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Why “*Tolle Lege*”?

The title of this journal is a reference to an extraordinary moment of conversion in the life of St. Augustine, the great philosopher and theologian of the early medieval period. The story begins with St. Augustine sitting beneath a fig tree, weeping in distress over his inability to leave behind his life of sin and follow God faithfully. Amidst his tears he hears the distant voice of a child chanting the words “*Tolle, lege!*” or “Take up and read!” Aroused from his pitiable state and taking this as a sign from God, he goes to his house, picks up the first book he finds, and reads the first chapter. The book contained the letters of St. Paul, and the verse that Augustine read spoke to his heart with such force that he was convinced beyond any doubt of the truth of God; he was converted on the spot.

This journal of philosophy and theology is meant to embody a spirit of truth-seeking—on the part of both the contributors and you, the reader. Like St. Augustine, we are all faced with the choice between complacency and continual conversion toward truth. We hope that this journal will serve as an aid in the discovery of truth, and thus we exhort you in all earnestness to “Take up and read!”

Editors' Note

Tolle, lege—take up and read. These two words inspired St. Augustine to embark on a journey of faith to discover truth. Twelve years ago, these two words became the cornerstone of our journal, through which we hope to offer you, our readers, an opportunity to begin your own journey toward truth. Collecting the best written work by Mount students in philosophy and theology, this, our twelfth issue, includes eight essays covering a wide range of relevant and stimulating topics. The prize essay, *A Theodicy of Animal Pain and Suffering in the Natural World*, by Daniel Scully, is an exceptional theological effort to explain the existence of animal suffering in a world created by an omniscient and benevolent God. Like all the essays in this journal, it was selected by the editorial board after a blind review, having stood out especially for its contemporary relevance and clarity of argument.

This past year was a particularly difficult one for our community due to the sudden and tragic passing of Michael Guckavan. We are honored to have had the opportunity to work alongside Michael during the creation of this issue, and we hope, for ourselves and our readers, that deeper philosophical and theological contemplation will add gravity and depth to our attempts to comprehend the significance and brevity of our human lives.

Publication of this volume would not have been possible without the support of many members of the Mount St. Mary's community. We would like to thank the provost, Dr. Boyd Creasman, and the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Dr. Peter Dorsey, for their financial support. Furthermore, we would like to give special thanks to our faculty advisors, Dr. Thane Naberhaus and Dr. Luis Vera, for their encouragement and guidance. Finally, we want to thank the members of the editorial board, who worked tirelessly to evaluate and select the essays for this year's publication, as well as all those students whose submissions made this volume possible.

So *tolle, lege*—take up and read! We hope that through this journal, you will be inspired to participate in a community conversation directed toward the discovery of truth and its revelation to others.

Paul Welte and Sydney Johnson
Editor-in-Chief and Assistant Editor

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A Theodicy of Animal Pain and Suffering in the Natural World

Daniel Scully

One of the most serious challenges to theistic belief lies in reconciling the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God with the existence and abundance of animal pain and suffering in the natural world. Theists are not only forced to confront the great amount of animal pain and suffering in the natural world in our present time, but they must confront the at least tens of millions of years of animal pain and suffering among billions of different species.¹ With animals experiencing such pain during their lives and dying bloody and horrific deaths for so long, it would seem hard for one to be able to carefully observe the natural world and yet still maintain that God exists.

According to scientific research, it is a given that animals of higher degrees of consciousness experience pain and can, in fact, experience a great deal of it.² To give a bit of insight into the bloody and horrific reality of animal pain and suffering in the natural world, consider the following example. Modern scientists have recently discovered a new way in which kelp gulls are able to get a meal out of baby seals. The kelp gulls will pluck out the eyes of a baby seal, blinding it so that it cannot get or find help from other seals, while the rest of the gulls come to devour the baby seal alive.³ Moreover, the original gull that plucked out the eyes will also eat the eyes as part of its meal because the eyes serve as a good source of both fluid and protein.⁴ According to scientists, gulls are very intelligent, and like many other animals that possess higher degrees of consciousness, they can quickly adapt to find their meals in ways that make it most efficient for them, despite how

¹ Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.

² Liz Langley, "The Surprisingly Humanlike Ways Animals Feel Pain," *National Geographic*, 3 December 2016, news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/12/animals-science-medical-pain.

³ Jason Bittel, "Seagulls Have a Gruesome New Way of Attacking Baby Seals," *National Geographic*, 17 August 2015, news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/08/150817-seals-seagulls-animals-science-predators-prey.

⁴ Ibid.

painful it may be for their prey.⁵ And this is not exclusive to gulls. For there are many predators that devour their prey live in ways that make it most efficient for them, regardless of the amount of pain that the prey may experience and endure. Gazelles and warthogs, for instance, scream in a terrifying manner while being eaten alive by predators like lions and crocodiles. Even parasites and diseases cause animals a great deal of pain while the parasites and diseases maim the animals in irreparable ways before they die. Darwin cites how the larva of the ichneumonidae feeds within the live bodies of caterpillars, literally eating its prey in a very painful way from the inside out.⁶ Another example is the way that dinosaurs, which existed for forty million years, apparently “suffered with great intensity and frequency from infestation by parasites and horrific diseases,” struggling mightily to survive for millennia.⁷

For many, the natural world seems to be anything but good. Some even argue that the true reality of life within the animal kingdom of the natural world is nothing but a lot of pain and death. As Darwin most succinctly says, “the strongest live and the weakest die.”⁸ According to the biologist Richard Dawkins, upon a truthful observation of the natural world one can conclude that “there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”⁹ Thus, for some contemporary thinkers, a truthful, objective observation of the natural world offers sufficient evidence for one to be able to conclude that God does not exist.

For the theist, there is no denying the factual evidence of the abundance of pain and suffering that animals have endured for many millions of years, since well before human beings came into existence; however, there are theodicies a theist can offer that explain why animal pain and suffering may be necessary. Moreover, a theist can also offer potential goods that may outweigh the pain and suffering that animals experience and endure in the natural world. This paper will offer a theodicy of animal pain and suffering in the natural world. The theodicy I will offer will explain in a consistent and cogent way why

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 107.

⁷ John Schneider, review of *The Problem of Animal Pain: A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small*, by Trent Dougherty (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/the-problem-of-animal-pain-a-theodicy-for-all-creatures-great-and-small>.

⁸ Quoted in Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 130.

⁹ Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 133.

God would allow animal pain and suffering in the natural world, and why he would allow it to exist for at least tens of millions of years among billions of different species. My goal is twofold. I will first show how pain and suffering is something necessary for animals in order to survive in a world governed by laws and how there could not be a metaphysical alternative to the reality of pain and suffering in the natural world; and second, I will argue that there may be two great goods that outweigh any pain and suffering that animals endure.

To begin, then, in order for animals to avoid injuries that could potentially debilitate or kill them, it is necessary for them to experience a sort of *hurtful* pain. A hurtful pain grabs the immediate attention of one's entire being. Such attention is able to let animals know immediately that they are being harmed and that they must prevent further harm from whatever it is that is harming them in order for them to avoid further injury and possible death. In this way, hurtful pain is very beneficial for animals. And insofar as hurtful pain is able to keep animals away from further harming themselves and death, the existence of hurtful pain in animals is not only very beneficial but is also necessary.

For example, consider a deer bitten by a wolf. The deer would not run away and would, instead, allow itself to be devoured by the wolf if it were not for the deer's experiencing of hurtful pain. It is only because the deer experiences a hurtful pain from the initial bite that the deer has a sufficient reason to run from the wolf in hopes of saving its life. Therefore, it is both good and necessary that the deer feels a hurtful pain as a result of the initial bite, since without such pain it would most certainly be killed and devoured.

However, one might object and argue that a sort of hurtful pain is *not* necessary to grab the attention of an animal's entire being. One might argue that there could exist another way in which an animal's entire being could be made aware of a threat to its life. Such a mechanism would sufficiently replace a sort of hurtful pain altogether. In order to clarify why this simply could not have been so, and why God could not have created a material world that lacked hurtful pain, consider the following example of a doctor's expedition in India experimenting on patients with leprosy.

In the 1940s, Dr. Paul Brand "was recruited to India to help serve the crippling needs of patients with leprosy."¹⁰ Leprosy is a lifelong illness caused by a bacterial infection, and some of its effects are

¹⁰ Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*, 112.

debilitating. Among the many effects, one is a total loss of the sensation of pain. With the loss of pain, lepers cannot feel even the most serious fatal injuries. Dr. Brand discusses in particular one patient, Sadan, who had terrible infections in both of his legs. The infections were so bad that double amputation was a strongly considered option. However, Dr. Brand thought there could be a way around the amputations, and so he carefully treated the infections. After the whole course of treatment, Dr. Brand noticed something very important as Sadan was leaving the hospital. Brand noticed how Sadan, because he could not feel pain, left the hospital without even a limp. His inability to walk with a limp caused inflammation, which resulted in the infection getting far worse. An otherwise normally healthy person would have felt the pain from the infection and would have walked with a limp, preventing the infection from getting worse. Unfortunately for Sadan, and to the chagrin of Dr. Brand, both of his legs had to be amputated.¹¹

Throughout Dr. Brand's time with the lepers, he learned this: that a sort of hurtful pain is needed in order to keep people—and arguably other animals, too—from harming themselves and risking fatal injuries. Dr. Brand concluded that all the infections and the degeneration that resulted from the leprosy was only worsened by the lepers' inability to feel pain. If it were not for their inability to feel pain, the infections and degenerations might have had a chance of being properly cared for and cured; but because the patients could not feel pain, their infections and degenerations could not be successfully healed. In his experience, Dr. Brand even attempted to warn the lepers of what they could and could not physically do in order to avoid serious injury and death. But without the ability to experience hurtful pain, even with painstaking attention they simply could not avoid injuring themselves.¹²

In order to try to find an alternative solution for his patients, Dr. Brand tried other techniques and devices that he hoped would work as successful replacements for their inability to feel hurtful pain. For some patients, Dr. Brand and his team equipped them with hearing aids that would “hum when the sensors were receiving normal pressures, buzz when they were in slight danger, and emit a piercing sound when they perceived an actual danger.”¹³ For other patients, he and his team placed sensors under the armpit that would shock them

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹² *Ibid.*, 117.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

when they were in danger, and they also used blinking lights that would warn the patients of danger. However, none of these techniques were successful. The lepers would proceed anyway with whatever it was that they were doing, without any regard to the alternative solutions that Brand and his team had tried. The team concluded that there was no alternative to true, hurtful pain that could help the lepers.¹⁴

It is, then, hurtful pain that allows us to avoid harming ourselves further and risking serious injury or death, and it is the same for other animals. For, as is made clear by Dr. Brand's story, it is evident that nothing else exists or could exist that could appropriately grab the immediate attention of one's whole being so greatly that it gives one a good enough reason to prevent oneself from further harm and the risk of serious injury or death.

There are still, however, other objections to the claim that hurtful pain is necessary for animals. First, one might think that hurtful pain could be replaced with a sort of pleasurable sensation once one has removed oneself from danger. Second, one might wonder whether there could exist a world totally without injury so as to not even necessitate any sort of hurtful pain. In what follows, I will state these and other objections as clearly as possible and attempt to respond to each.

On the question of whether hurtful pain could be replaced with a sort of pleasurable sensation once one has removed oneself from harm, one could argue that such a world would only cause much more injury and death. As Dr. Michael Murray writes, in a world wherein one would receive a pleasurable sensation once one had removed oneself from a harmful situation, people would be constantly harming themselves in order to receive the pleasurable sensation once they had removed themselves from the harmful situation. Like hurtful pain, the pleasurable sensation could not be dull and would have to be strong enough to grab the immediate attention of one's entire being. Such a strong pleasurable sensation, then, would certainly encourage people to harm themselves and then remove themselves from harm so they could experience the pleasurable sensation. In such a world, people would have more and more serious injuries, and there would be more death, too.

Murray uses the example of people placing their hands over a fire and then removing them after a long enough time in order to receive the pleasurable sensation. Murray argues that if such a world were to

¹⁴ Ibid., 121.

exist, people would be doing this over and over again, and what would result from this would be a world in which there would exist many more people with burnt, destroyed hands. In short, such a world would most certainly produce more injury and death, proving that such pleasurable sensations would not be a successful replacement for hurtful pain. Thus, in order for animals to survive and flourish, a hurtful pain rather than a pleasurable sensation is needed.

However, some may wonder why it is necessary for there to be a world where there exists the possibility of injury in the first place. That is, if there had never even been a world wherein injury was possible, then a hurtful pain and any sort of suffering would not be needed at all. This objection may at first seem to carry significant weight, but the response to such an objection is quite simple: injury is inevitable in a material, physical world. Injury simply cannot be avoided in a world where there are things having a material, physical makeup. In a physical, material world, *material* objects assume some sort of shape that takes up space. By definition, then, anything with shape or form that takes up space can also physically interact with something else that takes up space with some sort of shape or form. Thus, one could argue, injury is not only possible, but inevitable insofar as the world in which we live must also be material. That is, in order for material sentient beings capable of motion to exist, they must exist in a world that has a physical, material makeup. In short, then, material sentient beings capable of motion will necessarily react with the physical, material world in which they live in ways that will inevitably cause injury. For example, if a man or animal were to trip and fall to the ground, the sentient being with flesh, the human being or animal, would necessarily be injured in some way by the material object, the Earth's ground. For the colliding of a material being with a material object would inevitably cause some sort of harm, given what I have argued about the nature of material objects interacting with each other in a material world.

The next question, then, would be to ask if such a world is necessary for human beings; and the answer would seem to be yes. This is not to argue that God's creation altogether was necessary, but it is to argue that, if God desired to create and indeed did, he could not have created the world in any other way than a material way. The reason this is true is because, whereas a nonmaterial world does not undergo change and time, a material world can and necessarily does; and one could argue that change and time are necessary for free will.

That is, if, upon creating, God also desired to create human beings with free will, then certain things are absolutely necessary for human beings in order to ensure that our will is truly free. Aside from some other things that are also necessary to ensure that our will is truly free, it seems evident that time and change are two things most certainly required.

This is true because, in order to ensure our free will, God must keep some sort of distance from human beings and have some level of divine hiddenness. Therefore, he must place human beings in a world that serves as a sort of “testing stage” for them whereby they can freely choose between good and evil. Such “choosing,” then, is only possible in a world where there exists time and change. For human beings cannot choose in an eternal setting where time does not exist; such a thing would not be possible, given the nature of eternal, separable substances. Furthermore, what must also be possible is an inevitable death, so that those who choose God could eventually be with him. God could not have created a world where he would simply and miraculously “take” those who have definitively chosen him, because this, too, would interfere with our having a totally free will. Therefore, with all this considered, a material, physical world where injury is inevitable must exist, as there could be no alternative.

But even despite the existence of injury, one may still ask why predators in the natural world must exist. That is, why must there be a predator–prey relationship wherein pain and suffering are arguably most abundant? Crocodiles eating warthogs, lions eating gazelles, bacteria and parasites eating away and killing live animals—why must all this be necessary?

I would reply that the predator–prey relationship is needed for two reasons. First, it gives a sufficient reason for adaptation to occur within the evolutionary process to ultimately bring about the existence of human beings. And second, it prevents overpopulation. The evolutionary process would not exist and there would not be the ultimate existence of human beings if it were not for the existence of adaptation, which drove species to evolve from one species to another for the ultimate result of the existence of human beings. In order for greater, more complex species to come into existence, adaptation was a necessary requirement. Without simpler species having a sufficient reason for adapting and being able to create more-complex species, complex species, including human beings, could not have come into existence. Therefore, because the predator–prey relationship offers a sufficient reason for adaptation to occur in order to bring about the

existence of many more-complex species necessary for the ultimate existence of human beings, the predator–prey relationship is a necessary thing for the natural world.

Of course, one could argue that the evolutionary process itself was unnecessary, and that God could have created human beings and all the animals all at once. But in a world that is governed by laws, set in place by God, time and change must exist, whereby a gradual unfolding of God’s ultimate plan is necessary to ensure that such physical laws are consistent. And instant creation would be contrary to the consistent physical laws that imply change over time. Moreover, even if God were to suspend the physical laws and just instantaneously create human beings and all other animals at one point in time, so as to prevent all the pain and suffering within the evolutionary process, God would have run into the problem of contravening free will. That is, if human beings were able to easily and readily discover through empirical means that God had created them, the world, and all other things, say, a mere 4,000 years ago, God’s key goal of creating human beings with totally free wills would be greatly frustrated, as belief in his existence would nearly be a matter of fact.

Regarding overpopulation, one might argue that the predator–prey relationship is not necessary. Perhaps, one could argue, God could have designed the world or natural laws in such a way as to limit the number of offspring each individual creature could have. However, one could argue that God has already done that, considering that animals already cannot reproduce past a certain age. But if one were to suggest simply limiting the number of offspring every individual creature could have to just, say, one or two, it seems that such a world would run into many more problems than the problems we face in the world in which we currently live.

If such a limit were naturally imposed on animals, it would work contrary to the natural workings of evolution. Moreover, such a limit would also slow the overall process of evolution at an incredible rate. The evolutionary process works because each species is radically pursuing its own survival. Such an arbitrary limit would go against this impulse, and in the absence of miraculous intervention, creatures with this limit would be superseded by others that would not have such a limit. But in a world where all creatures would have this limit, whereby creatures could not be superseded by those that did not have this limit, the process of evolution would simply take a much longer time—perhaps many millions of years longer. If it were true, too, that evolution would take much longer, the elongated process would be

unnecessary and would produce much more pain, suffering, and death than what has occurred in our own world with its natural laws.

The existence of a predator–prey relationship in the natural world, therefore, is better than the non-existence of it. And moreover, for the reasons I have argued, the existence of such a relationship is also entirely compatible with the existence of an all-good God.

Yet one may still object and ask: why was it necessary to have such an extensive history of the predator–prey relationship? Why were tens of millions of years of suffering among billions of different species necessary? The first, most obvious response is to say that because we live in a physical, material world, the evolutionary process required much time in order to produce the ultimate changes and results that it did. And as I said earlier, another reason as to why it may have been so long was possibly to ensure the totally free will of human beings through a sort of divine hiddenness.

However, another response to such an objection may lie within the two possible great goods offered to animals that would most certainly outweigh any pain and suffering any animal might endure while alive in this temporal world. In the rest of this paper, I will focus on these two possible great goods.

The first great good to consider is animal immortality. It has been argued that, because animals are compelled to live in a world of pain, suffering, and corruption, it would be right for them, too, to be compensated by allowing them to share in eternal bliss. Would it not be true that an all-good God would desire nothing less than absolute goodness for his creation? It seems right to conclude that an all-good God would desire nothing but absolute goodness and thus would perhaps compensate animals with eternal life and bliss. Certainly, all the pain and suffering that an animal might have endured while temporally alive would be outweighed by the good of eternal life.

The majority of pre-Reformation Christian thinkers “rejected the notion of animal immortality” on the grounds that animals “lack the sort of souls capable of surviving bodily death.”¹⁵ While it was common to believe that animals possess a sort of soul, it was held that their souls are mere “corporeal principles of organization.”¹⁶ It was and is still argued by some that animals lack a part, such as the intellect, that can persist through bodily death.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Numerous Reformation and post-Reformation thinkers, however, explicitly endorsed the notion of animal immortality. Martin Luther, for example, held that, at the very least, *some* animals are immortal.¹⁷ To the Methodist founder John Wesley, animal immortality is necessary, as in his view there must be some sort of great compensation for animals given that they are subject to a world of great pain, suffering, and corruption. For Wesley and others, the just and appropriate compensation for animals would certainly be their share in eternal beatitude.¹⁸

Aquinas, on the other hand, argues that the soul of an animal simply could not operate without its body. Some take this to mean that animals absolutely cannot share in eternal life and bliss. Others, however, think that animals can do this. Murray argues that Aquinas's account of animals and their souls leaves open the possibility that on the final day, when all human beings are resurrected once again with their bodies, animals will also be brought back to existence for eternity by sharing in the final resurrection.¹⁹

Regardless of what may or may not be true, it is certainly clear that if animal immortality is true, it would be a great good for animals that would outweigh any and all suffering any animal had endured while temporally alive, even if there had been at least tens of millions of years of animal pain and suffering.

The second and final good that may outweigh the apparent evil of animal pain and suffering that I will discuss in this paper concerns the idea that animals may be essential instruments for the existence of human beings in a law-like or “nominally regular” world.²⁰ That is, perhaps it is alone sufficient that the great good that animals serve through all their pain and suffering in the natural world lies in their acting as essential instruments to the existence and continued survival of human beings. For not only are human beings incredibly dependent upon animals in order to survive, but, as I argued earlier, human beings also needed lower animals to endure pain and suffering through the evolutionary process in order for their existence to come about.

Furthermore, even if animals are not necessary for food, they are, at the least, necessary parts for the functioning of the ecosystem. The essential roles animals play in the world—such as spreading pollen, replenishing atmospheric carbon dioxide, and so on—are roles in the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

natural world that are simply necessary for the continued existence and survival of human beings. Without animals, human beings simply could not survive.²¹ With this in mind, then, the great good that animals may serve that could outweigh any pain and suffering that they endure is the existence and continued survival of human beings.

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated, first, that animal pain and suffering is necessary for the survival of animals and that there could not possibly be a metaphysical alternative that could abstract or replace pain in a way that sufficiently provided the necessary goods that true pain provides. And, second, this paper has shown that there may exist two great goods—namely, the good of an eternal life of bliss and the good of allowing for the existence and continued survival of human beings—that would necessarily outweigh any and all pain and suffering that animals endure while alive in this temporal world. This paper has offered, then, a reasonable theodicy wherein an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God could most certainly exist in compatibility with the existence of at least tens of millions of years of brutal and bloody animal pain, suffering, and death in the natural world.

²¹ Ibid., 128.

The Prescription of Antidepressant Medication in the United States

Katelyn Comeau

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, about one in every six adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in the United States. Additionally, over 4% of American adults have suffered specifically from a major depressive episode, 64% of which reported severe impairment.¹ Major depressive disorder (MDD) is one of the more commonly diagnosed mental health concerns in the United States, and just one of the diseases psychiatrists aim to treat through the prescription of antidepressant medications. While psychiatry does its best to work within the broad diagnosis of depression to tailor treatments for specific patient needs, it has recently been noted that prescriptions to treat depression are also on the rise. Some researchers attribute this observation to prescription rates rising to meet the rising diagnoses of depression and related mental health disorders, although this topic is highly debated.

Generally, major depressive disorder is a mental health disease defined by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest, and decrease in pleasure, leading to many intrusive physical and emotional symptoms. Patients who have MDD report frequent angry or sad outbursts, insomnia, anhedonia, anxiety, agitation, feelings of worthlessness, and unexplained physical problems, among other symptoms.² The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the mainstay of the practices of psychology and psychiatry, as it works to centrally classify the many diagnoses of mental health disorders and recommend treatment options.³ As Paris mentions, the manual has evolved over decades to expand the category of depression by including depressive symptoms with a broader range

¹ "Statistics," NIH: National Institute of Mental Health website, last modified 2018, nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics.html.

² *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), American Psychiatric Association, psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm.

³ Mayo Clinic Staff, "Depression (Major Depressive Disorder)," Mayo Clinic Medicine, mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007.

of severity.⁴ The currently accepted explanation of biological depressive onset, which excludes depression stemming from life tragedies and other non-biological factors, is the monoamine and catecholamine theory of depression. This theory holds that depressive symptoms arise from the decreased presence of certain neurotransmitter chemicals in neurons.⁵ These chemicals are serotonin, which is the chemical that stimulates feelings of happiness in the brain, and norepinephrine, which is a chemical that elevates awareness and the ability to interact with the environment. One can see that the lack of these chemicals in the brain would decrease feelings of happiness and the desire to interact with the outside world, two of the main symptoms that accompany depressive symptoms and major depressive disorders. To strengthen this theory, there are other mental health diseases that may be described by this theory, including manic episodes. People with mania have the opposite situation as depression: increased serotonin and norepinephrine in their neurons induces hyperactivity, abnormally elevated moods, and a sense of grandiosity.

As these symptoms are opposites to those mentioned for depression, the theory seems to hold some truth when it comes to the biological causes of depression. There are certainly many patients who are affected by this kind of hormonal irregularity, but for others targeted by prescriptions combating this imbalance, there may be other factors, such as lifestyle, diet, and recent traumatic events, that cause the onset of depressive symptoms.⁶ The monoamine and catecholamine theory of depression provides a concrete mechanism by which the body fails to take up the necessary chemicals to feel happiness and interest, resulting in depression. The classical kind of medical training many doctors and psychiatrists receive pinpoints this process as the root cause of most MDD cases and seeks to treat patients accordingly, with drugs to counteract this effect.

The practice of physicians prescribing antidepressant drugs is in itself well intended and aims at blocking innate chemical imbalances in the body and restoring feelings of happiness and interest. One class of antidepressant drugs that exploit this pathway, called SSRIs or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, are often prescribed by

⁴ J. Paris, "The Mistreatment of Major Depressive Disorder," *Revue Canadienne de Psychiatrie* 59.3 (2014): 148–51.

⁵ J. H. Meyer, N. Ginovart, A. Boovariwala, et al., "Elevated Monoamine Oxidase A Levels in the Brain: An Explanation for the Monoamine Imbalance of Major Depression," *Archive of General Psychiatry* 63 (November 2006).

⁶ Kelly Brogan and Joe Rogan, "#968 – Kelly Brogan," *The Joe Rogan Experience* podcast.

psychiatrists to patients exhibiting depressive symptoms. The reasons for prescribing these medications are sound, as the intention of physicians who do so is to help patients feel better and escape their depressive symptoms.

This topic is a difficult one to discuss, however, because although the United States has historically taken a liberal approach to the prescription of pain medications and medication in general, this approach has led to a rising dependency on opioid medications and rising levels of addiction to opioids, among other problems. The consequence of rising numbers of people diagnosed with depression is the rising rates of prescriptions, and while over-medicalization in the United States is a growing concern, it is also important to consider the responsibility of the medical providers to decrease the amount of pain their patients must endure. Ethically, it does not seem like a bad thing to do everything possible to prevent human suffering, but physicians must decide where to draw the line when it comes to prescribing just enough medication and not prescribing too liberally.

The CDC has recently released some alarming statistics about the incidence of patients in the United States who are regularly taking antidepressant medications. According to a widely cited epidemiological study, one in every ten Americans is taking medication for some kind of mood or depressive disorder, an increase of four times over the number in the 1980s.⁷ Hutchinson also reports that, even more alarmingly, a majority of these patients have never seen a psychiatrist for an evaluation or second opinion. According to Dr. Gary Small, “the reality is that there are not enough mental health care providers around to treat all who need it,” and part of the work of psychiatrists such as him is to teach primary care doctors how to effectively and accurately diagnose and treat depression in their patients.⁸ While the work of the psychiatrist and doctor alike is to increase the flourishing, and thereby the mood, of their patients, the seemingly excessive prescription rate seems to violate the idea that every patient deserves a thorough evaluation of their own individual circumstances.

The overprescription of antidepressants is well known in the psychiatric community. According to Paris, psychiatry recognizes that depression can be a syndrome as well as a symptom, but the

⁷ Courtney Hutchinson, “One in 10 Americans Use Antidepressants, Most Don’t See a Therapist,” *ABC News: AMBS News Medical Unit*, Oct. 19, 2011, abcnews.go.com/Health/Wellness/10-americans-antidepressants-therapist/story?id=14763251.

⁸ *Ibid.*

boundaries between the two are not well distinguished, leading to the proactive and liberal prescription of antidepressant medications in many cases that range greatly in severity.⁹ Hutchinson describes how this happens in her article, in which she elaborates on the rising incidence of primary care physicians prescribing antidepressant drugs and discusses the shortcomings of that route of obtaining the prescription. First, there is a concern that increased levels of prescription through primary care avenues comes at the cost of a lack of additional psychiatric care.¹⁰ Additionally, the prescriptions may not be in the right amounts, and that is a problem that cannot be addressed if the patients do not consult a psychiatrist separately.¹¹ There are certainly many patients who are affected by a hormonal imbalance or biologically based form of depression, but for others who are taking antidepressant drugs when the root cause of their condition lies in other factors such as lifestyle, diet, and recent traumatic events, the onset of depressive symptoms may not necessarily warrant medical intervention.¹² In this case, there is much uncertainty in discerning when antidepressants should and should not be prescribed in each individual case, as well as how long of an evaluation period should be conducted to plan the best method of care.

A course at Stanford University, a leading institution in the fields of medicine and bioscience, discusses the four main principles of medical ethics as part of its medical teachings.¹³ These tenets are autonomy, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence. Patient autonomy dictates that patients should be able to decide for themselves what is right and not be influenced too heavily to accept a certain kind of treatment. Justice implies that all patients be evaluated and treated equally. Beneficence requires that doctors must act only with the good of their patient in mind. Last, non-maleficence holds that harming the patient must, if at all possible, be avoided in treatment and evaluation. These tenets have been the basis of medicine for hundreds of years, and McCormick, a professor at the University of Washington School of Medicine, even cites the famous

⁹ Paris, "Mistreatment of Major Depressive Disorder."

¹⁰ Hutchinson, "One in 10 Americans Use Antidepressants."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Brogan and Rogan, "#968 – Kelly Brogan."

¹³ "What are the Basic Principles of Medical Ethics?" website for Stanford in Washington Seminar and Tutorial: "How Decisions are Made about Health Research and Health Policy," web.stanford.edu/class/siw198q/websites/reprotech/New%20Ways%20of%20Making%20Babies/EthicVoc.htm.

philosopher and physician Hippocrates in advising physicians to “help and do no harm.”¹⁴

The topic of human suffering and its treatments is hard to approach, because although doctors should always strive for beneficence in their treatment, jumping the gun and prescribing antidepressant medications to patients in small family practice settings and in short time windows could violate the ethical principle of non-maleficence. In the opening remarks of her article, Hutchinson describes a case where a middle-aged female went into her primary care office for a regular check-up and left with a prescription for an antidepressant, describing only symptoms of sleep issues and small mood variations.¹⁵ In this case, the primary care doctor may have violated the patient’s autonomy, suggesting anti-depressant medications when there may have been alternative options or a need to look into the patient’s situation a little longer.

A possible explanation for this misstep is examined in depth by Brendan Smith of the American Psychological Association, who in an article from 2012 describes the use of monetary incentives to increase prescription rates of antidepressants. Prescription drug companies increased their spending on marketing from 1996 to 2005 by three times, targeting doctors with monetary incentives.¹⁶ It is clear that physicians who accept incentives to increase drug prescriptions directly violate patient autonomy and non-maleficence. Despite this, Smith cites Dr. Daniel Carlat’s assessment that “[t]here is a huge financial incentive for psychiatrists to prescribe instead of doing psychotherapy” as well as this sobering estimation by Carlat: “You can make two, three, four times as much money being a prescriber than a therapist.”¹⁷ He goes on to describe how the consequence of this misstep is the habituation of prescription and dishabituation of psychotherapy.

According to Aquinas’s teachings, such “vicious customs and corrupt habits”¹⁸ will lead to the removal of natural law from the physician’s heart and promote the continued harmful practice that

¹⁴ Thomas McCormick, “Principles of Bioethics,” Ethics Medicine: University of Washington School of Medicine, depts.washington.edu/bioethx/tools/princpl.html.

¹⁵ Hutchinson, “One in 10 Americans Use Antidepressants.”

¹⁶ Brendan L. Smith, “Inappropriate Prescribing: Research Shows That All Too Often, Americans Are Taking Medications That May Not Work or May Be Inappropriate for Their Mental Health Problems,” *Monitor on Psychology* 43,6 (June 2012), apa.org/monitor/2012/06/prescribing.aspx.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benzinger Brothers, 1947), I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

disregards patient rights, a prognosis supported by the remarks of Dr. Carlat. Additionally, there is evidence in Kant's teachings that the root of the wrongdoing of these kinds of doctors lies in his Formula for Humanity, which holds that people, as rational beings, should never be used simply as means to an end but should always be treated as ends in themselves.¹⁹ With this in mind, doctors who operate in this way use patients only as a means to obtain more wealth, disregarding the fact that patients should be treated with dignity and with the intention of improving their lives.

It is widely accepted that the correct treatment for depression should encompass both medication and psychotherapies in amounts that vary from patient to patient, but such comprehensive treatment is not provided to patients who receive medications from physicians like these. In addition to this problem, many of the people who are prescribed these medications under these pretenses will not benefit from them.²⁰ That is a hard pill to swallow, especially when one considers some of the serious side effects medications can induce in patients. For these reasons, it is not ethically sound to prescribe antidepressant medications so frivolously, as it is not only incredibly risky for the patients but also morally damaging to the doctors who partake in the temptations of higher pay.

With the increasing rates of prescription of antidepressants in the United States, often for unethical reasons, it is important to mention an ethical method of evaluation and treatment of depressive symptoms. In a recent interview, Dr. Kelly Brogan, a psychiatrist and holistic women's health advocate, discusses her previous practice as a liberally prescribing psychiatrist. Brogan says that for many psychiatrists, one short appointment is enough to determine that a patient needs a drug prescription, adding that most patients who schedule appointments with psychiatrists and exhibit depressive symptoms walk away with a prescription after just one appointment.²¹ Although this scenario is an improvement over the previously mentioned instances of detrimental primary care prescriptions, Dr. Brogan highlights that ethical missteps arise even in true psychiatric practice, emphasizing that the problem does not just lie with primary care doctors. Dr. Brogan now devotes her time to holistic medicine, prescribing new diets, exercise regimens, and alternative treatments

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

²⁰ Smith, "Inappropriate Prescribing."

²¹ Brogan and Rogan, "#968 – Kelly Brogan."

which have reduced and even eliminated depressive symptoms in a majority of cases. She has published a handful of studies describing patients who had intense psychotic and depressive disorders before following her lifestyle change recommendations and who subsequently experienced a complete remission of symptoms. Although this cannot be the case for all patients experiencing depression, it serves as a model for other ways of investigating the possibilities of mitigating depressive symptoms without liberal drug prescription. In many cases, it may still hold true that medication should be part of the correct treatment path, but when medication is combined with therapies and lifestyle modifications, depressive symptoms can be treated more effectively and ethically.

Another important facet in this topic is how pharmaceutical companies target patients as well as physicians in drug advertising. By 2005, there had been an increase in direct-to-consumer advertising of five times in comparison to 1996.²² As the United States is one of only a handful of countries that allow for direct advertising from pharmaceutical companies to the public, there is an effect of increased public awareness and requesting of these drugs. Smith cites evidence that those patients exposed to antidepressant advertising were 17 times more likely to receive drugs than those who did not request them. In these cases, is the doctor to respect patient autonomy and reward the patient with the requested drug prescription, or should the doctor conclude that the risks outweigh the benefits and deny the prescription? In cases like these, where a patient may come in thinking he or she wants a drug and refuse to be happy without a prescription, doctors would in fact be honoring patient autonomy if they wrote the prescription.

Alternatively, according to some viewpoints, the liberal prescription of antidepressants may not be such a bad thing. Antidepressants do come with risks, but as Dr. Varma from New York University explains, it is difficult to persuade patients to begin taking any medicine, and the simple fact that one in every ten Americans now takes these drugs means that more people are seeking the help they need and reducing the stigma around taking antidepressants.²³ This opposing viewpoint highlights the fact that diagnoses of depression are on the rise and presupposes that the promotion of medical treatment and the increased prescription of antidepressant drugs are

²² Smith, "Inappropriate Prescribing."

²³ Hutchinson, "One in 10 Americans Use Antidepressants."

beneficial in attempting to reach the increasing number of patients diagnosed with depressive symptoms by informing them directly of available treatments. If this is truly the case, the liberal prescription of antidepressants would be in accordance with patient autonomy, beneficence, justice, and non-maleficence. If this turns out to be true, perhaps in one hundred years medical professionals will look back at our medical practice today disappointedly, as we do now with cranial lobotomies, and wonder why we did not begin liberally prescribing antidepressants sooner.

Although this belief may be held strongly by some, and it certainly may be true that the reason for the increasing numbers of diagnosed depressed individuals is better methods of evaluation, it is not a viable way to understand the reasons for the increase in prescriptions. The psychiatric overprescription of SSRIs for depressive symptoms is a clear problem of antidepressant prescription, a problem that has been investigated in a multitude of studies. The preceding argument seeks to ignore the increased use of direct-to-public advertisement strategies by pharmaceutical companies, as well as monetary incentives to physicians, the high prescription rates in primary care facilities, and the decreasing amount of time physicians spend in evaluating patients, among other factors. Although antidepressants certainly have a place in modern mental health treatment and are greatly beneficial to part of the population, they can be unnecessary or even harmful to some parts of the population, namely, those whose depressive symptoms derive from causes other than biological imbalance. The harmful side effects of the liberal prescription of antidepressants cannot be ignored, and the practice of liberal and corrupt antidepressant prescription is an aspect of our healthcare system that needs to be fixed, not praised.

Sapiential Theology in the Visions of St. Hildegard of Bingen

Heather Stevenson

While more attention is given to her musical and medical endeavors and the fact of her being a woman and having prophetic-style visions, Hildegard of Bingen also speaks a good deal about wisdom. In fact, Wisdom, Words of Wisdom, and the Book of Wisdom are mentioned and/or referenced at least seven times in the *Scivias*, the record of her visions. Of particular note is wisdom's appearance as a woman, God's female co-worker. Moreover, the study of, or focus on, the wisdom of God (*sapientia*) is often referred to as sapiential theology, and while sapiential theology has no easy definition due to the many and varied ways it has been expressed throughout the centuries, Hildegard's version does display some distinct characteristics. Sapiential theology is, especially in the visions and works of Hildegard of Bingen, a union between God and His creation, between the infinite wisdom—or *sapientia*—of the Creator and the finite creature.

Let us first take a look at one of the most compelling appearances of wisdom in Hildegard's visions. In the *Scivias* Hildegard describes wisdom as “the great ornament of God and the broad stairway of all the other virtues that live in Him, joined to Him in sweet embrace in a dance of ardent love. And she is looking out at the people in the world; for she protects and guides the people who want to follow her, and keeps with great love those who are true to her.”¹ This description comes from Hildegard's ninth vision and is preceded by a description of the Church and of God's gift of the Holy Spirit to her in order to protect the beauty of his “new Bride.”² These gifts are, as Hildegard says, seven in number, and she sees them symbolized by “seven white marble pillars” which are “supporting a round dome of iron,” and “on top of this dome you see a very beautiful figure standing.”³ The round

¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), book 3: vision 9: verse 25.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

dome represents virtue, and the beautiful figure is wisdom. Hildegard then says that the reason the figure stands on top of the dome is because “this virtue was in the Most High Father before all creatures, giving counsel in the formation of all the creatures made in heaven and earth.”⁴ In other words, wisdom is the first and most important of all the virtues. Furthermore, Hildegard says that this figure represents God’s wisdom (*sapientia*) in particular, which is the prime source of all of creation, “for through her all things are created and ruled by God.”⁵ A legitimate question then arises: What does this all mean? Well, for this writer it lays a sort of foundation for God’s infinite wisdom (*sapientia*) being united to his finite creation.

This is seen in the way *sapientia* is unique among medieval allegorical figures because it “is the only personification that remained equally compelling, and indeed ubiquitous throughout the Middle Ages, in both a masculine and a feminine guise.”⁶ This is further seen in the “tension between the procedures of personification allegory, in which the persona’s traits must be consistent with its grammatical gender, and the special demands of Christian theology, in which Wisdom—a feminine persona in the Old Testament—was very early identified with the masculine Christ (cf. I Cor. 1:24).”⁷ This all sounds quite interesting, but what does it mean? The first quote is basically saying that the Latin word for wisdom and its common depiction throughout the Middle Ages was the only concept ever personified as both a man and a woman consistently and compellingly. The second quote is commenting on how the procedure for taking a word and personifying it consists of making sure that the subsequent persona’s traits are coherent with the word’s grammatical gender. In other words, if the word is feminine then the person depicting it should be a woman, and, likewise, if the word is masculine, the person depicting it should be a man. Further, this quote says that there exists a tension between the fact that wisdom is personified by a female figure in the Old Testament and by Christ—a male figure—in the New Testament. Next, we see that, as Newman says in *Sister of Wisdom*, “It was in the Twelfth Century that . . . theological reflection on Christ, devotion to the Mother of God, classicizing humanism, and liturgical and artistic innovation . . . fully converged,” with Hildegard’s “sapiential visions”

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard’s Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 43.

⁷ Ibid.

witnessing to this fact.”⁸ Thus, while it seems confusing that wisdom was depicted by male and female figures, it actually begins to make sense when one looks at the context. For example, Christians were digging deeper into the meaning of both Christ’s and His mother’s roles within the faith. At the same time, they were taking new steps in art and liturgical practices, in which they were often moving away from a fear of employing human figures to represent divine concepts. Then, in the midst of all this innovation, we have Hildegard and her visions of what wisdom looks like.

Let us now take a look at Hildegard’s eighth vision from book three, in which she quotes Isaiah 11:1–3. In this passage, Isaiah is foretelling the coming of “a branch out of the root of Jesse” and this branch having “the Spirit of the Lord” resting upon him. Significantly, Isaiah further tells us in this same passage that this branch will have “the spirit of wisdom” and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit filling him. Hildegard responds in order to expound the meaning of this passage by saying, “The Virgin Mary came forth from the troubles of earthly oppression into the sweetness of moral life, as a person might come forth from a house in which he was imprisoned, not rising above the roof but walking in the designated path.”⁹ By this Hildegard is commenting on Mary’s being without sin. Next, Hildegard explains that Isaiah said a *branch* would sprout because branches are not thorny or knotted but straight, and this is why the branch came “from the root of Jesse, who was the foundation of the royal race from which the stainless mother had her origin.”¹⁰ This is to say that Jesse’s family was pure and not corrupted by the stains of sin. “And so from the root of that branch arose the sweet fragrance of the Virgin’s fecundity; and when it has so arisen, the Holy Spirit inundated it so that the tender flower was born from her.”¹¹ Thus, Mary’s purity is fitting to the family from which she came, and her purity gives way to this holy flower. This holy flower is born from her because she was filled with and covered by God’s spirit. According to this vision, then, Mary is the branch, and the child born from her is a spotless flower. Next, Hildegard says, “Like a flower born in a field though its seed was not sown there, the Bread of Heaven arose in her without originating in a mingling with a man and without any human burden; it was born in the sweetness of divinity, untouched by unworthy sin, without the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹ *Scivias*, verse 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

knowledge and utterly without the influence of the devious serpent.”¹² This is a reference to Jesus, the Bread of Heaven who is the flower who “deceived the serpent” and “ascended on high and lifted up with Him the sinful human race.”¹³ Finally, Hildegard says, “And because this Flower was the Son of God, the Spirit of Lord rested upon Him.”¹⁴

This also ties in nicely with what Hildegard says in her ninth vision in book three on the appearance of wisdom, “For from the beginning of the world, when Wisdom first openly displayed her workings, she extended in a straight line to the end of time. She is adorned with the holy and just commandments, which are green like the first sprouts of the patriarchs and prophets who sighed in their tribulations for the Incarnation of the Son of God, and white like the virginity of Mary.”¹⁵ Wisdom is closely linked with that straightness of the branch from Jesse’s root, and it is wisdom who inspired the patriarchs and prophets to long for the coming of God’s Son. Further, it is wisdom who caused Mary’s pureness. How can we say wisdom did all these things? Because wisdom is closely connected to the Word of God. In fact, wisdom is the Word of God, according to Hildegard, who says: “for when God created all things by His Word, great wisdom appeared, for it was so diffused in the Word that He was Wisdom.”¹⁶ Since God created all things through His Word, that means His Word created the branch—who is Mary—and Mary’s purity, as well as the inspiration that flooded the minds and heart of the patriarchs and prophets. Following this, Hildegard says that the Word was “invisible when He was not yet incarnate, but when He was incarnate, He became visible; the Word, Who was in the heart of the Father before all creatures, by Whom all things were made and without Whom nothing was made . . . shone forth within time as a Flower, visible as a human being and offering good understanding to all humans by His words.”¹⁷ She then asks what we are to do with this, responding, “Understanding and wisdom should go together; for Man was created by God with wisdom.”¹⁸ From all this, we can see that wisdom is constantly present in every action of God—is the very means by which He operates—and that it is God’s intent that wisdom be united to human beings.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., vision 9: verse 25.

¹⁶ Ibid. vision 8: verse 15.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

God's intent for union with human beings is also a major theme for Hildegard and can be seen throughout her narration of her visions. As Dinah Wouters says, "the way in which Hildegard's visions situate themselves on the crossroads of the visionary and didactic traditions tells us much about how Hildegard conceives of her project and its goals. The didactic situation that is established is one of direct interaction between God and human."¹⁹ This quote refers to Hildegard's teaching style as being one that seeks to bring the human being into direct contact and interaction with God, thus creating a platform for union between the two. This union happens in several ways—one of them having to do with who is speaking to whom in Hildegard's vision. Wouters explains it in this way: "While Hildegard is present in her narrative mainly as a narratee and, in that capacity, as a mediator for the actual audience, God's is the active voice exercising his control in every level of the narrative by explaining, warning and judging."²⁰ This means that it is Hildegard speaking but it is God's words and voice coming through her; she is an instrument and mediator. Additionally, Wouters explains that, within Hildegard's visions, God "behaves within his narrative as he behaves within the world: it is his creation, in which he is automatically present because it is contained by him, which is filled with his necessary presence, but which he views from a superior height."²¹ Here, Wouters means that God is both above and inside of his creation, and that God's being superior to his creation does not mean that he cannot move around within it. This is to say that God can both stand outside of his creation as an observer and place himself within it as one of its characters. This being the case, Wouters says, "enables the bridging of narrative levels by the narrator God, who operates on all levels, in the first as well as the third person."²² In other words, God is capable of traversing the gap between the one who initiates, or sets things into motion, and the one who is then moved. Wouters then also expounds this further by saying, "the narrator is by virtue of his nature part of the universe he narrates, and can therefore intervene in his own narration."²³

Moreover, as stated above, Hildegard is the instrument, and so it is not just her to whom God is speaking. Wouters puts it as follows:

¹⁹ Dinah Wouters, "Envisioning Didactics: Didactic Strategies in the Visionary Trilogy of Hildegard of Bingen," *Sacris Erudiri* 54 (2015): 238.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 246–7.

²² *Ibid.*, 247.

²³ *Ibid.*

“God makes no secret of the fact that he is, through Hildegard, in fact directly addressing all people, and while he begins by addressing Hildegard personally and returns to her frequently by referring to her vision, he addresses a far larger and far more diverse audience in between.”²⁴ That audience is anyone and everyone who reads Hildegard’s visions. To take this a step further, Wouters says, “The reader as an addressee can be located outside or inside the text.”²⁵ This means that anyone and everyone who reads Hildegard’s visions can be both someone on the outside to whom God is speaking and someone actually within the vision, taking part in it. To take things a step even farther, Wouters explains that the readers of Hildegard’s visions are the primary addressees and that they are expected to do more than just listen—in her own words: “In Hildegard’s visions . . . the narrator ignores the boundaries of the text and considers himself to be in the same reality as the readers, and at the same time, the readers find themselves represented in the text. The narrator thus ignores the different narrative levels and acts as if he is able to communicate directly with the audience.”²⁶ This is a fascinating concept, and one that is not present in just any story. Within Hildegard’s visions, the reader is compelled and almost commanded to participate in what he or she is reading. Therefore, God is not only speaking to Hildegard at the time of the vision, but he is also speaking to anyone and everyone who picks up a text of her visions and begins reading. Finally, in this way, God is directly communicating with the reader, while ignoring all boundaries of space and time. This sort of communication then serves as an ample opportunity for God to make himself present to and connect himself with a wide range of people.

The question then can arise as to what the purpose of this communication and connection is. According to Wouters’s study of Hildegard’s visions, the reader is encouraged to better him or herself; as Wouters says, “One thing that becomes clear in reading Hildegard is that authority, charisma and a prophetic stance do not have to be incompatible with systematic learning and self-improvement.”²⁷ This means that no matter who the reader is or what level of authority, power, or skill he or she possesses, there is still room for growth. Furthermore, God is calling these people to seek this growth. So, if one decides to read Hildegard’s visions, one should be prepared to be

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 248.

²⁷ Ibid., 259.

pushed and challenged to develop a closer relationship with God and become a better person. As Wouters puts it, “The major advantage is that God and reader can be brought into contact.”²⁸ This means that as the reader meets with God, it is God himself who can teach the reader and reveal to him or her what can and should be done in his or her life. Thus, reading Hildegard’s visions may not make one as pure and sinless as Mary or God himself, but it can at least help to bridge the gap that sin creates between God and the sinner.

Helen J. John sees this mission contained within Hildegard’s work as well. She says, “As one trained in the context of ‘Christian philosophy’ . . . I find in Hildegard—as in Augustine, Abelard, or Aquinas—a religious thinker who draws on both cultural heritage and personal experience in her search for wisdom.”²⁹ On the same page of her essay, John talks about Hildegard’s themes, which include “the verdant freshness pervading creation; the human microcosm as mirror image and speaking voice of the universe; the personified virtues embodying divine grace and human achievement; Wisdom and Love as emblems of the divine, immanent in human beings and in all created nature.” All of these “rely for their meaning and relevance to us on the ways in which they speak to our own experience and insight.”³⁰ Both of these quotes highlight Hildegard’s teaching style and mission of relating directly to human beings as human beings, with the goal of bringing everything that is human into contact and union with everything that is divine. John also refers to how God reaches down to connect with his creation in Hildegard’s work and says, “This overarching design is not unique to Hildegard. It is in essence the Pseudo-Dionysian theme of creation’s coming forth from God and returning to God—the design that Aquinas chose to structure his *Summa Theologiae*.”³¹ This links up nicely with what John says about Hildegard combining her time period and the Church traditions with her own experiences; she was not the first nor the only one to do this, and she will not be the last. Interestingly, the way John chooses to describe Hildegard’s *Scivias* is as “a kind of audiovisual *Summa Theologiae*, encompassing the whole reality: God, created nature, the incarnation of God’s Word, redemption, and salvation history.”³² This

²⁸ Ibid., 262.

²⁹ Helen J. John, “Hildegard of Bingen: A New Twelfth-century Woman Philosopher?” *Hypatia* 7 (1992): 122.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 116.

³² Ibid., 117.

writer finds this description almost comical because of how it, at first, seems ridiculous, but then upon reflection, one can see that it is quite accurate. Hildegard's visions are almost like a movie that the reader can place him- or herself into and not only relate to one of the characters but feel as though he or she *is* one of the characters. This writer also believes that this concept is not too far-fetched of an idea. In fact, considering what has been said above, it may actually be God's intent that we do, in our modern world, view Hildegard's visions in this way.

Thus, we have come to an area where my own thoughts, as the author and one of the characters within this drama of God's mission of uniting himself to his creation, are worthy of exploration. I believe, within salvation history, there is a constant play between the Holy Spirit and Mary, between divinity and a female figure. This is seen in the Douay-Rheims Old Testament translation of Ecclesiasticus 24:24–26, which says, "I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue." What I see here is a reference to Mary as the mother and a reference to the Holy Spirit in His gifts of fear, knowledge, and holy hope. I can also see a reference to Christ as "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), where wisdom is saying that within "her" is the grace of the way and the truth and hope of life. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit united to Mary that Christ became incarnate and then spoke in the Gospel of John, claiming himself to be the way, truth, and life. Mary is the branch from the root of Jesse, and Jesus is the beautiful and glorious flower the blossomed from the straight and spotless branch. Therefore, I think sapiential theology finds its climax in Mary. She is that place where divine power and wisdom met with humanity, femininity, and gentleness—where the Creator condescended to be united with His creation. Thus, from that climax, we have God Incarnate—divinity entirely bound up with humanity. This, I believe, speaks to the way we can "conceive" God within us when we are free of any hindrance and fully allow Him to do his work. When we do what Hildegard's visions compel us to do and allow ourselves to be moved by and through God to that betterment and advancement that He wants for us, we, like Mary, can also be that place and embodiment of sapiential theology where the divine unites with the human.

To conclude, Hildegard of Bingen is known for her legitimate contributions to the Church through things like music and medicine. However, her contributions with regard to wisdom and sapiential

theology are equally, if not more, essential. While she does not really offer anything new in this area, she does express it in a way that is genuinely coherent with the entire Church tradition, which is not something to scoff at. Thus, Hildegard's expression of sapiential theology is a manifestation of God's plan for humanity's salvation, which is, conclusively, union with Him.

I Am a Terrible Botanist

Nathaniel Bald

So many wise men and women throughout the ages have believed that the world is God's painting and that God is the artist of creation. Go and see how many artists have likened their creative abilities to those of the Almighty at work in the universe. That God is in constant work, editing and shading the different pieces of His creation, is such a beautiful image. Place that in your mind, dear reader. See the master of the universe patiently and delicately placing every soft stroke of the brush on the canvas, laying down coating after coating of mixed and magical colors.

Watch how He steps back and takes a moment to admire His masterpiece before returning to His diligent work. All the colors of the universe mingling together as they form the majestic grandeur of the existence which we occupy. Nothing goes unnoticed by the creator. And all things work in unison to illustrate the great reality of the world and of the master Himself. Now, my dear reader, remove this foolish and silly little image from your head. Do not be so childish as to believe that God is the only one at work in the universe and that there are not others who try to play God in our fallen world. Hear me now and see how God is not a painter, but rather the wisest botanist tenderly nursing the garden of the universe.

But first, we must come to an understanding of why we relinquish the silly little image of a graceful painter and replace it with the majestic icon of the hardworking, dirt covered, and wise gardener. Where did human life begin and end? Where was man made and where did he fall from grace? Did these events unfold on a painting's canvas? No, it was in the garden of Eden that our first parents entered this world. It was in the garden that God, with of a mixture of dust and spit, molded a man and breathed into his nostrils to give him life and color. It was in the garden in which the serpent coiled himself around the man's wife and tempted her to sin. This is where humanity was offered the greatest life in God, and where man rejected the love of God for the love of himself. But all was not lost, as it was in the garden that Christ began the passion which would redeem the entire world. Christ fell to

His knees in the garden to pray that He might not suffer the cup which the father placed before Him. Unlike Adam, Jesus did not refuse the cup. Rather, out of love for the father and for the human race, He drank every last drop and made it dry. Whereas sin was brought into the world by Adam in the garden, Jesus bore the sins of the world on His shoulders and carried them out of the garden to die with Him on the cross of Calvary. Christ defeated the temptation of the garden when Adam could not. And when Christ rose from the dead, Mary of Magdala found Him dressed as a gardener, tending the flowers that surrounded His very own tomb. This is where humanity must look for the analogy of the creator. For sin was created and then defeated in a garden; a garden which reflects our very own image in the universe.

Yet how does the image of the garden assist man in understanding God's relationship with His creation? A wise man once told me that a good botanist debuds his flowers. By this, he meant that the patient gardener snaps the buds of the flowers before they can bloom. How outrageous! Why would one purposefully pervert such a beautiful and wonderful plant, preventing it from its flourishing future? Does the thoughtless botanist not know that he is actively destroying the creation that God has set before him to care for and tend? So it appears to the unwise and uneducated in the field of botany.

But the wise man knows that this seemingly atrocious act is one of fatherly love. For properly debudding the poor plant actually promotes growth. If debudded correctly, the plant is temporarily pained only to be pushed and encouraged to become something more beautiful. More buds sprout from the old, and the plant thus produces more flowers, multiplying its exquisite color and life. Yet all of this requires the skill and wisdom of a venerated botanist.

Is this not what God does to us? Does God paint us on a blank canvas, or does He debud us so that we may grow through our own struggle and become more beautiful reflections of His image? To me, He is the wisest botanist who tends the garden of existence, which flourishes as He nurtures His creation and weeds out the unclean of the universe.

Nonetheless, throughout our lives we often try to place ourselves in the position of God by becoming botanists for others. Now it must be said that, unlike Christ, I am a terrible botanist. Although I do not lack the knowledge of a patient gardener, I am unable to put this wisdom into practice. This is not only true for the few plants which are unfortunate enough to suffer at my inability to tend to them properly, but also in my relationships with others. Too often do I

debud and forget to water. And sometimes I water too much, without giving the plant enough time to absorb the much needed grace in a time of plenty. As a result, my plants are left browned and dying due to my failure. My physical garden and my spiritual garden do not always flourish, as I often overstep my place and seek to fill the role of God Himself. I should know better. I should know that my own wisdom is not nearly sufficient to judge things which only God should judge. Instead, I should pray that my words and actions be rightly guided by Him who is the source and fountain of all wisdom in the universe.

This lesson is echoed in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, one of the most influential books that I have ever read. This thick work of French literature is a trove of wisdom, which I readily plundered just as the Count looted his physical treasure in the story. I do not wish to give too much away, but to summarize, the Count is locked away for many years without word or knowledge of the outside world. When he escapes, he finds riches beyond his imagination which make him potentially the most influential man in Europe. Likewise, he believes that this immense wealth is his compensation for his years of unjust suffering, and he takes it upon himself to reward the just and to chastise the wicked. In short, he believes that his wealth and power signal a divine providence to seek revenge upon his wrongdoers and to allocate temporal justice, which God has so clearly ordered him to distribute. Thus, the Count spends years accumulating more wealth and power in order to fulfill his God-given mission.

Nonetheless, as he pretends to be the hand of God, dispensing rewards to the good and delivering punishment to the wicked, he quickly finds that his judgment is too severe. After terrorizing a man to insanity and driving another to suicide, the Count realizes that, even after years of patient contemplation, his intricate and poetic revenge has overstepped the divine jurisdiction of God's temporal and eternal judgement. This fact strikes the Count's conscience so much that he allows his most loathed enemy to flee with minimal temporal punishment so that the scoundrel might one day receive his sentence in the afterlife under the perfect judgment of the true judge, God. In other words, the Count realizes that he is not God and that he, like me, is a terrible botanist. Often did the Count debud too much and water too little. Sometimes he debudded the wrong plants, and other times he watered the flowers too much. In essence, he came to the realization that his wisdom was not sufficient to judge the universe.

Now consider a modern adaptation of a similar lesson from the new *Avengers: Infinity War*. Here, Thanos takes his immense power as a sign that fate and destiny have chosen him to rid the universe of the overabundant population which squanders the finite resources of the galaxy. His willingness to destroy and murder in the name of mercy and progress is not only terrifying but goes against the firmly rooted societal condemnation of genocide. Even though the primary theme of the movie is the value of one life weighed against the lives of many, it is easy to see how Thanos sees himself as a gardener. He too debuds the various planets which he bleeds in order that they may grow. Additionally, he de-buds and waters his daughter Gamora at different points throughout her life to make her strong.

Nonetheless, Thanos is not God and often fails to see how his actions produce a false and artificial prosperity at the price of human (or alien) dignity and the lives of trillions of unique individuals. In the wake of Thanos's victory, many viewers are confused as to where the *Marvel Universe* will go next. Essentially, how will the directors and writers correct the infinite wrong that they have conjured by allowing Thanos to win in the end? Perhaps Thanos, like the Count of Monte Cristo, will come to the realization that he has gone too far. It is our only hope that Thanos will be swayed toward regret and guilt at the loss of his own daughter, only to realize that he lacks the divine wisdom to be the active god of all creation. In short, Thanos, too, is a terrible botanist who fails to see how he has debudded too much and watered too little, resulting in a fractured and ravished universe.

And so, we return, my poor, dear reader, to the image of the patient gardener, of the wise botanist. The Count, Thanos, and I have a lot in common in the sense that we fail to know how to debud and water others properly. Botany is both an art and a science that must be taught through example and practice, just as wisdom is taught through stories and experience. The good gardener knows each of his plants and their needs. He knows how much water to pour, how much sunlight to expose, and how often one must de-bud the flowers.

God is our wise and tender gardener, as He knows all things about us. And unlike the product of painting, a plant must ultimately grow on its own. If the plant does not have the will to surpass the struggle of suitable de-budding, then it will wilt and die, not from the fault of the patient gardener, but due to its own failure. Thus does God wisely debud us with exquisite precision. Our human flourishing is not imprinted on us like a coat of paint. It is the result of our free will and ability to best the struggles that God invites us to overcome in order

to bloom and become more beautiful. Just as the wise botanist knows how to promote growth in his plants, so too does the infinitely wise God know how to tend and promote the growth and prosperity of all things encompassed in His expansive universe.

Seeking Truth and Cultivating Knowledge: Curiosity as a Virtue

Cassie Mann

Anatole France, the French journalist and poet, once said, “The greatest virtue of man is perhaps curiosity.”¹ Curiosity inspires us to cultivate knowledge, seek truth, and expand our minds, and it is essential for full human flourishing. This virtue is necessary for satiating our intellectual appetite and perfecting the intellectual portion of our soul. Additionally, in our quest for knowledge through our natural curious tendencies, we are able to discover truths through first-hand experiences and grow in our intellectual capacities. We can develop this virtue by habitually practicing activities in which we pursue knowledge for its own sake, such as extracurricular studies, reading for pleasure, and imaginative play in children. However, although this virtue is essential for humans to lead good lives, American adults are losing their curious tendencies and ability to think creatively, which most likely stems from the education system in our country. In order to live curiously and flourish fully, we must rid ourselves of practices that inhibit our ability to possess this virtue and change social systems that detract from our ability to embody it fully.

Curiosity is defined as a strong desire to know or learn. The curious person wants to know more about a wide variety of topics and is passionate about learning for its own sake, not because it is something that is required.² Although curiosity’s value as a virtue is often overlooked because it has less social value than traits such as generosity or compassion, it does have an impact on self-perfection and is conducive to a well-lived life.³ As a virtue, curiosity can be directed internally through self-reflection and a desire to understand our human nature, as well as externally through intellectual curiosity, in which we desire to learn more about the world around us.⁴ Without

¹ *A-Z Quotes*, www.azquotes.com/quote/101073.

² Elias Baumgarten, “Curiosity as a Moral Virtue,” *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 15,2 (2001): 169–84.

³ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

this virtue, our ambition to learn and purely experience the world around us is diluted. Curiosity allows us to expand our minds through a pure hunger for knowledge, driving us to discover truths in the world through first-hand learning and leading to a rich, well-informed life.

Aristotle defines virtues as characteristics that serve as a mean between an excess and a deficiency.⁵ For the virtue of curiosity, the associated excess is meddlesomeness, while the deficiency takes the form of jadedness. Curiosity enhances human flourishing by helping us to become more conscious about truths and allowing our minds to become well rounded. However, when we act on curiosity in a way that might harm people or violate their right to privacy, we are participating in the excess: meddlesomeness.⁶ Our curiosity about the world should never place us in a situation where we interfere with someone else's life or pry into private details.⁷ On the other side, a deficiency of the virtue takes the form of jadedness. A person who is jaded can be described as being tired, bored, or simply lacking enthusiasm. Jaded people are apathetic toward learning and lack a passion for discovery, either because they think they already know everything about the world, or because they simply lack the desire to learn. In order to live flourishing lives, we must be careful to cultivate curiosity as the mean between meddlesomeness and jadedness.

In addition to defining virtues as means between excesses and deficiencies, Aristotle also defines these traits *in relation to* conditions of the soul.⁸ Curiosity can be defined in relation to the intellectual appetite.⁹ Just as humans possess the physical appetite of hunger, which can only be satiated by food, we also possess an intellectual appetite in regard to knowledge.¹⁰ When it comes to this intellectual appetite, we cannot simply be satisfied by shallow, surface-level knowledge; instead, we are fulfilled when we grasp something new and interesting.¹¹ In regard to the intellect, curiosity is a properly ordered appetite. Curious people seek knowledge for its own sake but know when their intellectual appetite is misguided.¹² Those who have an uncontrolled thirst for knowledge and cannot determine when it

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 29.

⁶ Baumgarten, "Curiosity as a Moral Virtue," 170.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 28–29.

⁹ Kathleen M. Fisher, "Curiouser and Curiouser: The Virtue of Wonder," *Journal of Education*, 182,2 (2000), 34–42.

¹⁰ Douglas V. Henry, "Curiosity and Smart Phones," *Virtual Lives in Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* (Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2011), 11–19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² Baumgarten, "Curiosity as a Moral Virtue," 170.

becomes meddlesome and invades other people's personal privacy fall into the excessive state. On the other hand, those who have no desire for it at all, either because they are uninterested in furthering their knowledge or because they think they know it all, fall into the deficiency. Curiosity is what is necessary for properly ordering the intellectual part of the soul.¹³

We most often think of children as being exemplars of curiosity, since their minds have yet to be inhibited by the stresses of school and work, which consume one's time and detract from our desire for unadulterated learning. However, the adults who hang on to this virtue and incorporate curiosity into their daily lives flourish greatly. Jane Goodall is a wonderful example of someone who embodies curiosity. In an interview, Goodall described her undying curiosity, saying, "I was totally curious as a child. I once took worms to bed, wondering how they walked without legs. I watched intently as they moved about."¹⁴ The curiosity she possessed in childhood continued when she dedicated her life to studying chimpanzee behavior. Although she lacked a traditional scientific education, Goodall's curiosity about the animal and her ability to patiently observe their actions afforded her success in her studies.¹⁵ Goodall did not join this field because she thought it would bring fame or recognition from the scientific community; instead, she studied chimpanzees because of her love for the species and her genuine desire to learn more about these animals. Goodall devoted her life to something she was passionate about and allowed curiosity to drive her career path; because of this, she was ultimately fulfilled in her daily activities, allowing her to flourish. Her quest for knowledge was unadulterated; therefore, Goodall is a perfect embodiment of curiosity.

On the other hand, people who enjoy learning still might not fully possess this virtue. A student who enjoys school might seem to embody curiosity, but the student's actions might demonstrate only a resemblance of this trait. The student might appear to enjoy learning but in fact be learning solely for the sake of getting good grades and advancing in education. When students take up studies for the sake of learning rather than for the sake of their classes, they fully embody the virtue of curiosity. In order to be truly curious, they must study topics outside the classroom, constantly question what they observe, and

¹³ Fisher, "Curiouser and Curiouser," 36.

¹⁴ "Jane Goodall, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and More on Curiosity," *The Wall Street Journal*, 1 Aug. 2016, wsj.com/articles/jane-goodall-joseph-gordon-levitt-and-more-on-curiosity-1470064490.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

seek to learn everything within the limits this virtue sets. Curious people are relentlessly inquisitive and attentive in observing the world and interpreting their experiences.¹⁶ They enjoy hearing other people's stories about their experiences, especially if they differ from their own, and they seek as many diverse approaches to problems as possible.¹⁷ This is a virtue that inspires us to read, experiment, explore, and experience the world in the most genuine, unadulterated way possible.

After describing virtues as means and highlighting the importance of pursuing virtues for their own sake, Aristotle continues his virtue-ethical discourse by discussing his psychology of habituation. He explains that our character is shaped by what we do repeatedly, arguing that to become a virtuous person, we must take up habits that lead to a virtuous lifestyle and rid ourselves of the practices that detract from it.¹⁸ Therefore, we must learn to adopt virtuous practices, and if they become habitual, our character is shaped accordingly.¹⁹ We can look at people like Jane Goodall and model our habits and actions after theirs. According to Aristotle, to apply the virtue of curiosity, we should seek to engage in actions that cultivate our desire for knowledge purely for its own sake.

While many actions and habits, such as extracurricular studies and reading for pleasure, can lead us to this virtue, one that helps foster curiosity early in life is imaginative play. Imaginative play is an essential part of childhood because of its benefits for cognitive development and social skills. Studies demonstrate that children who engage in regular imaginative play have better language skills and understanding of others, increased creative performance, and, most importantly for our discussion of this virtue, enhanced curiosity. During imaginative play, children engage in symbolic activities that are characterized as “fantasy” or “make-believe.” These might include playing house, running a restaurant, or living in an imaginary world, among others. Imaginative play should especially be encouraged in school to emphasize that knowledge can be discovered not just through textbooks and classroom lessons, but also through exploration and playtime.²⁰

A study conducted by Case Western Reserve University examined

¹⁶ Fisher, “Curiouser and Curiouser,” 37.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 28.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Scott Barry Kaufman, “The Need for Pretend Play in Child Development,” *Psychology Today*, 6 Mar. 2012, psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beautiful-minds/201203/the-need-pretend-play-in-child-development.

connections between pretend play, creativity, and emotional regulation. Researchers noticed the natural connection between imaginative play and a child's creative and curious tendencies, especially because it requires an ability to think symbolically and understand different world experiences. They hypothesized that children who were more imaginative would be more creative, better thinkers, and more academically successful. The study surveyed sixty-one participants in kindergarten through fourth grade to see the effects of their pretend play ability on their classroom performance, creativity, and curiosity. The researchers met with participants in two half-hour sessions during the school day to measure cognitive and affective pretend play processes as well as their verbal ability, storytelling, and divergent thinking skills. After completing and analyzing their research, the researchers' main finding was that pretend play did have significant links with creativity, emotional regulation, and a child's curious tendencies. With this psychological study, we can affirm the belief that imaginative play cultivates curiosity, and that when done habitually it can lead children to a life led by this virtue.²¹

Because children use imaginative play to take on new roles, be creative, and fantasize, they are encouraged to look at the world in a way that is different than how they normally experience it. With imaginative play, they grow curious about other lifestyles, experiences, and the natural world. As mentioned earlier, curiosity encourages people to understand the many views people can hold and the value in this diversity of thought. Similarly, imaginative play allows children to work through several different scenarios and understand multiple perspectives. This form of play encourages children to learn more and gain a deeper understanding of their world through this curiosity; it thus encourages children to desire knowledge for its own sake. In addition to curiosity, imaginative play helps children understand concepts such as civility, empathy, and kindness, which help lead to a virtuous life in general. Research has also found that children who participate in regular imaginative play during their early years find greater academic success later in life, so this activity sets them up for a life of enduring curiosity and a constant thirst for knowledge.²²

While imaginative play is encouraged in early childhood education, psychologists argue that education as an institution breaks down curiosity as children grow older. If this is true, the importance

²¹ Jessica Hoffman and Sandra Russ, "Pretend Play, Creativity, and Emotion Regulation in Children," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 6,2 (2012), 175–84.

²² Kaufman, "The Need for Pretend Play."

of education in our society is making it more difficult for children and young adults to hold on to curiosity as they grow older. While our desire to learn about the world around us stems from natural inclinations, the curriculum-driven education system strips us of this desire. In school, educators are required to teach their students from set lesson plans. Schools are not driven to teach what students are interested in learning about; instead, the curriculum is set to improve test scores and standardize learning across the country. The traditional school is breaking down intellectual independence, and because students see learning as a chore that is required of them, they shy away from extracurricular studies that enhance their learning in favor of other pursuits like sports and video games.²³

Our society relies heavily on public education, which affords all children an equal right to education. While schools once paved the way for curiosity, this is no longer the case. Programs such as George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind program and Barack Obama's Common Core were created to standardize education across the country and ensure that all children are taught the same things.²⁴ With these programs, teachers are unable to allow students to explore topics that genuinely interest them because they fall outside the range of their government-mandated curriculum.²⁵ These national curriculum programs are extremely specific about what topics must be covered at each grade level because the underlying goal of these programs is to improve our country's standardized test scores on an international scale.²⁶ Because of this, educators and parents alike suggest that Common Core and similar programs promote rote learning and lead to a decline in curiosity and creativity in children.²⁷ When discussing programs such as No Child Left Behind and Common Core, teachers have complained that they no longer feel like they are teaching, but that they are "simply instructing students to achieve the minimum educational requirements necessary for them to pass a standardized exam."²⁸ Additionally, imaginative play and creative opportunities grow fewer and further between as children grow older because of

²³ Zander Sherman, *The Curiosity of School: Education and the Dark Side of Enlightenment* (Viking, 2012).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John Baer, "The Impact of the Core Knowledge Curriculum on Creativity," *Creativity Research Journal* 15 (2003), 297–300.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Jack Burns, "Study Shows Kids Are Born Creative Geniuses but the Education System Destroys Imagination," *The Free Thought Project*, 4 Feb. 2018, thefreethoughtproject.com/study-children-brilliant-education-dumbs-down/.

strict lesson plans.²⁹ Public schools teach children that play is unimportant; they must focus on high test scores and required subjects in order to be successful.³⁰ After sitting in a classroom for nearly seven hours a day, students are drained from learning. Schools greatly impact curiosity because students feel pressured to focus on completing the work that is required of them, rather than embracing studies on other topics simply to expand their minds.³¹

To understand how Common Core and other government-mandated curricula are affecting student curiosity, Drs. George Land and Beth Jarman studied a group of 1,600 children ages five, ten, and fifteen. With their longitudinal study, the researchers discovered shocking revelations about American children's ability to think creatively over time. Land and Jarman discovered that at age five, ninety-eight percent of children scored at the "genius" level in their problem-solving, creative, and curiosity abilities, yet when they entered school, these numbers dropped drastically. When the researchers returned to these children when they were ten, only thirty percent had the same capacity; at age fifteen, it was only twelve percent. Land attributes this decline to the emphasis Common Core places on getting the "right answer," which causes stress and fear. The brain is basically useless when in fear, but highly active when imagining. Because of this, Land argues that schools need to place less emphasis on getting one answer and encourage students to problem-solve and come up with many different solutions.³²

Within the educational system, a major curiosity limiter is the standardized test. These tests create anxiety, hatred, and hostility toward learning because of the emphasis that is placed on receiving high scores. From third grade on, students are taught that in order to be successful later in life, they must do well on standardized tests. Kyung Hee Kim, a researcher from the School of Education at the College of William and Mary, says of these tests, "Standardized testing forces emphasis on rote learning instead of critical, creative thinking, and diminishes students' natural curiosity and joy for learning in its own right."³³

In recent years, the United States has fallen behind in standardized

²⁹ Sherman, *The Curiosity of School*.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Burns, "Kids Are Born Creative Geniuses."

³³ Daniel Luzer, "What Kills Creativity?" *Pacific Standard*, The Social Justice Foundation, 4 Nov. 2013, psmag.com/education/kills-creativity-standardized-testing-children-69137.

test scores compared to competitors like Finland, which ranks second. While that country falls on the smaller side of the global scale, sociologists attribute its repeated educational success to the country's emphasis on early education.³⁴ "Before Finnish kids learn their times tables," one observer writes, "they learn simply how to be kids—how to play with one another, how to mend emotional wounds."³⁵ Educators in Finland are encouraged to experiment with their students, find what teaching methods and learning styles create academic success, and adapt to their classroom's needs, unlike the national standards imposed in the United States.³⁶ Additionally, playtime is sacred in Finnish schools and is required by law, compared to the dwindling minutes of playtime in the U.S.³⁷ Schools in Finland assign very little homework, emphasizing the importance of using home time as family time, whereas students as young as kindergarten receive homework in the United States.³⁸ In a fight to become more competitive and improve scores, programs such as Common Core were created to encourage educators to "teach to the test," which means their lessons are tailored to helping kids elevate their test scores, rather than inspiring a love of knowledge.³⁹ However, American educators should look at Finland's success and realize that maybe our overemphasis on these tests is holding students back rather than helping them to excel.

Furthermore, Dr. Joseph Soares, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Wake Forest University and pioneer in the movement to make universities test-optional, argues that in reality, standardized tests are not a proper measure of student intelligence. In decades of research, Soares has discovered that standardized tests, especially the SAT and ACT, are created with racial, gender, and class biases meant to give white, upper-class males the highest scores. These tests were created with the racist, sexist, and classist agenda of Ivy League schools in mind and are redeveloped each year to make it nearly impossible for minorities, women, or lower-class students to excel. When asked if he believed that the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test, which is used to rank education levels

³⁴ Chris Weller, "8 Reasons Finland's Education System Puts the US Model to Shame," *Business Insider*, 6 Dec. 2017, [businessinsider.com/finland-education-beats-us-2017-5?r=UK&IR=1#5-playtime-is-sacred-5](https://www.businessinsider.com/finland-education-beats-us-2017-5?r=UK&IR=1#5-playtime-is-sacred-5).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Sherman, *The Curiosity of School*.

internationally, was biased like the SAT, Soares answered that all standardized tests are created with a bias. While PISA's bias might not be the same as the College Board's, Soares says that it contains a bias that ensures that certain countries excel while others fall behind. Since these tests are not true indicators of a student's intelligence, schools should not be placing test scores above thought-provoking activities that inspire student's natural curious tendencies.⁴⁰

The social structure of education in the United States is inhibiting these natural curious tendencies. Rather than feeling inspired to pursue studies on their own time and looking to expand their knowledge simply for the sake of learning, students are growing disinterested in their education and feeling pressure, hatred, and anxiety toward the system. Standardized testing, No Child Left Behind, and the Common Core are ruining curiosity in American children, and when this virtue is ruined so early in life, it is significantly harder to adopt habits that restore it in the future because the apathy is already so deeply engrained. Because of these adverse effects on curiosity, it would be better for American schools to prioritize exploratory learning over standardized testing.

To prevent Americans from losing touch with curiosity and struggling to regain this virtue later in life, children should be taught its importance early in their lives and encouraged to engage in practices that cultivate the virtue and add to its development. The Aristotelian psychology of habituation stresses the importance of building up practices that contribute to virtues and ridding ourselves of those that detract from virtue. This means that schools must give children sufficient play time and build a curriculum that allows teachers the flexibility to teach subjects their students are interested in learning. It also means that these ideas of exploration and imagination must be practiced on a daily basis, not just from time to time. Even as students grow older, educators should be given the tools to help students take up extracurricular studies and explore subjects they want to learn about outside the classroom. The United States should use Finland's impeccable example of how to operate schools that foster curiosity and a love of learning while still producing high-achieving students in academics. If teachers habitually encourage curiosity, students will be less apathetic toward learning, which will lead to more adolescents and adults retaining the curiosity they held as a young child later on in life.

⁴⁰ Joseph Soares, "How Standardized Testing Promotes Inequality," Lecture, Mount St. Mary's University, Emmitsburg, MD, 5 Apr. 2018.

While the research that proves the negative impact of standardized testing is boundless and parents and educators are pushing for an end to these tests, there are still some individuals who argue for their value. For government officials, standardized test scores are important for proving our country's rank on an international scale. Because one of the American ideals is to be the best, strongest, and most valuable country in the world, we need to have the best and brightest students in the world. Currently, our only way of testing our students' knowledge compared to other countries is through testing such as PISA, and government officials stress the importance of student success on these tests. This means a government mandated curriculum is necessary to ensure that all students have the ability to receive high scores. However, the stress students feel to succeed on these tests and educators' inability to create interactive and flexible curricula that inspire a love of learning create apathy toward learning, leading to a diminished sense of curiosity in children.

Supporters of standardized tests argue that they are necessary for high intellectual achievement, but in reality these tests diminish curiosity, which has negatively impacted our students' academic success. A country such as Finland, which places heavy emphasis on the cultivation of curiosity, not only produces students who think more creatively than American students, but also produces significantly higher academic results. Their schooling system proves that curiosity is an essential component for child development and academic achievement and is something we must strive for to improve our international academic standing as well. The negative impacts of these tests outweigh the benefits, so less emphasis needs to be placed on standardized tests and more emphasis should be placed on exploratory learning to foster curiosity in students. Doing so contributes to curiosity, but not doing so puts us in danger of detracting from curiosity.

The virtue-ethical framework highlights a virtue's value for human flourishing and its necessity for a "good" human life. As mentioned before, curiosity is often overlooked as a virtue because it is an internal virtue, rather than one with social value. However, curiosity is important for human flourishing all the same because it helps to hone the intellectual part of our soul, allowing us to fully discover truths about the world and making us well-rounded people. As humans, we are rational and intellectual creatures, so part of our flourishing is to perfect our intellect. Curiosity does just this; with a desire to learn for

its own sake, humans take up studies they might not have considered before. Their intellect is expanded in this process of discovery, and they open a door to knowledge that had been locked. Curious people desire to learn more than just what they have been taught, which means they are able to discover truths on their own terms, rather than accepting truths second-handedly from someone else's teaching or discovery. As intellectual creatures, all humans need to access knowledge as a basic human good in order to flourish. If people are apathetic toward learning, it will be more difficult for them to access this basic human good, as there is no desire to expand their knowledge or learn for their own sake. This also means that such people will have greater difficulty accessing deeper truths, since they will simply have to accept what they are taught without discovering it for themselves. Therefore, within the virtue-ethical framework, curiosity is necessary for human flourishing and living the good life, which means that we must celebrate practices that contribute to it (exploratory learning) while rejecting those that detract from it (standardized testing).

Because curiosity is so essential for our flourishing, we must take care to ensure that we instill this virtue in our society. Although it may not have as much of a social impact as many other virtues, it is important nonetheless. As intellectual creatures, we crave knowledge by nature. If our intellectual appetite is not properly shaped by this virtue, we will not be able to satiate this appetite and perfect this part of our souls, which will have detrimental effects on our ability to fully flourish. This virtue helps us to pursue knowledge in all forms, seek truth, and explore the world around us, and without it we fall prey to jadedness and apathy. In order to create a society filled with intellectual, high-achieving individuals, we must inspire our citizenry to have a strong base in curiosity, which means habitually practicing activities that help us develop this virtue while changing those that detract from it, including changing the fundamental elements of our educational system.

God is Dead and Foot is Alive: A Critique of Philippa Foot's Natural Normativity

Jacob Cherry

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

The German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, who operated under a naturalistic framework, is known for his critique of religion, particularly the Judeo-Christian conception of morality. Philosophers and theologians throughout modernity have tried to grapple with this Nietzschean declaration and have thus attempted to develop systems of morality based on secular, non-metaphysical, assumptions. Ethical naturalism has been the result of a framework built upon these assumptions. Perhaps no one has done more to provide a moral framework for modernity than Philippa Foot. In Foot's *Natural Goodness* she attempts to give reason to reject subjectivism and "non-cognitivism," which act as solutions to the Nietzschean problem. In doing so, Foot strives to provide an objective system of morality for people to embrace. Some have taken issue with particular components of her system or fine details of her scheme, but I will argue that the natural normative project, as explained by Foot, if taken to its logical conclusion, necessitates materialism, which is detrimental to her system of ethics.

I will first describe naturalism and then briefly lay out Foot's position and show why, if she desires to operate under a purely natural framework, she must posit a strictly biological account of the human person. Once this distinction is made clear, I will then show that it is

more probable to assume that a biological account of the human person will result in materialism. I will also respond to an objection raised by John Hacker-Wright which aims to defend Foot's view, by clarifying the intent of her project and the means she employs to arrive at her conclusion. I wish to show that natural normative ethics, while a noble pursuit, must be understood through a naturalistic lens which Foot does not maintain consistently, thus rendering her project flawed.

In the beginning of Foot's *Natural Goodness*, she admits to utilizing a naturalistic theory of ethics. Foot's usages of naturalism, even among her critics, is not a contested point. However, a recurring theme among Foot's critics is her misunderstanding of the term *naturalistic*. We must first understand what naturalism is in order to evaluate her use of it. Some have conflated materialism with naturalism, but I argue that naturalism is the genus which encompasses a materialistic worldview. Before we start, it must be noted that naturalism is not straightforwardly defined, and for the sake of this paper, an exhaustive account of naturalism or its components is not practical. With regard to defining naturalism, Barry Stroud states,

“Naturalism” seems to me in this and other respects like “World Peace.” Almost everyone swears allegiance to it, and is willing to march under its banner. But disputes still break out about what it is appropriate or acceptable to do in the name of that slogan. And like world peace, once you start specifying concretely exactly what it involves and how to achieve it, it becomes increasingly difficult to reach and to sustain a consistent and exclusive “naturalism.”¹

Naturalism can perhaps best be explained by what it is not. Naturalism is not compatible with the metaphysical. The fundamental nature of naturalism is to assert that God or any conception of the divine does not exist. Also, naturalism is not compatible with substance dualism, the type of dualism we will focus on throughout this paper. Substance dualism asserts that the mind is more than a physiological event involving synapses and chemical reactions; rather, it is *that which thinks*.² It must be said that naturalism is compatible with dualism as long as the disparate substances are “natural” and not divine. But this is not the type of dualism that will be analyzed. This is an important

¹ Barry Stroud, “The Charm of Naturalism,” in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario de Caro and David Macarthur (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 22.

² Howard Robinson, “Dualism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall 2017), ed. Edward N. Zalta, plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/dualism.

distinction because Foot, as a result of embracing an Aristotelian conception of man, maintains a dualistic sense of self that is contrary to naturalism. Before we get to that, we must do some work in showing why substance dualism is not compatible with naturalism. René Descartes is often credited, and by some blamed, for distinguishing between mind and body. While Descartes is often looked at as the “forefather” of dualism, it must be mentioned that even a forefather has a father. Plato and Augustine, though usually labeled monists, both argued against a purely material conception of man and would have been opposed to naturalism.

As Foot shows when developing an ethical framework, some form of dualistic thought needs to be understood as an innate feature of the human animal. This is because a purely biological and physical natural history account of man seems deficient and perhaps unable to capture the rational faculties of the human animal. As Tim Crane explains, many believe that dualism allows one to posit free will into the human animal. With regard to substance dualism he states, “One reason for believing this is the belief that the soul, unlike the body, is immortal. Another reason for believing it is that we have free will, and this seems to require that the mind is a non-physical thing, since all physical things are subject to the laws of nature.”³

Aristotle, too, recognized that the soul or animating principle of a being was different than the body which encased it. Whereas a recurring theme throughout the Platonic philosophy is the soul–body duality, it is important to note that Aristotle is not commonly understood as a dualist. One might apply this conception of Aristotelian metaphysics as an objection to my argument. One might argue that since Aristotle did not posit a mind–body distinction, Foot, who operates under an Aristotelian framework, does not need to either. This is a significant objection, one we must examine, because if shown to be true, my argument that Foot’s natural normativity is contrary to an Aristotelian conception of the human person will fail.

Some scholars argue that the dualistic problem that plagued Descartes is not a problem for Aristotle because he is not a dualist. They argue that the unity of the body and soul is best exemplified by Aristotle’s hylomorphic conception of man.⁴ Gareth Matthews elucidates this conception as follows: “Aristotle thinks of the human

³ Tim Crane, “The Mind-Body Problem,” *The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences*, ed. Rob Wilson and Frank Keil (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), philpapers.org/archive/CRATMP-2.pdf.

⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. D. W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 413a 20–21.

soul, not as a distinct substance, but rather as the functional form of a living body. When a human body ceases to perform any life functions, such as metabolism, perception, or movement, its functional form, its soul, no longer exists. The corpse, he thinks, is not a human being, except in an extended sense of the term.”⁵ This understanding of Aristotle is widespread, but as Timothy Robinson argues, it is entirely unclear whether Aristotle identifies the soul with the physical body.⁶ Aristotle asserts that the *nous*, or the part of the soul called the intellect, does not reside in a physiological structure; rather, it can exist apart from the physical body. In book 1 of *De Anima* Aristotle argues,

The intellect seems to be born in us as a kind of substance and not to be destroyed. For it would be destroyed, if at all, by the feebleness of old age, while as things are what happens is similar to what happens in the case of the sense organs. For if an old man acquired an eye of a certain kind, he would see even as well as a young man. Hence old age is not due to the soul’s being affected in a certain way, but to this happening to that which the soul is in, as in the case of drunkenness and disease.⁷

While Aristotle does not explicitly mention what the intellect as existing separately from the body might look like, it seems the intellect has the ability to exist as distinct from the body. A substance that exists outside of the material realm, which it seems the intellect, at least for a period of time, can do, is not compatible with naturalism, and also must be at odds with dualism, as Gilbert Ryle argues in his book *The Concept of Mind*. Ryle argues that dualism requires one to consider personhood to be like a spirit which embodies matter and functions like a machine, which is absurd. Ryle does not want to display a distinction between body and mind; rather, he wants to show that the two are concomitant, thus obviating the need to view the mind or soul as a separate substance. The mind, which will, for this paper, be considered as synonymous with the soul, is for many naturalists and those opposed to Descartes something that needs to be explained by a physical process. Ryle tries to do precisely that. He says, “Mental happenings occur in insulated fields, known as minds.”⁸ Ryle’s naturalistic attempt to reconcile with dualism commands him to seek

⁵ *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*, ed. Fred Feldman and Ben Bradley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 194.

⁶ Timothy Robinson, *Aristotle in Outline* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 43–51.

⁷ 408b 18–24.

⁸ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 13.

a physical explanation of the mind, and indeed he states that all of the mind's processes and neurological functions take place within the bounds of a palpable lump of cells, the brain.

Others have opted for alternative strategies toward reconciling naturalism with dualism, including the complete rejection of dualism. An account of all the arguments utilized by those who reject dualism given a naturalistic worldview is limitless, and beyond the scope of this paper. I will explain what is perhaps the most straightforward example of such reasoning, that given by Trenton Merricks. Merricks's reasoning goes as follows. He can kiss and has kissed his wife. If dualism is true, then he has only kissed her body. It follows that souls cannot kiss or hold hands or go for walks. He assumes that kissing requires a soul getting its body to make the proper movement. Thus, if kissing is an intimate, approximate action toward another, we have grounds for rejecting dualism.⁹ While an objection to Merricks's understanding of the soul is conceivable, the point is that a naturalist, such as Foot, needs to reject substance dualism because if substance dualism is true, how is one able to account for the causal interactions of a non-spatial mind and a substantial body?

This point is perhaps made most evident in the writings of Daniel Dennett. Dennett states, "This fundamentally anti-scientific stance of dualism is, to my mind, its most disqualifying feature, and is the reason why I adopt the apparently dogmatic rule that dualism is to be avoided *at all costs*. It is not that I think I can give a knock-down proof that dualism, in all its forms, is false or incoherent, but that, given the way dualism wallows in mystery, *accepting dualism is giving up*."¹⁰ The fundamental mystery of dualism for Dennett and other naturalists resides in the mind. Thus, some have come to the conclusion that it is better to disregard it, because ultimately science is not in the business of explaining the mystical. Naturalism is unable to demonstrate the causal link between mental cognitions and the body. Physics and chemistry are, for a naturalist, the only tools, and to deconstruct dualism requires much more than what is in their toolbox.

We must now turn our attention to Foot's position to understand why she cannot be both a naturalist and a dualist. I find Joseph Millum's concise explanation of Foot's project valuable. He states,

In *Natural Goodness* Philippa Foot provides an account of judgments about the human will through a conceptual

⁹ Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23–25.

¹⁰ Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991), 37.

analysis of our judgments about living things. She claims that the judgments we make about goodness and defect of the rational will do not differ in logical form from those that we make about the goodness and defect of other characteristics of living organisms. Those judgments are based on the role the characteristics play in the “distinctive way of life” of the organism in question, that is, their function.¹¹

Foot aspires to show that meta-ethical claims are grounded in the nature of the human animal. Natural normativity, Foot argues, allows one to make normative claims about human behavior in moral situations based on a set of propositions taken from natural history. John Hacker-Wright provides a brief sketch of Foot’s ethical naturalism in the following words: “For Foot, moral judgment is a variety of what she calls natural normativity.”¹² Natural norms are norms that apply to organisms, in virtue of which they are good or defective organisms of a given species. Foot argues that such norms are internal to the identification of anything as an organism. That is, to identify something as an organism is *ipso facto* to look at it from a normative standpoint. This is (logically) before developing any empirical theories of the organism.¹³

The problem with Foot’s project is that to develop natural history propositions, she must view the human animal in its naturalistic context, which requires a strictly biological account of the human person. The purpose of setting up natural history propositions, for Foot, is to show a commonality within a given species. This commonality, once established, can be referred to as a nature, or what it is characteristic of members of that species to do. Natural history propositions in animals are, for Foot, purely physiological. Foot states, “The swiftness of a deer fits it to preserve its own life by evading a predator.”¹⁴ A deer that does not possess swiftness, either by a physical malformation or perhaps just a lazy attitude, is defective, in that the natural history account of a deer is to be swift. Swiftness for a deer is part of its natural history account because a deer is purpose oriented and is, like all animals, biologically directed toward self-conservation and gene replication. Foot asserts that natural goodness and defects in plants and animals depend on the form of life of the species to which

¹¹ Joseph Millum, “Natural Goodness and Natural Evil,” *Ratio* 19 (2006): 199.

¹² John Hacker-Wright, “What Is Natural about Foot’s Ethical Naturalism?” *Ratio* 19 (2009): 310.

¹³ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

¹⁴ *Natural Goodness*, 34.

an individual belongs.¹⁵ This is all well and good, mainly because when speaking about the non-human sphere, Foot employs a biological account to reveal the natural history account of animals and plants. But the difficulty begins when Foot makes the jump to humans.

Foot makes it a point to reference Peter Geach, who asserted, “Men need virtues as bees need stings”¹⁶ Foot wants to show that just as specific biological functions of animals are essential, such as stinging is to a bee and swiftness is to a deer, Aristotelian virtues are necessary for the human animal. The problem is that virtues are not reconcilable with a biological account of the human person. Foot confirms that the correlation in Geach’s expression is not directly analogous. Foot understands that animals operate in ways vastly dissimilar to humans. Foot needs to show a disparity between animals and the human person for the sake of acknowledging the rationality that the human animal possesses.

The problem rests in Foot’s desire to reconcile human rationality in a naturalistic framework. Rationality was not an obstacle when Foot was concerned with the natural history account of animals and plants, but rationality is something that is essential to the human animal. Foot notes,

Whether an individual plant or animal actually succeeds in living the life that it is its good to live depends on chance as well as on its own qualities. But its own goodness or defect is conceptually determined by the interaction of natural habitat and natural (species-general) “strategies” for survival and reproduction. What conceptually determines goodness in a feature or operation is the relation, for the species, of that feature or operation to survival and reproduction, because it is in that that good lies in the botanical and zoological world. At that point questions of “How?” and “Why?” and “What for?” come to an end. But clearly this is not true when we come to human beings.¹⁷

According to Foot, human beings do not operate in the same way as animals and are not entirely susceptible to random chance or natural selection, in that they have reasoning capabilities. Foot calls this practical rationality. She states,

¹⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶ P. T. Geach, *The Virtues: The Stanton Lectures 1973-4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 17.

¹⁷ *Natural Goodness*, 42.

It is, I think, the fact that a man or a woman can question what reason he or she has for doing something that makes the comparison between the “natural” or “autonomous” evaluation of plants or animals and the same evaluation of human beings *qua* human beings seem at first sight so unsuitable. A human being as a rational animal will ask “Why *should* I do that?”, particularly if told that he should do something distasteful that seems to be for the advantage of others rather than himself.¹⁸

Foot places rationality, which in turn suggests free will and a host of other factors, into the human animal without much justification. Rationality is concerned with the mental aspect of the mind–body distinction alluded to previously. It seems that Foot, as a naturalist, is unable to refer to the mind as a distinct characteristic of the human animal. It follows that since Foot is unable to speak about rationality, she is also not able to attribute free will to the human person, since free will exists under the umbrella of rationality.

Foot is careful throughout *Natural Goodness* not to speculate on the origins of the human animal’s ability to choose freely; this is because she cannot give a precise account of the biological root of free will. The problem remains that when one is articulating an ethical system, rationality, which shows itself through the human animal’s ability to choose freely in ethical scenarios, needs to be an accrediting feature of the human animal.

The idea that someone would be unable to secure rationality to the human person may sound strange, but this is the case for the naturalist. The naturalist must only concern herself with the body half of the Cartesian two-part formula because, as we have discussed, the mind is nonmaterial. As we have confirmed, Foot is unable to account for the causal interactions of a non-spatial mind and a physical body, and so she must reject the very conception of a non-spatial mind, which in turn seems to be where the practical rationality of the human animal resides. This leaves her solely with the material body, and so Foot must confine her arguments to those involving a materialistic understanding. Again, this is not a problem for Foot when she speaks about non-human animals and plants, but when she ventures into the realm of the human animal, she acknowledges she has to posit rationality. A biological account of the human person is necessary for someone operating with a naturalistic framework, and as we have

¹⁸ Ibid., 56.

observed, biology is only able to deal with the physical realm. Thus rationality, for the naturalist, is not a part of the biological description of the human person. This being said, it is important to mention again that Foot, as John McDowell notes, believes she is operating with an externally verified biological account of nature.¹⁹

Just as the naturalist is unequipped to speak about the mind, as understood by Descartes, the materialist, which Foot must be, is unable to invoke human rationality. According to the materialist, the mind is the brain, and just as every other physiological function in the human animal can be explained in purely physical terms, so too can the brain be thus explained. Dennett states, “The mind is somehow nothing but a physical phenomenon.”²⁰ D. M. Armstrong is often credited with identifying materialism with scientific doctrine. He states,

What does modern science have to say about the nature of man? There are, of course, all sorts of disagreements and divergences in the views of individual scientists. But I think it is true to say that one view is steadily gaining ground, so that it bids fair to become established scientific doctrine. This is the view that we can give a complete account of man in purely physio-chemical terms we must try to work out an account of the nature of mind which is compatible with the view that man is nothing but a physio-chemical mechanism.²¹

With the absence of reason, Foot must employ the same principles she used for evaluating non-human animals to humans. It is apparent that she does not do this.

One instance of this disparity is her view of reproduction for the human animal. Foot states,

Lack of capacity to reproduce is a defect in a human being. But choice of childlessness and even celibacy is not thereby shown to be a defective choice, because human good is not the same as plant or animal good. The bearing and rearing of children is not an ultimate good in human life, because other elements of good such as the demands of work to be done may give a man or woman reason to renounce family life.²²

¹⁹ John McDowell, “Two Sorts of Naturalism,” *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, ed. R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence, and W. Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 151–55.

²⁰ *Consciousness Explained*, 29.

²¹ D. M. Armstrong, *The Nature of the Mental and Other Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 1–2.

²² *Natural Goodness*, 42.

Foot believes that not possessing the physical ability to procreate is a defect in humans, just as in non-humans. This being said, an able-bodied person with the capacity to reproduce but who chooses to opt out of it is not defective. It is not directly apparent in the text, but it seems that Foot puts the acquisition of Aristotelian virtues above things such as reproduction. In fact, Foot maintains that if the healthy person considers that having a child might hinder her ability to obtain virtue for whatever reason, whether it be financial or intellectual, she should opt not to have children.

Foot states, “The human desire to live is, of course, instinctual, but it often also has to do with a desperate hope that something may yet turn out well in the future. . . . the teleological story goes beyond a reference to survival itself.”²³ I agree that the teleological story goes beyond a reference to survival itself. The teleological account of the human animal also includes replication of one’s genes, but nothing else. In a purely biological sense, the teleological story of man is twofold: survival, and replication of one’s cells. If Foot advocated a system of materialism, she would have to state not only that the inability to procreate is a defect, but also that the choice not to procreate is by its very nature a defect. If an amoeba made the “choice” not to replicate, it would be a defective amoeba *qua* amoeba, given its amoebic natural history, which necessitates that an amoeba is innately wired to pass on its genes.

David Chalmers once said, “You can’t have your materialist cake and eat your consciousness too.”²⁴ This statement could perhaps be reformulated for Foot as, “You can’t have your rationality and eat your naturalistic cake too.” Micah Lott, while a defender of Foot, acknowledges this critique of Foot’s reasoning. “Critics,” he writes, “have argued that such a view cannot get off the ground, because the neo-Aristotelian account of *natural normativity* is untenable in light of a Darwinian account of living things.”²⁵ As explained earlier, because Foot is a naturalist, her use of Aristotelian categories or natural histories must reside in a purely biological and material realm. William FitzPatrick also defends a strict naturalistic conception of the human animal, writing, “Organisms must generally be understood ultimately as complex replicating systems-functional systems that have as their general and ultimate biological end *the replication of certain germ-line copies*

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 168.

²⁵ Micah Lott, “Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle?” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 9 (2012): 353–75.

of the genes represented in their co-adapted genomes in the next generation, with lower-level functions and ends all geared towards this end.”²⁶ FitzPatrick acknowledges that Foot’s usage of biology is flawed if she believes she can appropriate a materialistic approach to science and also view the human animal as possessing a nonmaterial mind, capable of practical rationality. Here, Lott presents an elucidation of FitzPatrick’s critique. FitzPatrick argues that once we understand the insights of evolutionary biology—especially in its full biological detail—we will see that there is no room left for the neo-Aristotelian approach in our understanding of the teleology of living things. Biological function is determined not by the good of organisms but by the end of gene replication. Since this has no plausible connection to ethical norms, the neo-Aristotelian claim that moral goodness is natural goodness is a nice-sounding bit of philosophy that is refuted by the “real world” of biological facts.²⁷

It must be said that while Fitzpatrick and I both understand Foot as having the same fundamental problem, we do so by concentrating on different components of her project. My critique is a large-scale analysis of the very foundation of Foot’s ethical views. I have explained that it is in the very nature of a naturalistic ethical code to be purely biological, which can entail strict materialism.

We need now to move our discussion to a relevant objection raised by John Hacker-Wright, who endorses Foot’s view. Hacker-Wright, like Lott, acknowledges from the start that Foot’s naturalism draws on a picture of the biological world which is at odds with the view embraced by most scientists and philosophers.²⁸ Hacker-Wright asserts that given Foot’s use of the term “function,” she does not need to employ an evolutionary view of the biological world. He argues, “She is very emphatically *not* pursuing a view of the ultimate function of an organism’s traits; for all we know, the ultimate function could be serving in some divine plan or gene replication, or something else altogether.”²⁹

The problem with this defense is that Foot necessarily needs to show that if she wants to posit something as a function of the human animal, it can be empirically verified through a scientific lens. A specific function of human animals under a naturalistic framework

²⁶ William Joseph FitzPatrick, *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001).

²⁷ “Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle?” 360.

²⁸ “What Is Natural about Foot’s Ethical Naturalism?” 309.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 312.

must be scientifically demonstrated, and I have shown that this necessitates a materialistic definition of function. Hacker-Wright asserts, “Foot’s purpose is not to satisfy the evolutionary biologist; her question is, ‘how do we identify organisms as such?’ and not ‘how did organisms with such and such features emerge?’”³⁰ Again, Foot, in clarifying the question, “how do we identify organisms as such?” necessarily must necessarily attribute a thoroughly biological account of the human function to the natural histories of the human animal. All physical phenomena, including functions, must operate under a materialistic framework and be understood as having a physical cause. As I have shown, the naturalist must dismiss the separation of body and soul or mind and must operate under the assumption that the material body is all there is. Thus, Foot must demonstrate that the functions of the human animal have a biological root, which is of course what she fails to show.

In summary, an essential theme in the evolutionary account is that the human animal and all its qualities are the physical outcomes of a purely physical process. There seems to be no need, nor is there a place, to fit a nonphysical substance into our understanding of ourselves. We are animals comprised solely of matter and we should learn to live with that reality. Foot as a naturalist acknowledges the Nietzschean predicament that “God is dead.” Like others, she has turned to a naturalistic ethical framework to, as Nietzsche would say, “comfort ourselves.” The problem arises when the comfort of a naturalistic framework requires one to attribute rationality and metaphysical qualities to the human animal. I have explained that Foot’s attempt to construct a system of morality based on a naturalistic framework while at the same time understanding man as a practical reasoner is incoherent; thus, her project needs to be re-evaluated in light of a strictly a naturalistic framework.

³⁰ Ibid., 313.

Gaudium et Spes's Requirement of Humane Considerations in Immigration Policy

Ryan Budd

I AM thy father's God.
—Exodus 3, 6

In the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council condemned “*deportationes*”—among other practices—as insulting to human dignity.¹ In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II clarified what the Council meant by labeling *deportationes* and its companion offenses as “intrinsically evil.”² Recent political commentators have noticed this and articulated the view that the recent magisterial tradition condemns deportation as an intrinsic evil. In the words of one such commentator:

The council specifically identifies deportation among a list of actions insulting human dignity, alongside such morally reprehensible acts as slavery, prostitution and the selling of women and children. “All of these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society”³

Prompted by such and other discussions, the purpose of this work is to investigate what *Gaudium et Spes* could have meant by the undefined word *deportationes*. It will first look to the original Latin for clarification; it will then look to other aspects of the recent magisterium, concluding that there is no clear definition of the term as used in *Gaudium et Spes*. That said, viewed against the concept of *dignitas* as articulated in both *Gaudium et Spes* and *Pacem in Terris*, the

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*. 1965, par. 27. All official Vatican documents’ English text is from the Vatican Web site (w2.vatican.va), unless I indicate that I have done my own translation.

² *Veritatis Splendor*, par. 80.

³ D. M. Henson, “Deportation: A Moral Morass,” *Health Progress*, July–August 2017, chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article/july-august-2017/deportation-a-moral-morass. For a different perspective, see R.P. Maggi, “The Morality of President Trump’s DACA Decision,” *Crisis*, January 11, 2018, crisismagazine.com/2018/morality-president-trumps-daca-decision.

Council seems to condemn as intrinsically evil restrictions of movement that are made for purely material or economic reasons, as not making a thorough enough recognition of the *personal* nature of an immigrant as a human being.

To begin, however, the original Latin text itself does not help in understanding the Council's use of the term *deportationes*. While the word *deportationes* literally means moving people from one place to another, presumably against their will, the original Latin could with grammatical integrity be read to suggest that only *arbitrary* deportations are intrinsically evil. The original Latin reads as follows: “*quaecumque humanam dignitatem offendunt, ut infrahumanae vivendi condiciones, arbitrariae incarcerationes, deportationes, servitus, prostitutio, mercatus mulierum et iuvenum.*”⁴ Because of the adjective *arbitrariae*, it might be suggested that the Council is condemning *arbitrary* deportations—deportations that do not take into account the specific circumstances of the case—on the same reasoning that would condemn so-called “mandatory minimums” in criminal sentencing.⁵ But while grammatically feasible, the result would be to cause the document to spout moral nonsense. For to apply the adjective *arbitrariae* to all the categories that follow would lead the text to be condemning *arbitrary* prostitution and *arbitrary* human trafficking, as if these things were only wrong when they were arbitrary. And this would be absurd—human trafficking is *always* wrong, as is prostitution.

At the same time, not all “moving someone from one place to another” is *always* wrong. If *deportationes* is understood in reference to immigration issues, it must exist in harmony with the other recent magisterial teaching on the issue—that of Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*:

Again, every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own State. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular State does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the

⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 27.

⁵ This would seem to be the rationale of Most Rev. Daniel Flores, Bishop of Brownsville, in equating mass deportation to driving a woman to an abortion clinic. See C. Camosy, “Bishop says deporting migrants ‘not unlike’ abortion,” *Cruce*, July 26, 2016, found at cruxnow.com/interviews/2016/07/26/camosy-interview-bp-brownsville-tx/. The article headline does not precisely reflect the more nuanced position His Excellency provides in the text.

common, world-wide fellowship of men.⁶

Pope John clearly recognized limits on this right of movement from one State to another, saying it only exists “when there are just reasons.” This seems to mean two things: first, that the immigrant must have established the “just reasons” in favor of his taking up of residence in the host country and, second, that he must leave if there are not “just reasons” to compel his acceptance. Absent these “just reasons,” it seems that the removal of an immigrant would be in accord with right reason and justice. Consequently, the mention of *deportationes* cannot—in harmony with preceding magisterium and right reason—condemn any and all “deportations.”

The original context of the term *deportationes* suggests some framework within which to understand what it means, even if a precise definition eludes us. For it appears among a list of offenses against *human dignity*: “inhumane living conditions, arbitrary incarceration, *deportationes*, slavery, prostitution, and the sale of women and children.”⁷ *Dignitas humana* is, like *deportationes*, a concept not defined in *Gaudium et Spes*. But, like the issue of migration, the concept of *dignitas* seems to have first appeared in the contemporary magisterium in John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris*, where he wrote the following:

Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable. When, furthermore, we consider man's personal dignity from the standpoint of divine revelation, inevitably our estimate of it is incomparably increased. Men have been ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace has made them sons and friends of God, and heirs to eternal glory.⁸

⁶ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963, par. 25. In historical context, this passage might have more to do with *letting people leave* (viz., the Iron Curtain) than *letting them come in and stay*. And so its magisterial weight on this question might be even more limited than I herein acknowledge. This is an occasion for further study, as we must understand what John XXIII was addressing in order to grasp its actual application to our present situation.

⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 27. My translation.

⁸ *Pacem in Terris*, pars. 9–10. John XXIII also made the following more oblique reference to the issue in *Mater et Magistra*, paragraph 45:

“In dealing with the family the Supreme Pontiff [Pius XII] affirmed that the private ownership of material goods has a great part to play in promoting the welfare of family life. It ‘secures for the father of a family the healthy liberty he needs in order to fulfil the

Seen through the lens of John XXIII's writing, *dignitas* seems to be man's *personal dignity*, which seems to be the *demand for recognition of man's endowment with intelligence and free will*—in other words, his ontological superiority to the beasts. Viewing *Gaudium et Spes's* list of offenses against human dignity through such a lens, these offenses in some way render the recognition of this endowment impossible—hence, they are intrinsically evil. Movement restrictions could do this when they equate man with an animal: when they apply to his movement the same principles that would apply to the movement of herds. In other words, purely economic and material considerations cannot have absolute say in determining the justice of a migrant's case for taking up residence in a new place.

To reinforce the principle that immigration decisions must be made on a more holistic plane than the purely material, one can turn to the discussion of refugees in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. There, Pope Francis provides the following:

For example, changes in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate; this in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded.⁹

This treatment of the issue of what we might call “environmental refugees”—people fleeing from what *Gaudium et Spes* would call “subhuman living conditions”—closely parallels John XXIII's treatment of migration in *Pacem in Terris*: It speaks of the right to seek a new home as fundamentally secured by man's common brotherhood in the one human species. These persons are spoken of as “forced” to

duties assigned him by the Creator regarding the physical, spiritual and religious welfare of the family.' *It is in this that the right of families to migrate is rooted.*" (Emphasis added.) Cf. Gen. 12:1–10; Gen. 46:1–7.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015, par. 25.

leave their homes; hence, it seems fair to say that the encyclical implies that their nonrecognition as refugees is an injustice. They are not leaving their homes, in other words, to seek a *better* life, but merely a *human* life. The pope is equating these persons with refugees from violence as persons deserving asylum in a place other than their home, that they might live a properly *human* life, one recognizing their endowment with intelligence and free will. This is hardly a claim concerning economics—it is not suggested that accepting such persons materially “enriches” the receiving community, but simply that *they need asylum*. The implication would seem to be that the community that can afford to receive them must do so.

While much work remains—and while no clear definition of *deportationes* has been sketched here—it seems clear enough that movement restrictions that fail to recognize man’s *personality* are intrinsically evil, and may very well have been what the Council Fathers had in mind. An ordered policy, on the other hand, would have some mechanism for the admission of persons *because* they are persons. This would seem to take primarily into account the ability to earn and keep hold of a meaningful livelihood for one’s family; for, as John XXIII teaches, the right to migrate is rooted in the right to personal property, which as an adumbration of the family precedes the State.¹⁰ Hence, “the fact that he is a citizen of a particular State does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men”—*because* he exists as part of an institution that is prior to the State in origin and in importance.¹¹ The evil that *deportationes* propagate, therefore, is not an individual but a *familial* evil. For man’s *personality* is a *familial* personality.¹²

¹⁰ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961, par. 45.

¹¹ *Pacem in Terris*, par. 25.

¹² This paper was peer-reviewed by Zack Robinson.

The Problem of Evil and God's Moral Agency

Joe Knepper

Is there a morally sufficient reason for a good and omnipotent God to allow suffering? This question has been the subject of much philosophical and theological inquiry and debate for thinkers across many traditions for years. The inquiry into the goodness of God in light of suffering and evil in the world has so often been examined in philosophical works that it can be simply referenced to as “the problem of evil.”

There are several variations and approaches to tackling the question of evil, but most return to the same basic structure and argument. Some may speak of evil in a more general sense of the word. Others may distinguish between natural and moral evil. Still others may choose to speak of suffering that is caused by either form of evil. In her work *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*, Eleonore Stump offers an excellent summary of the basic premises which form the problem of evil or suffering as most commonly presented and understood. Stump presents the propositions as follows:

- 1) There is suffering in the world
- 2) There is an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God
- 3) There is no morally sufficient reason for an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God to allow suffering in the world.¹

Working from the argument against the existence of God, or at a minimum against the goodness of God, many philosophers and theologians begin their pursuit to disprove this argument. Oftentimes the theodicy or defense developed by those taking on such a task begins by stating something along the lines of, “I will show that there exist morally justifiable reasons for a Good and omnipotent God to allow suffering.” There are countless defenses and theodicies that have been developed throughout the tradition that approach the problem

¹ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

of evil from this starting point. The traditional argument will be explored at greater depth later. However, although many of these projects are well developed and consistent within themselves, they often fall short of satisfactorily responding to the question asked.

The work of the project that I am undertaking here does not wish to develop a new defense or theodicy aimed at addressing the goodness of God in light of the problem of evil but rather to show that the answer is not satisfactory because the wrong question is being asked. The work of the project I am undertaking will show that God is not a moral agent under obligation to the moral law in the same way man is, and thus our reading and understanding of traditional defenses addressing the problem of evil should be adjusted.

The Traditional Response to the Problem of Evil

Much of the work done in addressing the problem of evil is done in the Thomistic tradition. In the work being undertaken here it is important that the framework in which traditional theodicies are developed is understood, as well as the general structure of such arguments. The problem of evil as discussed in contemporary circles was not as large of an issue during the time period in which Thomas Aquinas was writing. Father Brian Shanley, in his book *The Thomist Tradition*, lays out the classical approach to the problem of evil and offers background for how this approach was developed and should be understood. According to Shanley, the problem of evil was not one requiring the argumentation it does today: “Aquinas instead began with a strong doctrine of divine providence and sought to show how that providence encompassed and defeated evil.”² The basic premise for Thomas was that because God is maximally good, He “would not have allowed any evil into his work unless he were so omnipotent and good that he could even make good come out of evil.”³ The faith of Thomas and simple arguments presented by him may have satisfied discussion during the medieval time period, but the contemporary discussion surrounding the problem of evil has evolved. For people to make sense of the classic response to the problem of evil, they must first understand what is meant by evil. Thomas and the tradition understand evil not as existing in a substantial way but rather as an absence of some perfection or a privation of a good. Just as Thomas’s definition of evil must be understood, so too must his understanding of what it is to be

² Brian J. Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 22.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.2.3ad1, translated by Shanley in *Thomist Tradition*, 92. Aquinas is here quoting from Augustine’s *Enchiridion*, chapter 11.

good. As Shanley writes, “In Aquinas’s metaphysics, anything that exists is *ipso facto* good.”⁴ That is to say, in so far as something exists or has being, it is good. This is demonstrated by the mere fact that creatures desire to live; their existence is desirable or good. With these basic ideas established as guideposts, the question of the problem of evil can be explored further.

In light of the above points, evil and suffering for human beings can be understood as occurring when man loses his capacity to fully flourish. Every man as creature has goodness in the fact that he exists; yet, he does not have fully actualized goodness but rather potency for a fuller goodness. Evil is said to occur when a man is seemingly no longer able to reach his full potential or fulfillment. Traditional defenses would argue that as long as man reaches his ultimate end of union and closeness with God, it can be concluded that God remains good.

The evil most commonly addressed in the problem of evil and the focus of the work at hand in this project is that of human evil. This form of evil can be understood as flowing from two modes, as Thomas himself argued. There is an evil of fault and evil of punishment.⁵ Evil of fault is a privation that comes as a result of an action that is sinful and is formed in the individual’s will. Evil of punishment is understood as a privation that man suffers outside of his will as a punishment for sin. As Shanley explains, Thomas attributes “all the evils of human life to sin and its punitive consequences.”⁶ These arguments leave open the question of why a supposedly good God would allow for such conditions where evil can flourish. The traditional answer to this question is generally known as the free will defense.

There are a variety of free will defense arguments that exist in the tradition, but most hold to the same general premises. A common free will defense would look something like this:

- (1) God created man and gave him free will as a great gift worthy of protection.
- (2) God must preserve free will and cannot prevent man from exercising his free will.
- (3) Therefore, God does not cause evil but merely tolerates it in order to protect the greater good, free will.

This argument is oftentimes used in an effort to release God from any responsibility for moral evil. The free will defense may satisfy some

⁴ *Thomist Tradition*, 93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶ *Ibid.*

and even appear consistent with the views of Thomas Aquinas; however, such arguments rely on premises that Thomas himself rejected, as will be shown in later sections of this paper.

The True Problem of Evil

Having established what is commonly meant by the problem of evil and presented a summary of the traditional response to the problem of evil, in the following sections we will focus on why the traditional approach falls short and offer a new lens through which to examine the problem of evil. It will be shown that asking the question, “Is there a morally sufficient reason for an all-powerful good God to permit suffering?” or some variation of that question is fundamentally flawed. Posing the question in that manner leads to implicit premises about God that should not be assumed. The premises are especially problematic in the Thomistic tradition, as they make assumptions that Thomas himself would have rejected and begin their search for answers to the problem of evil from the wrong starting point.

In asking the question as it is often posed, man is assuming God to be good in the same way one might assume one’s neighbor, co-worker, father, or any other human being to be good. In the following sections I will show how God’s goodness is not to be understood as requiring the same things as a human’s goodness. God is not a moral actor with the same obligations as created man, and unless one acknowledges this reality, any work in examining the problem of evil will be incomplete. In order to address the problem of evil more adequately, there are certain truths which must be examined. This project will explore these realities and help one understand God as creator, God as possessing goodness, God as just, and ultimately God’s providence.

God as Creator

If one is going to understand anything about God, especially if one claims to be working in the same tradition as Thomas Aquinas, one must begin by understanding God as creator. The Dominican priest and philosopher Brian Davies argues that for Aquinas, the idea “that God is the Creator” is central to everything Aquinas believes about God.⁷ It is not enough to simply say that God is a creator. To gain a deeper understanding of God and what one can say about evil, one must further define what it means to say that God is creator.

⁷ Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39.

Central to understanding in what way man can speak of God as creator is understanding the difference between how man is said to be and how God is. Man, and all of creation, can be said to exist in a way that does not necessarily speak to their essence. God, on the other hand, has existence that is *ipsum esse subsistens*, subsisting being itself.⁸ This is to say that God does not merely exhibit certain traits but is in His fullness all that he has. God is existence, and in His creating He causes other things to have existence. As a created thing man does not have existence apart from God.

Fundamental to understanding God as creator is the fact that God did not have to and does not have to create. God never had to create in the beginning and according to Thomas is under no obligation to continue creating or even to continue to give being to things once he started. In addressing this point, Davies explains, “For Aquinas, however, God by nature enjoys (and is) the perfect good. So his nature is not such as to compel him to create insofar as he essentially wills (delights in) what is good.”⁹ Simply put, God creates because creation is good, and God wants what is good. This is not to say that anything is added to God in his creating or that he is somehow made better in creation. Aquinas himself speaks about this, writing, “Since God’s goodness subsists and is complete independently of other things, and they add no fulfillment to him, there is no absolute need for him to will them.”¹⁰ These claims support the belief that God creates from nothing. There is no reason to believe that apart from God anything that is would be.

From what has been defined as a part of the creative nature of God thus far, one can conclude more about God. An important component of God as creator is the simplicity of God. Davies summarizes Aquinas’ understanding of God’s simplicity as the view “that God is not changeable, that God is not an individual belonging to a natural kind, and that God is not created.”¹¹ All of these points contribute to our understanding of God, but for the work in this paper it is most important to understand that God cannot be spoken of in a natural or material way within the universe. As creator He enjoys a unique place apart from his creation and with different obligations and modes of acting than creatures.

⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.19.3, ed. Thomas Gilby (Blackfriars Edition, vol. 5) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964-1980).

¹¹ *Thomas Aquinas on God*, 48.

Many people speak of God as if He is the greatest of things among many, but if God is the creator, he cannot simply be a great object among many lesser objects in the created universe. It is true that man can only speak of God based on what is shown in creation. Thomas argues that what is said of God based on creation cannot be understood in the same sense.¹² This is especially true for understanding how God creates by causing creation. God as cause is not a cause in the same way in which a bad driver is the cause of an accident.¹³ God brings being to creation and establishes the natural order of the world. That is not the same as saying God causes every event to occur. When God does cause an event to occur, it is not like when a creature or something in nature causes an event to occur. This point is important to understand in light of God as creator, but it will be expanded further below, in the section on God's providence.

God's Goodness

A central question implicit in the problem of evil centers on goodness and what is actually said about God when He is called good. The problem with the traditional understanding of good, particularly as it is presented in the problem of evil and suffering, is what people assume about God in this claim. People are claiming that to be considered good or "well behaved," God must act in the same way a person who is called good should act. But God is not to be understood as being good in this way.

Brian Davies offers a clear argument for how one in the tradition of Thomas can properly attribute goodness to God. Davies demonstrates that the primary means by which man first recognizes any goodness in God is through creation. Looking at creation as a whole, it is clear that things in nature work and that there is a goodness about them. Davies says that creatures' "goodness derives from God and amounts to his creative action in them."¹⁴ The goodness of man that is reflective of God's nature has nothing to do with the moral agency of man but rather the reality of his existence. This is to say that simply because things have "being" and that being is recognized as desirable, creation itself is good, and that goodness must come from somewhere. In light of all of this, one may be tempted to ascribe a

¹² *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton Pegis, F.R.S.C. (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1.33.

¹³ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God*, 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

moral goodness to God. But that is not what this argument is showing. God is good in so far as he gives being to creation.

Talk of moral goodness is always rooted in the living of moral virtues by man. Davies argues that moral virtues are that which people need to flourish as people.¹⁵ God cannot be bound by a pursuit of moral virtues in this manner, as He Himself is already said to be perfect. God could not create if He were lacking in anything, yet He does create, and He is shown to be the giver of being. God is not bound by virtue because He is the aim of virtue.

God's Justice

In contemporary culture the word “just” and the idea of justice are often used with no real or consistent meaning. In the work being done to address the problem of evil it is important to establish what is meant by justice and how God can be understood in this way.

For the purposes of this work, let us begin with a look at commutative justice. In commutative justice there exists an exchange between two parties. An example of this would be the customer exchanging cash with a car dealer: the customer would then expect and be owed a car in exchange for the cash. It is obvious that because God is a creator, this type of justice does not exist between God and man.

There remains a second form of justice, distributive justice. Distributive justice can be understood as justice which “governs the way in which the ruler of a community distributes goods according to the needs and merits of community members.”¹⁶ There are those, such as Brian Shanley, who claim that God is just in this sense of justice. This is a dangerous assumption and one that Aquinas himself likely did not hold, as will be shown here.

Josef Pieper and Brian Davies both offer compelling cases and clear arguments for how God ought to be understood as just. Their correct arguments provide a better background for taking on the problem of evil. Pieper’s understanding of justice is rooted in the understanding that “justice is directed toward the other man.”¹⁷ Later Pieper writes that “a just man is just, therefore, because he sanctions another person in his very separateness and helps him to receive his due.”¹⁸ Pieper continues, “Justice, therefore, ‘consists in living one

¹⁵ Ibid., 117.

¹⁶ Shanley, *Thomist Tradition*, 111.

¹⁷ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 54.

¹⁸ Ibid., 55.

with another'; the just man has to deal with the other."¹⁹ Already this presents problems for how one might understand God as just. As previously established, God is not a part of the natural world. Further, God Himself is not directed toward another but is the Other; man is always directed toward God.

In his exploration of justice, Pieper arrives at the conclusion that what is common to every understanding of justice is that "in every case there is a *debitum*, something owing, a debt. To be just means, then, to owe something and to pay the debt."²⁰ As clearly shown by understanding God as creator, God is not in debt to any creature. If God owes nothing, then he cannot possibly be understood as a debtor and thus cannot be said to be just in the same manner in which man is said to be just. In light of this this understanding of God's justice, any good that comes to man beyond what is proper to his nature is a gift, and a lack of it cannot be said to be an evil caused by God.

The justice of God as offered by Pieper is consistent with the thought of Aquinas and should factor into our consideration of the so-called problem of evil and its possible solution. In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas writes, "Nothing is owed to the thing created unless it be on the basis of something that pre-existed in it . . . and again if this is owing to the thing created, it will again be because of something prior to it. And since we cannot go on to infinity, we must come to something that depends only on the goodness of the divine will."²¹ What Pieper is demonstrating here is that for Aquinas, God is to be understood as just in so far as he is just to Himself: "He renders to Himself what is due to Himself."²² This does not meet the proper definition of justice but is simply a way in which God can be thought of as being just. Clearly for Thomas, as demonstrated by Pieper, God cannot be thought of as a moral agent with virtue in the same manner in which man is said to be virtuous. God is just in any way He acts because His will is always ordered toward bringing man to his final end, which is God himself. In making this argument Thomas appeals to Anselm, who says, "When thou dost punish the wicked, it is just; since it agrees with their deserts; and when thou dost spare the wicked, it is also just; since it befits thy goodness."²³

¹⁹ Ibid., 56.

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.21.4, as cited and discussed in Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 57.

²² Ibid., Ia.21.1ad3.

²³ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 10.

In his own work on the problem of evil, Brian Davies offers his own explanation of how God can be understood to be just. Davies argues that distributive justice does apply to God because, as Shanley explains, “it governs the way in which the ruler of a community distributes goods according to the needs and merits of community members.”²⁴ Even so, Davies is in agreement with Pieper and Thomas that justice is only attributed to God in so far as he is just to Himself. To this point Davies says, “If we are entitled to call God just it can only be because he can be said to act in accordance with his own decrees (as revealed), or because he gives to his creatures what is good for them given their natures as made by him.”²⁵ Davies is making it clear that attributing justice to God in this sense does not imply that God is under any degree of moral obligation as man is. Davies shows that God cannot be thought of as being moral or immoral.²⁶ To speak of God as being just in the way in which we understand man to be just reduces and skews the manner in which moral virtues ought to be understood as attributed to God. According to Davies, when one offers statements such as “God is just” they are to be taken as “equivalent to ‘God is well behaved’”²⁷ Davies makes clear that God should not be understood in this way as human beings are. God is certainly all of these things, but if men assume He exists in the same manner as them, they will not be talking about God as He truly is and will never arrive at a satisfactory answer about Him and the world which He governs.

God’s Providence

Having now spoken of God as creator, the goodness of God, and in what ways God is said to be just, we must now arrive at an understanding of God’s providence. A proper comprehension of the providential care which God shows for creation is essential to a better understanding of the problem of evil. Having established that “God is the creator,” it can be said that He is that which keeps all of creation in being. This being true, Herbert McCabe is correct in saying that “the creator cannot in this way ever be outside his creature; a person’s act of being as well as every action done has to be an act of the creator.”²⁸

²⁴ Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition*, 111.

²⁵ Brian Davies, “The Problem of Evil,” in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject*, ed. Brian Davies (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 179.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁸ Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Chapman, 1987), 44–45.

The creator, God, is thus at work in creation. God is constantly giving nature its order and showing providential care for creation. God has ordered all the things of nature for their ultimate end, closeness with Him.

If God is said to be providential then why does there exist a possibility for evil? As Davies has already noted, the world as it is established is ordered to divine goodness. Questioning God's providence and goodness out of the desire for a better world is to deny the perfection of God. Man, as an intellectual being, was given the capacity to reason. In invoking reason, man utilizes his senses and memory. This allows man a sharing in the life of God and speaks to His goodness. If God's providence meant that He was constantly using His power to intervene in the physical world, He would be making Himself a liar in changing the created order. A positive understanding of God's providence can be seen in nature. When a flower turns to face the sun, does the flower turn to face the sun or does God move the flower toward the sun? The answer to the question is both. The flower turns to face the sun because its nature has ordered it to do so. The flower receives this ordering of nature because of God's providence He has ordained nature to function in this manner. God does this because He is good, and creation functions according to his way because it too is good.

There are of course times when the order of nature is violated. This can prompt the question as to why God does not directly intervene or why God did not create conditions where the depravation does not exist. Shanley offers a response to these questions: "The short answer is that God did, only human beings forfeited the blessings of that original condition and now exist in a punitive condition from which God is bringing an even greater good than originally bestowed through Christ."²⁹ Ultimately the problem of evil and the seeming loss of God's providence is the result of sin.

God's Providence and the Free Will Defense

Having examined God's providence in a general sense, we must now speak of God's providence in light of what is traditionally known as the free will defense. The traditional free will defense follows the idea that because God gave free will to man, he must allow evil actions to exist in order to preserve that free will. This idea, considered without caveat, is not compatible with the conception of God as the first cause

²⁹ *The Thomist Tradition*, 97.

of being, as Brian Davies notes. As Shanley summarizes Davies's position, "To deny that human actions are caused by God is to deny that God is the cause of being."³⁰ Furthermore, this argument suggests that for any action within creation, God is dependent on created beings to carry them out.

Brian Davies and Thomas Aquinas do believe in free will, but it is important to understand how they do so. God is the cause of the will and thus has designed man to use his will in a certain manner. The will being created by God is ordered toward God and goodness. Man does have the free choice to act with a well-formed will. Shanley again sums up Davies well: "God's providence is enacted through the free choices that we make under the movement of His will."³¹

Traditional Considerations and Replies

There are many in the field who believe that the traditional approach to the problem of evil (and in particular the free will defense) is sufficient. Their arguments are not without merit. Brian Shanley offers some common arguments in support of the traditional method as well as critiques of an approach such as the one taken here that seeks to better define God's moral agency.

Shanley and those of his school of thought suggest that to deny that God is morally good as traditionally understood would suggest that he is morally bad. This critique does not take seriously the arguments outlined in this paper. The problem is not the work undertaken to show the goodness of God but rather the assumption of a false premise that God can be said to be either well behaved or misbehaved.³²

There are also questions surrounding the claim that God is not under moral obligation. The traditional school of thought argues that because God is said to be just there is a sense in which He is under obligation. I do not here wish to rehash the full explanation of how God is properly understood as just (having already done so in the section on God's justice), but I will address the connection between His justice and obligation. Some argue that because God has created, He is under an obligation to govern creation in a certain manner. Davies's response is that since "God is the transcendent creator and not an inhabitant of the created order, there is no intelligible way for us to ascribe to God the kinds of actions that normally count as

³⁰ Ibid., 113.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2015), 177f.

fulfilling moral obligations.”³³ As shown in earlier sections, God does not exist as another among many beings but as the cause of all being who, being goodness Himself, cannot be understood with the same conception of agency as man.

How to Address the Problem of Evil

Those committed to the traditional approach are failing to recognize where their error is and why a free will defense or any defense in response to the problem of evil as most often posed is unsatisfactory. In asking, “Is there a morally justifiable reason for a good God to allow for suffering?” such thinkers are beginning with false premises that guarantee a false conclusion. Man, as creature, lacks the capacity to understand God and is in no position to offer a moral evaluation of God. According to Davies, moral evaluation of God, even when in a positive sense, is not appropriate.³⁴

The work of a theodicy or defense of God is reducing God to an agent in need of explanation. God and creation do not need their goodness to be defended. God’s goodness is already affirmed by our showing God as the creator who sustains all being. Since God is under no obligation to create, the reality of creation is itself affirmation that God cannot be thought of as anything other than good. As Thomas Aquinas reminds us, God has virtue not in the manner of man but as having “exemplar virtues of ours.”³⁵

Acknowledging that asking the question, “Is there a morally sufficient reason for a good God to allow for suffering?” is a poor starting point does not void the entirety of the work done by serious philosophers on this issue. The deeper and correct understanding of God, as outlined in this paper, can bring a new light to the work done by thinkers like Brian Shanley and Eleonore Stump. The arguments that are shown in their work for the redemption of suffering and the fulfillment of the heart’s desires are only enhanced by a deeper understanding of God as creator. In acknowledging the proper relationship between God and man, creator and creature, everything is seen as gift. When God is understood as the final end and ultimate fulfillment of man and as existing beyond the physical world, it sheds a new light on situations where evil and suffering seem to be left unaddressed. In acknowledging that God is beyond our capacity to

³³ This is Shanley’s explanation of Davies in Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition*, 112. Here Shanley is addressing Davies’s points in “The Problem of Evil,” 179–82.

³⁴ “The Problem of Evil,” 182.

³⁵ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.93.12.

entirely comprehend, we should be aware that only the sufferer may realize when his or her fulfillment has been reached. This is not to discredit the pain felt by one who suffers and those who witness suffering. Offering a defense as is traditionally done does little in the way of bringing clarity to these situations anyway. The only true answer to suffering and the problem of evil comes from God Himself.

Jesus Christ, God's Answer to the Problem of Evil

*This is the night
that with a pillar of fire
banished the darkness of sin.
This is the night
that even now, throughout the world,
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices
and from the gloom of sin,
leading them to grace
and joining them to his holy ones.
Our birth would have been no gain,
had we not been redeemed.
O wonder of your humble care for us!
O love, O charity beyond all telling,
to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!
O truly necessary sin of Adam,
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!
O happy fault
that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!*

—The Exsultet: The Proclamation of Easter (USCCB)

The final answer to the problem of evil, for Thomas and for all of mankind, is Jesus Christ. Philosophical inquiry is an important tool in man's pursuit of truth, yet as Thomas himself made clear, reason only gets man so far. The ultimate good for each individual is the beatific vision, union with God who is love and who created that person. When evil entered the world, God did not stand idly by and simply accept it as a consequence of having given man free will. Rather God took on flesh, sending His only son to enter into the suffering of man so that all of creation could obtain the redemption that it awaits. When man comes face to face with the reality of a fallen world, he need not ask why such a thing would be allowed to occur but should look to the cross and beyond as he joins the church triumphant and proclaims, "O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!"