

Evolutionary Theodicy

with Denis Edwards, “Christopher Southgate’s Compound Theodicy: Parallel Searchings”; Ted Peters, “Extinction, Natural Evil, and the Cosmic Cross”; Robert John Russell, “Southgate’s Compound Only-Way Evolutionary Theodicy: Deep Appreciation and Further Directions”; Bethany Sollereeder, “Exploring Old and New Paths in Theodicy”; Holmes Rolston, III, “Redeeming a Cruciform Nature”; Ernst M. Conradie, “On Social Evil and Natural Evil: In Conversation with Christopher Southgate”; Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, “Evolution, Contingency, and Christology”; John F. Haught, “Faith and Compassion in an Unfinished Universe”; Celia Deane-Drummond, “Perceiving Natural Evil through the Lens of Divine Glory? A Conversation with Christopher Southgate”; Nicola Hoggard Creegan, “Theodicy: A Response to Christopher Southgate”; and Neil Messer, “Evolution and Theodicy: How (Not) to Do Science and Theology.”

THEODICY: A RESPONSE TO CHRISTOPHER SOUTHGATE

by Nicola Hoggard Creegan

Abstract. This article is a critical and appreciative interaction with Christopher Southgate’s theodicy and theology of glory. I critique in particular his rejection of all dualist moves in theodicy. I question why Southgate can ascribe evil to some human actions, many of which are automatic and unconscious, but not to any other level or form of consciousness. I argue that he may rely too heavily on rational scientific categories, which are not sufficient in themselves to carry the weight of key theological concepts. His use of poetry is powerful and suggestive, but in the end, he may not give it enough epistemic weight.

Keywords: Sonali Deraniyagala; glory; natural evil; poetry; Christopher Southgate; theodicy

AMBIGUOUS NATURE

I must start this interaction with Christopher Southgate’s work with heartfelt appreciation. There are not many theologians who are working within this particular *umwelt*: placing our long evolutionary history with its tragedies and proclivities as well as its stunning and wondrous beauty and grandeur into juxtaposition with the gospel story; naming nature as a place of resolute ambiguity. Those who do form a particular community

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that is to some extent never fully accepted by the theological status quo. I appreciate, therefore, the weight that Southgate places on the huge changes in our outlook that have emerged over the last century and a half. I appreciate that he does this with a poetic heart, with sensitivity, intellectual perspicuity, in-depth analysis of others, and often a new vocabulary that attempts to “bridge” or explain the unimaginable.

For Southgate, there are two great puzzles of theological meaning. The first is, how did the evolutionary process (which he describes as mostly natural selection) arrive at both the outcomes we describe as unequivocally good, “the values of beauty, diversity, and ingenuity in creation,” and at those that are more troubling—extinction, sickness, and predation and then eventually the forces of nature that overwhelm human life in an instant (Southgate 2014, 785). The other puzzle with which he is in constant dialogue is how and why Jesus had to suffer to save the world (2014, 786). This is a helpful pairing, because he returns to the cross again and again to assert that it is capable of carrying the ambiguity one finds in the natural world.

There are of course, a number of ways of finding a measure of resolution on these pressing issues—paths not travelled, as Southgate puts it. The reframing of God as in some sense less than sovereign, in open theism or process, has been a ubiquitous and at times fruitful path in twentieth- and twenty-first-century theology. He does not take this path, and in the end, I would concur with him that process philosophy does not make ultimate sense of either revelation or physics.

Southgate’s response to the existence of horrendous evil that picks off certain people, certain animals, and whole species with alacrity and often in hidden ways, is that God is responsible, followed by any number of “buts.” But, God came and suffered with us, and with the victims of predation, says Southgate (2008, 56ff). But, there is a heaven for “pelican chicks” and the victims of horrendous human and natural evil, he says, echoing Jan McDaniel who reflects on the cruel fate of many animals, especially the reserve chick every pelican lays and then routinely discards (Southgate 2008, 78ff). Some of this evil, if seen within a wider frame of evolution, is the best of all possible ways of doing things, the only way to make this world possible (Southgate 2008, 92ff). His theodicy is not entirely unique, as indeed no one’s is, but is rather a particular expression of a number of different approaches, combined with a new vocabulary and set resolutely within a wider cosmic evolutionary framework. In a context of widespread and persistent creationism, he also usefully discusses and rejects a falleness view of suffering for both humans and creatures (Southgate 2008, 28ff).

The evolutionary theodicy foil to Southgate’s position (and ancient theological alternative to the falleness hypothesis) is to allow that we are dealing not only with a world of human intelligence and God’s will but also with forms of “powers and principalities” not necessarily aligned with God,

whatever their ultimate destiny (Hoggard Creegan 2013, 8, 93). I would take the latter view and Southgate the former. In fact, he dismisses the dualist view swiftly and decidedly saying, “that would be to accord more power to a force opposed to God than the Scriptures and the Christian tradition are willing to accede” (Southgate 2014, 785). Nevertheless, I note that Southgate is not entirely consistent on this point. In *The Groaning of Creation*, for instance, he says that he would be “the last to deny the reality of spiritual evil,” and even that this evil may have effects on the natural world. He also makes it clear, however, that this is to be a minor trajectory in the response to evil, because it has the possibility of undermining the sovereignty of God (Southgate 2008, 33).

All of this is to say that I appreciate Southgate’s position enormously, but I disagree with some of his emphases. Let me then explore briefly the strengths and coherence of his position before returning to my critique and to a discussion of further points of agreement.

SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Without naming it this way Southgate is opting for the sovereignty of God, in the sense that for him whatever oddness and inscrutability there is in God, it makes no sense to imagine that “God has been defeated in making straw-eating lions” (Southgate 2014, 785). On the one hand, creation by evolution has produced all the goods and values which make our lives full and good. The *process* is therefore good and we must live with the disvalues it also throws up. On the other hand, these disvalues are great enough that he accepts God must accommodate them somehow. He admits an uneasiness with some of the natural conclusions of his position, but never wavers in his commitment to it (Southgate 2014, 799). In his book *The Groaning of Creation* he uses several theological moves, “intratrinitarian kenosis” and the idea of “selving” to justify the evil and ambiguity of nature, and he places his theodicy insights in a wider framework which posits humans in Christ as crucial to the co-redeeming of the universe.

Southgate thus contributes to this field by co-opting a unique vocabulary, modeled on the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. In his use of the poetic, he is acknowledging the difficulties of this interpretive exercise and the need for language that can carry the ambiguity as much as possible (Southgate 2008, 61), though I argue at the end of this article that he does not take the poetic far enough. Invoking the Trinity, Southgate speaks of the *logoi* imprint of God on each creature, and the ability to “selve,” coming out of the sacrificial movement of the Son from the Father in the power of the Spirit. Southgate rejects a kenosis of space, and instead affirms a kenosis of equality and ethics. “The self-abandoning love of the Father begetting the Son establishes an otherness that enables God’s creatures to be ‘selves’” (Southgate 2008, 58). Intratrinitarian kenosis (with von Balthasar) “is

the self-emptying love of the Father in begetting the Son that creates the possibility that other selves can be formed. Otherness in the Trinity is the basis for the otherness of creation” (Southgate 2008, 59). He continues, “It is from the love of the Father of the world, and for the glory of the Son, that other selves gain their existence, beauty, and meaning, that which prevents them from reverting to nothingness” (Southgate 2008, 58).

Because this process of selving is inherently problematic and subject to any number of contingent and necessary hurdles, frustration in selving is an aspect of creaturely existence. “All that the frustrated creature suffers, and all it might have been but for frustration,” he argues, “is retained in the memory of the Trinity. Given that the same processes lead to full selving and to frustration, we must imagine this ambiguity held deep in the loving relationships of God” (Southgate 2008, 65). Becoming a self requires a constant process of “self-transcendence” whereby the creature listens to the invitation (or lure) of the Holy Spirit, which will enable the creature to relate to others in new and creative ways.

Southgate therefore portrays a process of becoming that is turbulent and fraught, but undergirded always by the movement within the Trinity that also produces the Son from the Father by the work of the Holy Spirit. God does not come from afar, then, to suffer with us, but is already with us in the process of selving that each creature has undergone from the beginning of time. In the Incarnation, this process is brought to perfection but is not inherently new because life has been selving on this planet already for 4 billion years or more. Thus, crucifixion is both a new work of God and a continuing one at the same time.

ESCHATOLOGY

As is the case with many theodicies, Southgate’s affirms a heaven of some sort, a reward or compensation for all the frustration and inability to transcend the self that life for most creatures entails. Eschatology is complex at the best of times. Are we and the creatures resurrected as embodied creatures; is the resurrection subjective or objective, and what does it mean to be retained in the memory of God? Southgate is tentative on these matters while insisting that some form of afterlife must exist, at least for species, if not individuals whose lives have been cut short in their fulfillment (Southgate 2008, chapter 5). For nonhuman creatures, he suggests that afterlife need not be eternal, while for humans it must be because our fulfillment and transcendence are complete only “within the life of God” (Southgate 2008, 84). He argues, however, that apart from frustration, afterlife for creatures must exist because Scripture suggests it, and because all ways of being human entail a connection with other species. He is particularly attracted to the work of Ernst Conradie, who understands all of cosmic history as “inscribed in the eschaton” so that “nothing is lost”

(Southgate 2008, 87). But the inscription allows for richer depth in light of Christ's redemption.

I would certainly sympathize with the directions of Southgate's eschatology, but I would add that one of the reasons for Christ's life and this Earth is the overcoming of evil, first in the Trinity, incarnate in Christ, and then in us, the Body of Christ. Much of Southgate's emphasis upon our taking up work of kenosis on Earth in an ethical sense is consistent with resistance of evil, but he does not frame it in this way.

THE THEOLOGY OF GLORY

Given Southgate's position on suffering, therefore, his transition into a theology of glory is entirely consistent, and follows on from his theodicy. If predation and disease and disaster are no surprises to God, and are all diverse moments of God, and all the good of life and the selving of creatures requires them, then God's presence and communication are to be found in all of nature, including its more troubling aspects. Southgate moves from justifying God to insisting that everything is also a sign of God. This follows very directly from his theology of God's sovereignty in the face of suffering. The troubling places in evolutionary theodicy are now going to be incorporated into the notion of the glory of God.

He begins by noting the wide semantic field in both the Hebrew and Greek Bibles that is associated with glory (*kavod*, and *doxa*) (Southgate 2014, 786). He rejects the common Platonic approach to nature because in it nature is diminished and is always only referring onward to a transcendent aspect, which is also often related to beauty (Southgate 2014, 787). The beauty and glory of God are not to be found only in, or even particularly in, the sunset, or other instances of natural beauty. The associations, for instance, between *kavod* and "weight" extend the meaning of glory far from any easily appropriated beautiful landscape. Moreover, glory is located in the natural world—the glory of God fills the Earth. These considerations justify, he thinks, the location of glory as including the tsunami, the parasitic worm, and the eagle catching its prey (Southgate 2014, 802–03). Moreover, glory is semiotic. Because God is partly present and partly hidden in the present age we are meant to look to nature for signs of God, and these can be found in *all* its ambiguity, not excluding the darker sides. "The material," he says, "not as a sort of expedient but as a necessary outworking of the character of God—carries signs of the divine reality" (Southgate 2014, 787). Nature in its fullness is a sign of the "Godness of God" (Southgate 2014, 788).

God is communicating with us in nature (though Southgate also admits that glory has an ontological component, one that is particularly oriented toward the eschaton when there will be no more need of signs) (Southgate 2014, 791). In that case, everything of God must be related to and a

sign of this glory. Bringing this understanding of glory alongside the cross, Southgate nevertheless insists that somehow this is mitigated by God's infinite tenderness for the victim as well as the predator. He says, "the inscapes of every created entity or event constitute glory: an utterly reliable array of signs of the divine nature. Not, then, that the tsunami could be called a glorious event, but it contains elements of divine glory" (Southgate 2014, 802).

Extending the glory to these troubling aspects of creation, he argues, is like learning to "dance on our heels" (a wonderful metaphor) and accentuates the richness of the terms as it applies to God, not modifying God, but signaling God's presence (Southgate 2014, 799). All of this makes sense if you opt for God as the explanation of everything, even if you admit that this God is puzzling. Then everything must be a sign of God. Everything. Southgate has a strong distaste for any position other than a God with ultimate responsibility—though a responsibility modified by kenosis. Even if he goes on to argue that God *is* odd, and in Wendy Farley's words, "mind-bendingly strange" (Southgate 2014, 793).

I will argue below, however, that one can play the strangeness/oddity/mystery card in a number of different spaces. We must play it somewhere. We can explain why good reasons are to be followed, and why at some point we have to point to the inscrutability of God, while nevertheless acknowledging God's goodness and Godness. The oddness cannot be so odd as to trump the goodness. Of course, in matters of theodicy it is always threatening to do just that. One senses that Southgate is never comfortable that his position leads to God inevitably being portrayed as undergirding tsunamis, but also—in the words of David Bentley Hart—to God being "the metaphysical ground of Auschwitz" and its shadows throughout history as well (Southgate 2014, 799).

ANOTHER VIEW

Here, I will come in with an alternative view. In the end, I would argue that deep intuitions, both formed by life and the biblical text, explain both our positions, Southgate's and mine. I admit that for both of us, we end up arguing some form of the "best of all possible worlds" approach, or at least that this is the only way to get this particular world. This is a world "knowing good and evil," where sometimes and to some extent knowing the evil makes the good exquisite. This is a world where some struggle and uncertainty add to the emotional depth and poignancy of love. This is a world where the immediacy of God's presence is sometimes replaced with signs.

These points of accord do not disguise essential differences between our positions as well. God may in some sense be sovereign, but God's will does

coexist with ours, and our wills are often at odds with the good. Why are other forms of evil (Celia Deane-Drummond's shadow Sophia or evil of some other sort) excluded necessarily by Southgate (Deane-Drummond 2009, 185)? God *has* been defeated by failing to make a peaceful *Homo sapiens*.

Evolutionary processes have made both the hawk and the lamb, Southgate says, and therefore we must accept both as God's will. But humans have been formed in the same way as other mammalian predators. Although in some places and circumstances we can be said to be free (and hence god-like), much of what we do is unconscious, mediated through cultures and by habits and genes that precede us. Southgate will judge that what humans do is often evil. Humans *do* constantly defeat the purposes of God. Humans are formed, however, as a result of a God-given (full of glory) process that has led also to other forms of life. Why not grant the possible existence of other (evil) beings or intelligences, or fragments/hypostases or whatever, equally without scruple?

And yet, I admit one hesitates to invoke evil. I would much rather live in a world without any hint of transcendent evil outside of humanity. If I am asked how such evil eventuated or was able to oppose God I would play the inscrutability card here. We don't know. But I would insist that both experience and the Scriptures describe such realities, without in any way explaining or justifying their presences. The "powers and principalities," for instance, of Ephesians 6:12, the "rulers and authorities" of Colossians 2:15 and the "ruler of this world" (John 14:30), are all examples.

I admit that probably things can't be any other way. But I take some comfort from the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13: 24–30), which cannot be separated in this era (Hoggard Cregan 2013, chapter 5). Evil and good are entangled so that we cannot separate them and cannot see how they could be separate either (images of lions and wolves and lambs notwithstanding). The entanglement is deep, so that the tares are holding up the wheat. They are never unequivocally wrong. And yet, it is to defeat these powers that Jesus has come.

An example, perhaps, is the trophic cascade, an ecosystem that has been renewed and recovered by the introduction of a top predator like the wolf. These restored places show how this life as we know it cannot work without these predators, or at least works better as an integrated ecosystem if that predator is there. When the wolf has been reintroduced into Yellowstone, for instance, trees, river banks, badgers, and elk have all been restored to a new harmony. The ecosystem in this particular world, in which damage and disease are minimized, needs the top predator, with all its attendant misery for some weak animals (Eisenberg 2010, chap. 2). Wheat and tares are necessarily mixed in this world.

But to invoke the parable is to say that for whatever reason and however this all happened, tragedy is a part of human existence and natural existence,

and all life is afflicted with some part of the shadow (as well as experiencing and being dependent upon the glory of God). I would point to those images of Jesus' victory over evil in his crucifixion and earthy life. He wasn't making a more perfect synthesis, he wasn't just identifying with all the victims of history. There was and is also a *Christus Victor* component to it all. The signs of God's glory are there. The signs are in the wheat, but the sign has noise and is confounded and confused by the presence of the tares.

Glory can still exist in every manifestation of God in nature, but the way in which the various aspects or levels or layers fit together is fraught in some way. Southgate sees God at work in the tsunami, the future being pulled out of the present, so to speak. I also would see something similar, but also hold that that work of God involves some sort of defeat of evil, the evil being hard to define. We can't just say it is the power of the water itself. It is the combination of earthquake, water, and proximity of people. As humans we partly bring this on ourselves, but only partly. Other planets without life or consciousness are perfect in themselves, but this planet both invites us, nurtures us, and also defeats and torments us; us and other creatures as well.

One almost gets the impression that Southgate prefers the difficult forms of glory to the beautiful ones. And certainly, great tragedy has given rise to the most beautiful music. But only because there is redemption. If glory is partly a sign then humans of all kinds must be able to discern this sign and that is indeed a part of what we mean by beauty, that we are recognizing an order and a depth that precede us and extends to infinity. Although there is some beauty in earthquakes, tsunamis, the taut body of a cheetah, and even the strength and power of a soldier, there is much more that is troubling in what follows from each. The wheat and the tares, the glory and the shadow subsist together.

THE WAVE

Southgate speaks often of particularity. I want to tell a particular story, one chiseled out of a mass disaster, the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. In *Wave: A Memoir of Life after the Tsunami*, Sonali Deraniyagala gives a particular account of the moment when her world was destroyed by this tsunami (2014, 3). She and her husband and two young children divided their time between their London home and academic jobs, and the Sri Lanka of her youth and larger family. In both countries, they were nurtured by and within unusually rich communities. Their children were at a vulnerable magical age, the family loving and close. A moment before the wave became visible in their Yala hotel on the Sri Lankan coast the day after Christmas, Sonali's friend, also holidaying with her parents, shared her own desire for a family, and told Sonali, "what you guys have is a dream" (Deraniyagala

2014, 5). In the ensuing moments her children, her husband, her friend, her parents, and the friend's mother, were dead, as they fled for their lives. She describes vividly the way in which time was divided, how every experience of living after the wave was excruciating, how everything at first seemed to confirm the unthinkable, and then reminded her of the world she no longer lived.

This was a particular and utterly unheralded disaster. There is something about the experience of everyday life, of family, community, of birds, salt water, games, tantrums, and flesh that comprises everyday life in its exquisite beauty and that seems to say: this will continue, much as the sun will always rise, and day will follow night. It might fade; it might be marred by pain and disease, but this is the true reality. There is almost an unspoken covenant with the Almighty that nothing will happen quite like this. After all, Noah was warned. Londoners in the early 1940s knew they would be bombed in the night. There were sirens. There are small-scale disasters that come out of nowhere, harbingers of something bigger, like the biblical "one who is taken and the other left." In its scale, the tsunami escalated the odds, the stakes, the sense that all covenants of normality had been rescinded. Now anything was possible. Of course, 9/11 and the Holocaust before it, did something similar. Providence itself was hugely in question because there was no room at all for any redemption.

The prediluvian scenes Sonali paints of her life before the wave are depictions of human states that become an important part of why any of us believe in God, respond to the Spirit, or experience a sense of absolute dependence, whether we articulate it or not. To have this destroyed in an instant is to be condemned to be an "outlier" (although in that instant there were a quarter of a million lost, and many millions of survivors), is to know that the signs of divinity are possibly misleading (Deraniyagala 2014, 112). To survive, even, was to be condemned to lifelong repetition of the pain, always appearing from a new and different source of ordinary everyday life, somehow mysteriously continuing. To survive was to be condemned to purgatory. The very richness and overabundance of her family, community, and professional lives before the disaster only accentuate the pain that followed.

There is no mention of God in Deraniyagala's book, except that Christmas was joyously observed as a holiday. There is a brief allusion to karma, and her passing thought that perhaps she had murdered someone in a previous life. There are a few unusual coincidences. One child had a persistent fantasy that he had another family in America, and would go to live with them soon. A few months before the Wave he admitted they had all gone to Africa and had been eaten by lions. The husband's sister had woken weeping on Boxing Day of 2004, long before any word of the disaster had reached her in London. And even more strangely, months after the Wave, Sonali visited the site of their devastation at Yala, 200 miles from Colombo,

with her father-in-law. They stood desolate, still, at the water's edge, a persistent wind at his feet. A piece of paper stuck in the sand. It was the back page of her husband's publication, with an ISSN number still intact. The whole devastated site of buildings and infrastructure had been completely drowned and then subject to a pull of cosmic proportions, followed by a monsoon; even the foundations had been destroyed (Deraniyagala 2014, 73). This was a sign? A sign from a friendly or unfriendly deity?

I should state that at the end, seven years on, there was no resolution, but with friends, family, a counselor, and the privilege to live and work in New York instead of London, and to decide how she spent the lost family's birthdays—mostly alone—Sonali had found some measure of control in life. She discovered that if she owned her life and kept their memories vivid and expanding she could live with them, find some aliveness in her self returning.

I mention this story at length in the hopes that everyone who writes on theodicy will read it. We must all live with repercussions of our words. Does this story really fit with any of them? If we are Christian, yes, we can relate to the damaged, crucified Christ, and the sundering of normality that occurred with his birth, death, and then resurrection, and the arc that then extends to a redeemed future. But what made the world so out of kilter, that one day it can be calm and benign, so nurturing of life and love, as it has been for all its existence as a planet, and the next a swirling mass grave? Is this really all the work of God and a sign of God's Godness? I prefer, still, to think that there are elements out of kilter, malignant lines always slack in the fabric of creation, ready at a moment's notice to be pulled taut and visible. Are they signs of God at work, or of God overcoming evil? In my judgment they are the latter, but I would agree that we have no alternative but to see God at work somehow, the apocalyptic visions of the New Testament perhaps strangely comforting if anything can be. This living hell was not unexpected. The gross injustice of the distribution of affliction was not either.

The problem with accepting that these are signs of God's glory is that we do that acceptance on behalf of others, the ones who experienced these events as outliers of humanity and living creatures on Earth. The accursed.

But to read the story of *Wave* is to hesitate to make any defense of God of whom it is said "a bruised reed shall he not break" (Matthew 12:20 KJV). So yes, we have exacerbated these tragedies. Humans have drained the mangroves, made war, and built on the dunes, but humans are weak and ill-informed creatures. Does God have to break us? And if God does act this way, why are all humans not accursed? Why only some? A part of the exquisite grief of Sonali is that she bore it alone, in a world that did not experience her grief and could barely imagine it. If Southgate's instinct is to defend the sovereignty of God, mine is not only to protect God from some responsibility but also to defend humans from ultimate responsibility.

SOUTHGATE'S SCIENCE

There is one last observation I would make of Southgate's overall *corpus*. His work is an attractive combination of poetry and a theology/philosophy undergirded by science. In spite of the poetry, though, his theology is often trumped by his more hardline scientific instincts. He admits that science has to some extent disenchanting the world (Southgate 2008, 801). What place is there then, I wonder, for the unknown and the enchanted in his theological considerations? There is so much in the theological story that is hard to grasp within a fully scientific worldview. Prolepsis, Incarnation, the Spirit of God hovering always at the boundaries of every inscape. Southgate uses Hopkins's understanding of inscape to denote the inner and outer landscape of an entity, its scientific and its more subjective quiddity in the world (Southgate 2008, 97–98). Inscapes can signal glory, but so can the hints of enchantment and the glimpses of what we do not know. In this latter category we might put dark matter, dark energy, eleven dimensions, and the formal causes of evolution. Human experience certainly radiates beyond the knowable and into the realms of the uncanny. Even at the philosophical level, philosopher Steven Horst can speak of nomic incompleteness (2011, 3). And Rowan Williams has probably articulated this perspective most acutely, saying, "arguably one of the basic implications of seeing the world as in some way 'sacred' is to see it as always hiding something from us, as well as always presenting fresh aspects for understanding and representation" (Williams 2014, 120).

Certainly, it is an important principle that we should not always appeal to the "God of the gaps," and yet, as Williams argues, there are necessarily gaps. These gaps are not just temporary holes in our understanding, but ever-deepening crevasses. An example of an emphasis with which I would quibble is Southgate's understanding of competition and predation as a *necessary* aspect of the evolutionary process. It may be described as necessary because at the moment, yes, predation does uphold ecosystems. It may not be necessary in another way: deeper principles of cooperation, and as yet unknown formal causes undergird the evolutionary process, and both the known and unknowable aspects of these deep processes may indeed make a big difference to our theological outlook (Conway Morris 2005). Southgate himself distinguishes interestingly between the calm and complex behavior of deer in their natural habitat, and the more frenzied behavior of deer where humans have intervened and feeding them is entertainment (2008, 99–100). Competition, like the frenzied feeding of the deer in straitened circumstances, may end up being less essential to the flow of life on this planet than we think.

Where I would wish to include the poetic, with all its ambiguity, *within* the theological space, to say that theology *is* poetry even, Southgate separates them. For Southgate, enchantment is the stuff of poetry and

hard-edged science is the data with which theology must work. Southgate's use of Gerard Manley Hopkins and James Dickey (who imagines heavenly, joyful infinite predation) may be misleading here. His work in *The Groaning* is deeply indebted to both, especially Hopkins, but as Southgate notes, Hopkins himself was rooted in a scientific worldview. I would here agree with Williams when he says, "The word God cannot be grasped scientifically, rationally or even theologically without it exploding. It can only be held lightly and poetically" (2014, 34). For Williams language is always pressured, always metaphorical, always disruptive, not merely representing reality.

And, although there is no space here to pursue his work on origins of life, I suspect that our differences would translate into that field as well. Will we be able to construct life in thirty years? If we can, what does that say about the psychic nature of all matter? How do we relate the Lordship of the Spirit to life if humans can indeed construct it? These matters relate to the theodicy issue because they concern the intellectual framing of our world and its relationship to God, a matter that lies at the heart of our agonizing over evil. Nomic incompleteness and the mysterious nature of both God and cosmos make more coherent the theological supposition that God's causality is different from ours, and that there are "non-competitive relations" between God's actions and ours as described, for instance, by Kathryn Tanner (2001, 90).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I can only reiterate my appreciation for the finely wrought argument that characterizes Southgate's work. I am left with questions. At times Southgate appears to recognize the depth of evil that is often discernible in the warp and woof of everyday life. But he consistently rejects evil as an explanation of anything. Moreover, he errs always on the side of accepting the overall process as good, perhaps because, as a scientist, anything else would be too troubling to contemplate. His use of poetry is powerful and suggestive, but in the end, he may not give it enough epistemic weight.

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