to be to reinvoke the notion that God needed to allow these effects in order to bring longer-term goods out of these evils. Thus one version of the "Barthian" argument does indeed begin to resemble the "only way" argument propounded in different forms by Attfield (2006, chap. 6–7), Rolston (2003), and Southgate (2008, 47–48). In doing so it reawakens the teleological aspect of the problem of evolutionary theodicy (Southgate 2008, 9, 14). This is the sharpest and most difficult element of the problem—the thought that God *used* suffering and extinction to effect His longer-term purposes.

The resources for addressing this problem must come from a vigorous dialogue between science and systematic theology, of the sort that I attempted in (*The Groaning of Creation* Southgate 2008, chap. 3–4). For it is evolutionary science that can explain to us why it is that the disvalues in creation are needed to make possible the arising of novel and more complex forms of creaturely value. Strikingly, Barth himself, though not working from the scientific account, is at pains to reject the "great deception" of attributing the negative side of creation to "nothingness" (Barth, 1960, 300).

In pointing this out I am not claiming that there is no support in Barth for Messer's reading. When the great Swiss thinker writes that, "in the physical evil concealed behind the shadowy side of the created cosmos we have a form of the enemy and no less an offence against God than that which reveals man to be a sinner" (Barth 1960, 315), or calls nothingness the ancient nonbeing which obscured and defaced the divine creation of God (363), Messer's reading begins to look more plausible.⁷ Is Barth here contradicting the position described above, which he outlined in pp. 296–99 of the same volume? I think not. When Barth writes that the story of the creature in its relationship with God begins with "a disastrous defeat," referring there to Genesis 3 (Barth 1960, 356), then it seems ever more clear that the great stretches of evolutionary time, during which we

know creation to have worn a profoundly ambiguous “face,” are not under discussion. Messer claims that:

History, says Barth, *begins* with the story of sin and the Fall (Gen. 3), and it is the *fallen* world we inhabit that has the “struggle for existence” at its heart, a struggle that “does not correspond with the true and original creative will of God, and . . . therefore stands under a *caveat*” (Barth 1961, 353). (Messer 2009, 148)

But this is the crucial point. Evolutionary history does not begin with the story of sin and the fall of human beings. It begins with millions of years in which the light and shadow of creation are to be found together, but from which the freely chosen sin that Barth calls a disastrous defeat is absent. I think it is highly significant moreover that Barth joins Hans Urs von Balthasar in admitting of a Yes and No within the scope of God’s (good) creation (Barth 1960, 299; Southgate 2008, 63–68; von Balthasar 1994, 329).

On this reading of Barth, then, the impact of *Das Nichtige* on “the creature” is taken to emerge only with human creatures’ deliberate sin. To extend it to include the whole evolutionary narrative is to run counter to Barth’s other remarks about the light and shadow of creation—and, I would submit, to graft an excessively dualistic account of creation into that narrative, an account rejected by Barth himself. Here is Messer’s self-defense against the charge of dualism:

I might seem to have re-invented two of the oldest heresies in Christian history: a form of Manichaeism, in which there is a cosmic conflict between equal powers of light and darkness, and a form of Gnosticism, in which the material world is irretrievably flawed and salvation lies in escaping from it.

The reason we do not have to say either of these things lies in what God has done to address our predicament, according to the Christian confession. God in Christ has taken upon himself human existence in the material world. This is the important—indeed, crucial—insight that I said earlier is struggling to get out when evolutionary theodicies refer to God’s co-suffering with the creation. As Barth puts it, “in the incarnation God exposed Himself to nothingness even as this enemy and assailant. He did so in order to repel and defeat it” (Barth, 1960, 311). (Messer 2009, 150–51)

This is a particularly interesting response. Messer in effect admits the charge of dualism—there are opposing powers in creation. If this is allowed to extend across evolutionary time, then God wanted, to return to the example I gave above, to create straw-eating lions, but was unable to do so. Messer is not a Gnostic in the sense of regarding humans as needing to be rescued from an evil creation—for him, as for me, the whole creation is reconciled and gathered up in Christ. But if we were to accept a scheme in which God’s “purposes” are gravely compromised and a world of suffering results, the power and sovereignty of the creator God are severely in question.

So much for my theological reservations about Messer's formulation. I continue to think moreover that his "mysterious" distinction (see the quotation on p. 378)—made within what he concedes is a unified scientific narrative in which disvalues are essential to the evolution of values—does grave harm to the conversation between theology and the sciences. It is, at the end of the day, not open enough to what those sciences might be telling us about God's ways with the world. In endeavoring to dissect out goods from harms, when science has helped us to see how the two are inextricable, it runs the risk of making theology appear too defensive, too bent on mystification, to be part of an authentic conversation.⁸

In affirming, then, a reading of Barth that regards evolutionary disvalues as part of the "shadow side" of creation, but comprehended by, fully in relationship with, the creator God, I claim that I can derive scriptural support for this position (especially from Ps. 104, Job 38–41, in which God's purposes do indeed seem to involve the creation, care, and nurture of predatory creatures). I affirm moreover that the most important thinker in the tradition to have articulated a position on these "evils," Thomas Aquinas, was able to acknowledge that hunting might be part of the *telos* of lions, just as that of ravens might involve the tearing of flesh (Jenkins 2008, 144–47). Further, I want to assert that the powerful (though always corrigible) insights of Darwinian science suggest to us why competition, predation, and extinctions prove indeed to be necessary elements in the evolution of the sort of biosphere we know now.⁹

Celia Deane-Drummond's monograph *Christ and Evolution* includes brief commentary on my approach to theodicy (Deane-Drummond 2009, 170–74). Her main point of divergence from my view is that she cannot see suffering as *necessary* to the evolutionary process, preferring to echo Reinhold Niebuhr's formulation (in respect of sin) that it is "unnecessary, but inevitable" (171). She is concerned that a view of suffering as necessary, as intrinsic, to God-given processes takes us into the territory of theodicies that endorse suffering, "rather than giving the moral imperative to seek its amelioration" (172). This is a slightly odd charge against my work, since I go on to suggest a moral imperative on humans to be part of the healing of evolution, a position Deane-Drummond also rejects (Southgate 2008, chap. 7; Deane-Drummond 2009, 173–74).

A particularly intriguing element of Deane-Drummond's position is her invocation of Bulgakov's term "shadow sophia" to characterize nature's vulnerability to nonbeing and chaos (Deane-Drummond 2009, 185–91). She gives a brief and allusive sketch of how this concept might help. It is "implicit as a possibility from the very beginning of creaturely existence" but should not be thought of "as *constitutive* to creaturely wisdom" (187). It is not a necessary force, but has "a seductive power over the natural world," which is overcome at the Cross (190). It is "a way of giving a response to evil inasmuch as it resists too ready an explanation of why it [evil] exists"

(190). As Nicola Hoggard Creegan notes (in work to which I shall turn shortly), Deane-Drummond “intentionally defines neither the shadow’s origins nor its precise effects” (Hoggard Creegan 2009c, 44). It seems to hover between Barth’s “negative side of creation,” and his “nothingness” (see above). Perhaps, it may also owe something to a Thomist concept of double effect—God does not will suffering in evolution; it is not in that sense necessary, but it is an inevitable by-product of God’s good action.¹⁰ If this is the direction in which Deane-Drummond’s talk of “unnecessary, but inevitable” leads her, then it has something in common with Jenkins’s analysis of Thomas’s implicit theodicy (Jenkins 2008, chap. 7). It is to be hoped that Deane-Drummond may be persuaded to extend and clarify her analysis of “shadow sophia,” the status of which at the moment resembles the status of Rolston’s phrase “cruciform creation.” Both are bold and tantalizing metaphors, presently lacking sufficient argumentative purchase to help much with the problem of evolutionary theodicy.

A very carefully nuanced critique of my position comes from Hoggard Creegan herself (Hoggard Creegan 2009a, 2009b, forthcoming). She is convinced that the extent and the “unevenness” of the agonies of evolution points beyond the necessary activity of God to “the dark side.” As an analogy she points to the parable of the wheat and the tares (Hoggard Creegan 2009b). The Gospels provide ample evidence of the struggle with evil and demonic forces, affecting not just human beings but the physical environment (and, Hoggard Creegan might have added, animals, in the story of the Gadarene swine, Mark 5:1–20 and parallels). She also points to recent evidence suggesting that, on the one hand, there may be freely chosen evil in chimpanzees, and, on the other, that evolution may contain much more cooperation, empathy, and bias to complexification than is often realized (Hoggard Creegan 2009b, citing in particular Frans de Waal and Simon Conway Morris).¹¹

This is an important discussion, which reveals a previously unexplored fault-line in my own analysis. In rejecting the possibility that evil forces had a substantial role in frustrating the purposes of the creator in evolution, and refusing to dissect out disvalue from value within processes governed by natural selection, I effectively confine significant activity of evil forces to the era of free human choices. “The dark side” becomes an emergent property of creation, correlated with the possibility, and indeed the addictiveness, of freely chosen evil. For this understanding I draw on Paul’s double understanding of sin, as both individual transgression—against either God or neighbor—and also as a power that inveigles and traps the transgressor (Southgate 2008, 102, cf. Dunn 1998, 112). I am agnostic as to the possible influence of this power before the evolution of freely choosing beings, though I accept that if free choice begins to emerge also in other primates, then it can also lead to sin (understood in both the ways mentioned above). Deane-Drummond has a possibly helpful comment here, when she remarks

that “The fall . . . needs to be seen as the *culmination* of tendencies already latent in the natural world, rather than the specific work of a mythological figure of Satan.” She goes on to quote Bulgakov, “Creaturally creativity entails not only the possibility but also the inevitability of errors, which in themselves are not yet evil but prepare a place for evil”¹² (Deane-Drummond 2009, 187).

I continue to be reluctant to explore “the dark side” further—indeed I echo Barth’s sense that building “nothingness” into a philosophical system leads to self-deception (Barth 1960, 300). And I continue to be unrepentant in rejecting an over-dualist understanding of the forces operating in the evolutionary process, for the theological and scientific reasons given above. I am not clear why the “unevenness” Hoggard Creegan notes in the extent of evolutionary suffering should be a mark of dark forces at work—indeed in invoking this she is effectively conceding that much suffering may be regarded as part of the natural processes of the creation, processes under the control of God’s laws. I suspect that Hoggard Creegan herself experiences some of these concerns, which may be why she is attracted to Deane-Drummond’s formulation of “shadow sophia.” This can as I noted above be regarded as a negative aspect, or an inevitable by-product, of God’s very good creation, rather than the activity of an evil force.

PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER WORK IN EVOLUTIONARY THEODICY

Where this discussion now needs further elaboration is:

1. In respect of the goodness of God’s creation. A critic such as Messer, who so strongly emphasizes the verdict of Genesis that creation was *tôv m^eôd*, very good (1:31), will properly ask how this verdict can be sustained on my view of creation as profoundly ambiguous. Indeed, Stephen Webb accuses positions such as mine as being a sort of Catharism, in which creation is in fact evil (Webb 2009, 95–98). Colin Gunton’s concept of creation as God’s “project” may be useful here. He holds that creation “is real and good precisely because it takes time to become what it was created to be” (Gunton 1998, 93). Again he writes, “Creation is a project. As created, it is perfect, because it is God’s project. But it is not perfect in the sense of being complete. It has somewhere to go” (202). The goodness of creation as the “project” originally arose was in terms of its potential, its capacity to give rise to fruitfulness of all sorts of kinds—from the vast seeming profligacy of stellar systems to the extraordinary fecundity, diversity, and ingenuity of life-forms, including the evolution of a life-form capable of bearing the true image of the invisible God, capable truly of the utterly self-given self (Southgate 2008, 71–73), and hence of inaugurating the healing of the world. This reading of *tôv m^eôd* is, then, eschatological—it

points to possibilities, rather than to an actuality that (as Messer concedes) never existed within the creation as science reconstructs it. So a textual scholar such as John Rogerson writes of the supposed primordial harmony of the creation, “The importance for biblical readers of a violence-free world lay not in the *fact* of its supposed existence, but in the way it witnessed to a possible form of existence that was also a radical criticism of the actual world of human experience” (Rogerson 1998, 12, emphasis in original). In the same volume Scott Ickert comments on the position of Luther: “Luther seems to suggest . . . that the significance of the original paradisaical harmony lies in its anticipatory function, pointing forward to the final great and perfect fulfillment” (Ickert, 1998, 99).

This returns me to my previous set of reflections on the *imago Dei*. This is a world of “selving,” in which creatures come to be selves over against other creatures—only so can (quasi)-autonomous selves arise. The culmination of that process is the utterly self-transcended self, the perfectly generous response to perfectly generous love—that is my understanding of “the image of the invisible God” in Col. 1:15. The Christ-event is both an evolutionary emergent (*the* ultimate demonstration that the potential of creation is indeed *tôv m'ôd*), and a further index of utter divine grace. Insofar as human beings, by kenosis of their (evolved) aspirations, acquisitiveness, and appetite (Southgate, 2008, chap. 6), come to be conformed to the image of Christ, they both grow in that grace, and endorse the verdict that the creation is indeed “very good.”

2. In relation to the doctrines of divine omnipotence and *creatio ex nihilo*. If I reject the notion that a negative force corrupted God’s good creation, and assert that evolution was the only way God could give rise to creaturely selves, the so-called “only way” argument (Southgate 2008, 47–48), then an objection can be raised that this is a breach with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—with the Christian confession that all that is came absolutely out of nothing solely by the *fiat* of God. What is the nature of this constraint—that a Darwinian world was the only way to give rise to beauty, diversity, and complexity in creation? Here is a constraint that seems to co-exist with God from eternity, so for the philosophical theologian it is problematic. Surely God could have made creaturely beauty and diversity out of any materials and processes God liked? Whereas for anyone trained in the natural sciences it is a very plausible constraint—philosophers can dream up all sorts of alternative worlds, but the only way we know matter “works” and gives rise to life is *this* way, and the only way this type of life evolves and gives rise to novel and excellent adaptations, creaturely selves of all types and ingenuities, is via Darwinian natural selection,

driven by competition, predation, and extinction. Theologically however this constraint continues to seem problematic, and calls for further exploration in relation to the classical doctrines of divine omnipotence and *creatio ex nihilo*.¹³

As will be evident from this discussion, I think that the most coherent and creative position to hold is to concede the disvalues associated with evolutionary suffering as a necessary element in God's creation of an evolving biosphere. This was indeed the only way, or the best way, God could give rise to creaturely selves. This "only way" argument allows the retention of a strict monotheism, a God utterly sovereign over the whole cosmos, though at the price of sharpening the theodicy problems posed by the ambiguities of the world we experience. Most biologists would be inclined to think in these terms, to say that nature is a "package deal" (Gregersen 2001). The values are not obtained without the disvalues. End of story. Given the extent of the disvalues of creaturely suffering and extinction, the theologian may tentatively conclude, without incoherence, that a loving God would only have created in this way if it were the only way.

However, I have argued strongly that the "only way" argument by itself is not an adequate defense of the goodness of God. God is not merely the God of systems, but of individual creatures. It is not enough to say to the limping impala calf picked off by hyenas, or to the second pelican chick pushed out of the nest to starve by its stronger sibling, to creatures whose lives know no flourishing, that God is the God of the system and the system is a package deal, the bad with the good. So the first element in my theodicy of evolution, the "only way" argument, cannot subsist by itself. It is not enough to say with Robin Attfield that this is the best sort of world God could have made, and leave it at that (Attfield 2006, chap. 6–7). That seems to make God a hard-hearted consequentialist prepared to accept a certain quota of creaturely suffering to realize the divine ends. Nor do I consider that it is enough to say with Holmes Rolston that evolutionary creation is both self-redeeming and cruciform, and that that in itself constitutes a theodicy (Rolston 2003). In a sense what I am doing here is applying a modified version of the argument Dostoevsky gives to Ivan Karamazov—if the system of divine providence works at the expense of the torture of a single child, Ivan respectfully returns his ticket. Without for a moment equating animal suffering with that of a tortured human child, I believe the same argument can be used against an evolutionary theodicy resting simply on the value of the overall system (Southgate 2008, 13, 43; cf. Dostoevsky [1880] 1958, 286–87).

I am also, implicitly, rejecting the theodicy of those chapters that form the climax to the Book of Job. Job 38–41 is a profoundly important passage, not least in stressing that God has a care for creatures that is quite

distinct from humanity and its role (cf. Horrell et al. 2010, chap. 7 and references therein). Also important, but in the end unsatisfying in relation to evolutionary theodicy, is the author of Job's position on suffering. In God's response from the whirlwind the author implies that human beings can pose questions about suffering as passionately as they like, and are right to do so, but in the end our tickets are punched and unreturnable, it is not for us to expect an answer from the sovereign God. Lamoureux's recent *Evolutionary Creation* offers a Christianized version of this strategy when he applies to evolutionary suffering Jesus' response to the question about the man's blindness in John 9: no one was to blame, but this suffering was for the glory of God (Lamoureux 2008, 297–305). In his eloquent essay *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (2004) D.Z. Phillips develops a remarkable variant of God's response to Job, in which the tickets to a world of horrendous and arbitrary evils are to be received as gifts of grace. Phillips and I are in a sense attempting the same thing, "the struggle for a more adequate understanding of God within an essentially believing relationship with God" (Phillips 2004, 118), and we both in our different ways find ourselves qualifying the classical notion of the omnipotence of God,¹⁴ but relatively few Christians will find it easy to follow Phillips down his path of abandoning such key beliefs as the personal nature of God, and the reality of life after death.

Christian theology needs as Barth said "to take rational trouble over the mystery"¹⁵ of God's ways with the world. It needs then to attempt a theodicy in the light of evolution, one that makes use of the "only way argument" but recognizes that it needs to be incorporated within a wider schema of divine involvement with the world, and salvation in Christ. In other words, there is a need for a "compound evolutionary theodicy," a "thick account" (Tracy 2007) that does not simply establish the logical compatibility of a loving God and evolutionary suffering on the basis of a single argument (Attfield 2006, chap. 6–7) but holds the argument for the justice of God within the whole arc of the Christian narrative of creation and redemption.¹⁶

Elements of such a wider scheme might include:

1. The need to invoke the co-suffering of God with all creatures, an increasing emphasis in twentieth century Christian theology, and applied to the nonhuman world in the work of theologians such as Jay McDaniel (1989) and Arthur Peacocke (2001). Every theologian would concede that God is present to every creature both in its flourishing and its suffering, and that therefore no creature suffers or dies alone. In the Christian tradition this suffering is focused and exemplified at the Cross in a way that inaugurates the transformation of the world, and Gregersen's work on "deep incarnation" emphasizes the solidarity of Christ not merely with

humans but with all creatures and particularly the victims of evolution (Gregersen 2001). So it is a short step from there to the supposition that God does indeed suffer with every suffering creature, and that that suffering, at some deep existential level, makes a difference, both to God and to the creature.

2. The need to suggest that creatures whose lives know no fulfillment may experience fullness of life in some eschatological reality, a “pelican heaven,” in McDaniel’s phrase (McDaniel 1989). A number of theologians have explored this line recently, including Robert J. Russell, Denis Edwards, and Ernst Conradie (see Russell 2008; Edwards 2004; Conradie 2002; and Southgate 2008, chap. 5 for a summary of their positions). If we take altogether seriously the loving character and purposes of God I think we cannot believe that lives consisting of nothing but suffering are the end for those creatures that experience them. How many other animals there may be in heaven, other than those are so evidently the victims of the evolutionary process, no theologian is able to say. All I can say is that I believe there is no shortage of room in heaven.¹⁷

The notion that there is a redeemed life for at least some creatures of course provokes the hard question—why then did God not simply just create heaven? That is always a demanding question for the theist, one that Wesley Wildman poses with his characteristic trenchancy (Wildman 2007, 292). The way forward here must be a development of the only way argument—it would be necessary to posit that creaturely selves may be able to flourish (in transmuted form) in heaven, but they can only *arise* in an evolving biosphere.

3. The final element in a compound evolutionary theodicy, relying on a number of different inferences in combination, a number of different elements in the arc of the Christian narrative, in order to understand the ways of a good God in a Darwinian world, might be an account of the calling of human beings as co-redeemers with God. I have pondered long on the passage on the nonhuman creation in Rom. 8:19–23. It is a fascinating text, frustratingly brief and allusive. And to read it as a post-Darwinian modern is very different from responding to it in its original context.¹⁸ But I think one can safely infer that Paul sees the era beyond the resurrection of Christ as the eschatological era, one in which humans come into the glory of knowing their true freedom. On such a reading, then, Christian ethics is or should be inescapably eschatological—it supposes that this is the era of the final healing and transformation not only of human beings but of the whole cosmos. This is a conclusion fraught with all sorts of perils and

possibilities of abuse, but not to be discarded all the same. We cannot read off from the-way-the-world-is too definite an inference as to what the-world-ought-to-become. And Paul the Apostle in Rom. 8:19–23 says something very intriguing, which at the same time makes abundant sense to humans trying to confront the extent of our ecological depredations. He implies, in the language of vv. 19, 21, that the glory of creation’s own liberation in some way depends on humans coming into their full glory as free creatures in Christ. So the ecologist’s prediction that creation will only cease to groan when humans can live harmoniously and sustainably with other creatures is matched by Paul’s theological instinct that our struggle to be transformed—in the words of 2. Cor. 3:18—“from one degree of glory to another” is necessary to the final freeing of the nonhuman creation at the eschaton. In this journal and later in my book I have suggested that humans’ part in that liberation might actually involve an imperative to cut the rate of biological extinction, as our part in God’s healing of creation (Southgate 2002, 819–21; 2008, chap. 7).¹⁹

One of the most fascinating questions to arise at the 2009 ISSR meeting was the extent to which a Jewish theologian could have advanced a theodicy similar to my own. The view of the meeting was that—with the exception of the emphasis on Christ and his atoning work, and of course the Trinitarian language for God—a very similar set of moves could indeed have been made within Judaism. So I was intrigued that Shai Cherry at the 2009 ISSR Conference actually offered a very different emphasis, stressing the givenness of the world and humans being charged to make what they can of it. There is a connection to be made here with other work colleagues and I have published recently on the genres of theological narrative (Horrell et al. 2010, especially chap. 3, 6). We identify in Christianity, especially in the thought of Paul, an inescapably eschatological narrative in which believers are caught up into a kind of quest, following their hero-figure, Christ, in their struggle to be authentically Christ’s body on an Earth being transformed into the new creation. Judaism has its eschatological dimension too, but it may be that its recent horrendous experience of suffering leads its thinkers more naturally to think of the inexorabilities, indeed the ironies, of the world in which God has set his people.

CONCLUSION

I conclude that Christian theology in conversation with Darwinism has to part company with the notion of a perfectly good initial creation that was corrupted by some mysterious process. It has to accept the profound ambiguity of that creation—as “very good” in the words of Genesis 1:31 but also “groaning in labor pains” in the words of Rom. 8:22. It does well to

abandon the perfect impassibility of God so beloved of classical tradition, in favor of a God who grieves and laments with suffering creatures, very possibly in the very same process in which God takes joy from the flourishing of other creatures. And it should also abandon the conviction—also strong in the tradition—that animals, having no souls, know no redemption, in favor of a view of a heaven rich in creaturely diversity. In accepting the way in which Darwinian thought forces Christians to re-read some of their most foundational texts, I end with the radical suggestion that re-reading a key biblical text might invite us to recognize a calling to be part of the eschatological healing of creation, and hence to seek to subvert the process of biological extinction, up to now one of the key mechanisms of evolutionary change.

NOTES

1. Setting aside William Dembski's very strange view that God instituted a system of creaturely suffering in anticipation of human disobedience. Dembski writes that: "To make us realize the full extent of human sin, God does not merely allow personal evils . . . to run their course subsequent to the Fall. In addition, God allows natural evils (e.g., death, predation, parasitism, disease, drought, floods, famines, earthquakes, and hurricanes) to run their course prior to the Fall. Thus, God himself wills the disordering of creation, making it defective on purpose. God wills the disordering of creation not merely as a matter of justice . . . but, even more significantly, as a matter of redemption (to bring humanity to its senses by making us realize the gravity of sin) (Dembski 2009, 145). "On this view evolution is not so much a method of creation . . . as a method of judgment by which God impresses on the world the radical consequences of human sin" (167). Quite apart from Dembski's bizarre handling of time, the anthropocentrism of this, and the disregard for the sufferings of the nonhuman creature, will seem unbearable to many readers of this journal.

2. I thank Dr Abi Millings for these insights. See also Tallis (2008, 37–44).

3. A corollary of this position is the view noted in the Introduction—whoever manifests self-giving love, even from a position of no faith, has been touched by the life of God. The contemplation of the face of Christ through worship is a form of relating in freedom to the God who made us and saves us; it is itself transformative and takes us deeper into the glory of that God. But insofar as anyone sees profound need and responds to it, reaches out to the poor, the sick, the hungry or imprisoned, that action reveals someone already caught up into the divine conversation (Mt. 25:31–45), already acting in the image of the God of self-giving love. Other-regard and worshipful contemplation, then, are two sides of the same coin.

4. This fascinating notion seems to me to be a helpful complement to the understanding in, for example, the work of Arthur Peacocke, of God suffering "in, with, and under" the suffering of every creature (Peacocke 2001, 86, cf. Southgate 2008, 50–54). In the extremity of suffering, creator-creaturely relationship—compassion on the one side, praise on the other—comes to be most truly itself.

5. Interestingly, T.F. Torrance, Barth's greatest pupil writing in the science-religion debate, is also unable to hold to what seems to be the main emphasis of Barth's account of the shadow aspect of creation. Torrance writes of the predator-prey relationship and the extent of animal pain: "It is difficult not to think that nature has been infiltrated by an extrinsic evil, affecting entropy for ill, corrupting natural processes, and introducing irrational kinks into their order" (Torrance 1981, 123, cf. Southgate 2008, 32–33). This position of Torrance's is subject to the same critique I give of Messer.

6. Indeed Barth himself was clear that this discussion revealed the brokenness of theological discourse (Barth 1960, 293–95). Barth here is conscious of how much mystery he has to invoke to reconcile the sovereign God with the extent of evil in the world.

7. Arguably, Messer may also draw some support from Barth's handling of sickness and disease in Barth (1961, 356–74).

8. Although we part company at various points, I continue to be most grateful to Dr Messer for the conversation he has initiated, as well as for a thoughtful and helpful response to a draft of this article.

9. Cf. Rolston's important analysis of why advanced computation evolves only in the brains of creatures adapted to eat or be eaten (Rolston 1992).

10. See also Murphy (2007) for a "by-product defence." I am concerned that this position does not quite do justice to the extent to which suffering in evolution seems to serve what may be regarded as the divine purposes, as well as just being a by-product. That is not to say that God directly wills the suffering—rather that God wills the processes, the teloi of creatures, that necessarily give rise to suffering.

11. That there is much more cooperation in nature than a baldly competitive account of evolution by natural selection might imply is a point also made by Moritz (2008).

12. This indeed is an eminently plausible way to read Genesis 1–3. The possibility of defying God seems at least to co-exist with the earliest humans, and is represented in the text by the profoundly enigmatic figure of the serpent, but there is no evidence that God's will was actually defied until free human choices were made.

13. For a recent analysis of aspects of *creatio ex nihilo* see Robson (2008). Again, a helpful way forward may be to explore Gunton's language of creation as a "project" of God's (Gunton 1998). I thank Dr John Colwell for the latter observation.

14. See also Edwards (2004, 107–10) on different ways of understanding divine omnipotence.

15. Quoted as one of the epigraphs to Kaufman (1993).

16. On combining different types of defense to evolutionary evil see also Murray (2008, chap. 7).

17. Messer is strongly critical of my suggestion that there might still be predation in heaven, though without pain or suffering (Southgate 2008, 88–89; Messer 2009, 152–53) He regards this suggestion as the logical inference from my "only way" argument. I part company with him here—I regard a "peaceable kingdom"—along the lines of his favorite text, Is. 11:6–9—as equally compatible with my overall scheme, though (for me) less imaginatively persuasive than the picture I offer. It is often remarked that Christian eschatology involves positing both continuity between this creation and the new, and also discontinuity (see, e.g., Polkinghorne 2002). What is at issue here is the (unknowable) question of what constitutes the essence of leopardness, such as will be in continuity between the old creation and the new, and how on new-creation earth to imagine a state of shalom between new-creation leopards and new-creation kids. Is the hunting capacity of a leopard (or the fleeing capacity of an antelope) only a "protological telos," or something which will in some way be carried over into the new creation? There is a delicate balance here between Messer's speculations and my own.

18. For a thorough discussion of readings of the text in relation to ecological concern see Hunt et al. (2008); Horrell et al. (2010, chap. 4).

19. I recognize that the prospect of significant anthropogenic climate change makes the mitigation of anthropogenic extinction a much more urgent task—I have addressed this issue in more recent writing (Southgate 2009).

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