

**ONTOLOGICAL AND VALUE INCOMENSURATION:
MARILYN MCCORD ADAMS ON MEDIEVAL AND MODERN
APPROACHES TO THEODICY**


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DECLARATION

I declare this thesis has been composed by me, it represents my own research, and it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael A. Chandra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Michael Ajay Chandra

1 April 2008

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ABBREVIATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCES

Anselm

CDH

De Casu Diab.

De Conc. Virg.

Mon.

Pros.

Cur Deus Homo

De Casu Diaboli

De Conceptu Virginali

Monologion

Proslogion

Aquinas

De Malo

Sent.

SCG

ST

De Malo

Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum

Summa contra Gentiles

Summa Theologiae

Augustine

De Doct. Chr.

De Civ. Dei

De Lib. Arb.

De Trin.

In Evan. Ioan.

Retr.

De Doctrina Christiana

De Civitate Dei

De Libero Arbitrio

De Trinitate

In Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus

Retractionum Libri Duo

Calvin

Inst.

Christianae Religionis Institutio

Duns Scotus

De Prim. Prin.

Lect.

In Metaph.

Ord.

Rep. 1A

De Primo Principio

Lectura

Quaestiones super Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis

Ordinatio

Reportatio Parisiensis 1A

Hume

Treatise

Enquiry

A Treatise of Human Nature

An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals

Julian of Norwich

Shew.

Shewings of Divine Love

William Ockham

Ord.

Ordinatio

VERSIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

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SERIES

CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina

ABSTRACT

The Medievalist and Philosophical Theologian Marilyn McCord Adams argues that the standard treatments of evil in Anglo-American philosophy of religion are overly abstract respecting both evil and God. She contends that the typical focus on moral evil detracts from attention to horrendous evils, or horrific individual suffering, which is the most difficult class of evils to reconcile with the Christian faith. Adams also argues that we can satisfactorily account for why horrors occur and how God can defeat them if and only if we interpret God and creatures as being ontologically incommensurate, which precludes the commonplace among analytic philosophers that divine goodness is moral goodness. On Adams's interpretation, these moves will require substantial reworkings of traditional Christian teachings on sin, eschatology, and related doctrines.

This dissertation is limited to Adams's metaphysics and value theory in her writings on theodicy. The study explicates those key elements for an audience that is theologically educated but is not conversant with her broad set of writings. It repairs what I represent as some important lacunae and inconsistencies in Adams's essays and her first book on horrors. It also puts her project into fuller conversation with Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas and contemporary scholarship on both figures. My thesis is that medieval Christian Platonists such as Augustine and Aquinas provide sufficient resources to address horrendous evils and divine-human incommensuration without necessitating Adams's revisions of traditional Christian teachings especially on sin and morality. Such thinkers also elude her criticisms of analytic philosophy of religion.

Nevertheless, my criticisms of Adams rest on some general agreements with her. I suggest that the debates on God and evil in analytic and modern philosophy take over thoroughly theological problematics but attempt to do the work with non-theological tools. From a Platonizing perspective, these attempts are unsatisfactory because the problematics, premises, and chains of reasoning are unified wholes. Though a detailed reacquaintance with theological traditions will not convince skeptics or heal the world, it does show the strength and coherence of at least some such traditions. It also reorients the debate away from piecemeal inquiries and towards articulating and comparing rival philosophical-theological systems. Accordingly, this study treats evil with respect to divine simplicity, parts and wholes, participation metaphysics, suffering, natural law, and moral sentimentalism. My conclusion discusses points of difference and possible convergence between medieval and modern approaches to God and evil.

INTRODUCTION

1. Biographical Sketch

Marilyn McCord Adams was born in 1943 in Oak Park, Illinois. She earned her A.B. in philosophy from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in 1964 and her Ph.D. in philosophy from Cornell University in 1967. Her dissertation, written under the distinguished medievalist Norman Kretzmann, is titled “The Problem of God’s Foreknowledge and Free Will in Boethius and William Ockham.” Adams also earned two Th.M. degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary during 1984-85 in Biblical Studies and in Developmental Psychology and Faith Development. In 1987, she was ordained deacon and priest in the Episcopal Church U.S.A. While holding academic positions, Adams concurrently has served congregations in the Los Angeles and New Haven areas and now shares responsibility as Canon of Christ Church, Oxford.

Adams’s academic work straddles Anglo-American analytic philosophy and Christian historical theology.¹ She has published over 60 essays in journals including *Faith and Philosophy*, *Franciscan Studies*, *Medioevo*, *The Modern Schoolman*, *The Monist*, *Noûs*, and *Religious Studies*, and in edited volumes such as *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (edited by Norman Kretzmann and Anthony Kenny) and *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (edited by Paul Vincent Spade). Her books include her massive two-volume *William Ockham* (University of Notre Dame 1987), which Paul Vincent Spade describes as “the best study of Ockham written to date, bar none” and Alfred J. Freddoso reiterates “is the best comprehensive study of Ockham’s thought ever written in English or, as far as I know, in any other language.”² She has edited the volume *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press 1990) with Robert Merrihew Adams. Her books

¹ Adams is among the leaders of a renaissance of Christian and Jewish philosophy over the last four decades. Two volumes of autobiographical essays by such philosophers that provide some background are *Philosophers Who Believe* (Intervarsity Press 1993) and *God and the Philosophers* (Oxford University Press 1994) in which the essay of Adams (1994) appears.

² Spade 1990, 597; Freddoso 1991, 317.

Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God (Cornell University Press 1999) and *What Sort of Human Nature? The Metaphysics and Systematics of Christology (Aquinas Lecture 1999)* (Marquette 1999) are on theodicy and Christology, respectively. She combines the latter topics in her book *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge 2006), which incorporates ideas from her recent Gifford, DuBose, and Warfield Lectures.

Adams's scholarly accomplishment is reflected in the recognition she has received and in her academic appointments: American Council of Learned Societies Fellow (1988-89), Guggenheim Fellow (1989-90), Aquinas Lecturer at Marquette University (1999), Gifford Lecturer at University of St. Andrews (1999), DuBose Lecturer at University of the South (2003), and Warfield Lecturer at Princeton Theological Seminary (2005); Chair of Philosophy at UCLA (1985-87), Horace Tracy Pitkin Professor of Historical Theology at Yale University (1998-2003), and Regius Professor of Divinity at Christ Church, Oxford University (2004-).

2. Outline of Adams's Project on Theodicy

2.1 Religion-Neutral Inquiry about God and Evil

Adams's intellectual interests are notably continuous from her undergraduate studies at the University of Illinois through her mature writings as a professor at UCLA, Yale, and Oxford. Adams relates how Nelson Pike's essay "Hume on Evil" (1963) impressed her when she read it that year as an undergraduate.³ She also tells how she won a Woodrow Wilson graduate fellowship, which she applied to her doctoral studies at Cornell, by interviewing as a candidate interested in the philosophy of religion and particularly in the problem of evil and Trinitarian doctrine.⁴ While Adams only recently has published her considered opinions on Trinitarian and Christological issues, she published proposals on universal salvation and on theodicy in the early to mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, respectively.⁵

³ Adams 1999c, xi.

⁴ Adams 1994, 145.

⁵ Not including her book *Christ and Horrors*, Adams's major Christological treatments include: Adams 1982a; Adams 1985; Adams 1987a; Adams 1987b; Adams 1991a; Adams 1992d; Adams 1992f; Adams 1997a; Adams 1999e. She only advocates positions on Christology in the latter two or three writings, whereas her earlier, historical inquiries are merely consistent with her basic acceptance of Chalcedonian Christology. The writings of

2.1.1 “Redemptive Suffering” and deflationary ‘theism’

If our evaluations of Adams’s writings on theodicy are to be evenhanded, then we need to read them in the context of the conversations and frameworks into which her training in analytic philosophy and subsequent academic posts inducted her. Adams’s early attempt to put philosophy and a substantial theology into conversation on theodicy resulted in her essay “Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil” (1986).⁶ There she suggests suffering relates organically to intimacy with God. It offers “a vision into the inner life of God” (whether in terms of Christ’s passion, divine suffering, etc.) that would defeat the ruinous aspects of intense and prolonged pain insofar as God is the unsurpassable, perfect good.⁷ Such ideas are uncommon among analytic philosophers of religion who often, deliberately have used minimal theological and ontological resources. For instance, William L. Rowe calls the view that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent creator, “standard theism” and distinguishes “expanded standard theism” from “restricted standard theism.”⁸ Expanded theism is the conjunction of standard theism with “significant religious claims” about teachings on sin, eschatology, divine action, and so forth: “Orthodox Christian theism is a version of expanded theism.”⁹ Restricted theism is standard theism without such sectarian claims. Rowe argues the latter does not imply the former. He then argues that Stephen J. Wykstra, to whom the expanded-restricted distinction furnishes a reply, does not answer Rowe’s evidential argument from suffering against the existence of God.¹⁰ The details of Wykstra’s argument are unimportant here. What is important is Rowe’s argument that (i) Wykstra assumes expanded theism and thus (ii) “chang[es] the question” being

Adams (1988b; 1993e) on Luke-Acts are not particularly concerned with Nicene or Chalcedonian teachings as they are with making space for universal salvation (see Adams 1989a, 307fn.16; Adams 1993a, 56, 61n.16; Adams 1996a, 130n.46). Her early writings advocating universal salvation are: Adams 1971; Adams 1975; Adams 1976a.

⁶ Adams (1994, 157) notes the essay was partly in response to the challenge of her spiritual director “to explore how Jesus solved the problem of evil.”

⁷ Adams 1986a, 264. Adams (1994, 155) credits Jon Hart Olson with giving her the idea.

⁸ Rowe 1984, 95, 99.

⁹ Rowe 1984, 95.

¹⁰ Wykstra 1984.

discussed, namely, if the “theistic hypothesis” is true and the deity of restricted theism exists.¹¹

According to Adams, her 1986 essay on how theological goods may redeem suffering and her view that the doctrine of hell is a problem of evil for Christians (which she later articulated in a 1993 essay bearing a corresponding title) both prompted similar objections from prominent members of the Christian Anglo-American philosophical community.¹² They deemed such an expanded theism not to be topical. Moreover, unlike the defensive arguments of Alvin Plantinga against J.L. Mackie and of Nelson Pike, Adams’s interests widened the range of objections to Christian faith. Skeptics such as Mackie were not attacking Christians on doctrines such as hell presumably because his verdict regarding “ordinary theism” rendered such doctrines non-starters.¹³ So Adams’s interests were potentially regressive for the emerging Christian philosophical community whose members were working to establish their credibility in a highly secular professional environment. Rather than bowing under criticism, Adams respectfully disagreed and effectively inverted Rowe’s point.

2.1.2 Divergent “Problems of Evil”

In her essay “Problems of Evil: More Advice for Christian Philosophers” (1988) and elsewhere, Adams rejects the idea that Christian philosophy should center on defensive arguments that satisfy objections from outside the believing community.¹⁴ The problem with the latter approach is that it requires the defender to reply within the supposedly “religion-neutral” conceptual resources in which the objection is stated.¹⁵ Following David Hume and John Stuart Mill, Anglo-American philosophers of religion, such as Mackie, Pike, and Plantinga, assume the goods invoked in the debate on God and evil should be limited to uncontroversial, non-transcendent goods: the debate should center on moral goodness (e.g., the maximization of happiness or the fulfillment of rights and duties) rather than metaphysical, natural, or

¹¹ Rowe 1984, 100.

¹² Personal conversation, July 26, 2005, at Christ Church, Oxford.

¹³ Mackie 1955, 201.

¹⁴ See Adams 1987a, 486-87; Adams 1988a; Adams 1989a, 297-99.

¹⁵ Adams 1988a, 121, 127.

aesthetic goods, and distinctively Christian interpretations of such goods.¹⁶ This stipulation simplifies the debate but only rhetorically. For “the hope of universal agreement in value-theory is shattered,” says Adams, when we consider modern, secular moral philosophy whose practitioners “share a common ontology” but are deeply divided between and within contractarian, deontic, consequentialist, and virtue theory camps.¹⁷ A shared value theory is even less realistic in the debate on God and evil “where ontological commitments are significantly different” between sides.¹⁸ Adams argues that the “myth of shared values” in this debate generates two problems: it fosters equivocations about what value theories are in play and it obscures Christian views about God and evil.¹⁹

Her main example is Plantinga’s celebrated Free Will Defense (FWD), which aims to rebut Mackie’s classic argument for why the existence of any evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of theism’s omnipotent deity. Plantinga works within Mackie’s religion-neutral assumptions and claims logical inconsistency only follows if there are no additional, possible considerations that render ordinary theism’s God and the existence of evil consistent. Plantinga uses possible world semantics to construct a modal argument for why incompatibilist creaturely freedom is a good that might justify allowing evil to occur. For “it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or at least as much moral good as this one contains) without creating one containing moral evil” given incompatibilist freedom’s essential relation to moral good and evil and how it involves the will being its own first cause.²⁰ Mackie’s error is to think omnipotence entails God can strongly actualize any possible world such as one in which people are “significantly free and always do only what is right.”²¹ Plantinga contends that ‘divine omnipotence’ names

¹⁶ Adams 1988a, 124, 127-28.

¹⁷ Adams 1988a, 128. More accurately, distinctively modern moral theories share a rejection of theologically-rooted ontologies and value theories, as Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) argues in her famous essay “Modern Moral Philosophy,” but they still disagree about value theory due to corresponding metaphysical disagreements.

¹⁸ Adams 1988a, 128.

¹⁹ Adams 1988a, 128.

²⁰ Plantinga 1974, 167.

²¹ Plantinga 1986, 126.

several incompatible views, and distinguishing these views is philosophically consequential and indispensable. He refuses any generic view of omnipotence. Adams writes that Plantinga's overall argument leaves the impression that "the existence of free creatures whose actions yield a favorable balance of moral goods over moral evils" vindicates theism.²²

However, other writings of Plantinga and his personal correspondence with Adams and others indicate he thinks theological goods that are compatible with creaturely freedom "are essential to the balance" of good over evil.²³ This does not render his FWD, which does not bar theological goods, formally inconsistent. But as with Rowe and Wykstra, the rhetoric of religion-neutrality obscures how the contending parties in actuality examine different problematics regarding theodicy. These latent disagreements about what goods could defeat evil "yield varying, non-equivalent notions of 'perfect goodness' and contrasting evaluations of evils."²⁴ Adams rightly concludes that "any fair-minded debate about the problem of evil will be much more complicated than the literature in analytic philosophy of religion over the last thirty years" has suggested, because disagreements in metaphysics and value theory yield "different problems of evil."²⁵ This argumentative possibility is latent in Mackie's argument, as Adams notes, as well as in Rowe's reply to Wykstra.²⁶

Adams's criticism of this equivocation is itself progress, but she pushes the point further. For Mackie and Rowe do not acknowledge their need to justify the terms of the conversation—treating the existence of God as a hypothesis and limiting the discussion to standard theism—on which they insist. However, Adams correctly notes about Mackie what my brief examination of Rowe implies: many objections to 'theism' are irrelevant to traditional Christian faith (e.g., Rowe criticizes restricted theism alone, which he insists is separate from expanded theism to which he assigns "orthodox Christian theism" as a subset), and Christians have little interest in

²² Adams 1988a, 135. Mackie (1982, 176) and Jerry Walls (1991, 78) illustrate her point.

²³ Adams 1988a, 135; see also *ibid.*, 130-32.

²⁴ Adams 1988a, 132.

²⁵ Adams 1988a, 132-33.

²⁶ Adams 1989a, 298.

stopping skeptics from discrediting some imposter deity.²⁷ As Alasdair MacIntyre pointedly states, “The God in whom the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to disbelieve had been invented only in the seventeenth century.”²⁸

Adams identifies three ways in which religion-neutral approaches to God and evil obscure Christian views on those matters. First, such approaches assume God is a moral agent such that it is sensible to ask if divine behavior is moral (e.g., respecting the rights of others and meeting one’s obligations to others or managing the world so as to maximize pleasure). Adams objects that the great patristic, medieval, and reformation theologians hold that divine obligations to creatures are inconsistent with divine transcendence. God necessarily is a debtor to no one except God.²⁹ Secondly, Adams argues that religion-neutral approaches wrongly frame the challenge evil poses to God in terms of abstract goods like whether the world is the best possible world or it contains goods like creaturely freedom. She asserts that Christian conceptions of divine goodness center on love of particular persons, and this is what the worst evils put in question.³⁰ Thirdly, such approaches underestimate how bad some evils are by treating evil as commensurate with and able to be offset by non-transcendent goods such as creaturely freedom. Adams asserts that Christian historically have believed some evils can be defeated only by God.³¹

In sum, the debate on evil in analytic and modern philosophy has often (i) involved *simulacra* of the God that Christians worship, (ii) included conceptual tools that Christians historically have thought inapplicable to God, and (iii) excluded metaphysical, soteriological, and value concepts that such Christians deemed vital. Philosophers in modern cultures take over a problematic that was originally, thoroughly theological, both in its premises and chains-of-reasoning, and such

²⁷ Adams 1989a, 298; Adams 1999c, 3.

²⁸ MacIntyre 1969, 14.

²⁹ Adams 1988a, 133-34; see quotation at chapter 1, fn.7, below.

³⁰ Adams 1988a, 134-35: “The Christian characterizations of divine goodness center on God’s goodness to and love of persons, both individually and collectively. . . . Perhaps, too, this is the legitimate point to be taken away from J.S. Mill’s warning not to depart from ordinary-sense moral goodness.”

³¹ Adams 1988a, 136: “In my judgment, only religious value-theories contain anything valuable enough to defeat the evil of horrific suffering. Following medieval Christian philosophers, we could identify that valuable with God Himself.”

modern thinkers often have tried to approach it with non-theological tools.³² This approach is unsatisfactory because it purchases simplicity and common ground at the price of distortion and irrelevance. Adams overhauls the debate. Apparently, much skepticism towards Christianity logically involves rejecting entire schemes that Christians propose (or what are erroneously considered Christian schemes) rather than piecemeal inquiries that recoil on issues such as evil alone. The real task then, as Adams urges, is to map the rival schemes and put them into explicit conflict.³³

Adams presents this criticism in her essay “Problems of Evil” (1988). Though that piece is early in her project, it is foundational. She develops its logic in a series of essays that explicitly link themselves to the essay.³⁴ Over a decade later, Adams’s book *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (1999) reasserts substantial segments of these arguments in its initial chapters which deconstruct the influential approaches to theodicy of Mackie, Pike, Plantinga, and others.

2.2 *Horrendous Evils and Divine Goodness*

Adams explicitly aims “to push both sides of the debate [on evil] towards more detailed attention to and subtle understanding of the religious system in question.”³⁵ She admits a detailed re-acquaintance with theological traditions will not compel a skeptic to accept Christian ontological commitments and their wider implications; but it may bring some agreement about whether those traditions, their premises and logics, are internally consistent regarding evil and the Abrahamic God.³⁶

Adams pushes discussants into more detailed appreciations of evil and Christianity using her concept of ‘horrendous evils’. She first defines it in her essay “Theodicy without Blame” (1988) and develops it in her essay “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God” (1989). These are evils which give a victim or a perpetrator *prima facie* reason to doubt whether her life can, given her participation

³² My supervisor Nicholas Adams suggested that I frame the study in this manner, and in retrospect this is what Adams herself argues.

³³ Adams 1988a, 139.

³⁴ Adams 1987a, 486-87; Adams 1987b, 75-76, 76fn.2; Adams 1988a, 143fn.38; Adams 1991c, 1-3, 23n.2.

³⁵ Adams 1989a, 298.

³⁶ Adams 1988a, 137. See also Adams 1989a, 298-99, 309-10.

in the evil, be a great good to her on the whole. Adams has in mind disruptive evils such as rape mutilations, profound betrayals, or slow starvation, about which she asserts that no creaturely good or set of goods can offset or redeem the evil. So her project is arguably less lenient on Christianity than standard atheological objections. But as Adams's essay "Redemptive Suffering" argues, there may be plausible ways in which horrors can be transformed into organic elements of beatific relationship with God. Horrors resist creaturely remedies, and this motivates the assertion of divine transcendence aside from any medieval rationale: Adams's "central thesis . . . is that horrendous evils require defeat by nothing less than the goodness of God."³⁷

While Adams is dissatisfied with conversations about God and evil in analytic and modern philosophy, she does not spare pre-modern Christian traditions from criticism. For regardless of how she treats ideas of medieval Christian theologians on divine transcendence, Adams says their concepts of evil wrongly center on sin, rebellion, and just deserts. For instance, in his *De Libero Arbitrio*, Augustine argues that retributive justice is a primary way God resolves the disharmony moral evil introduces. In his *De Malo*, Aquinas likewise affirms that evil properly divides into fault and penalty where the latter encompasses our acts' natural consequences and the ignorance and weakness that God ordains as befitting the primeval couple's original sin. Adams counters that it is a mistake to focus on blame assignment.

Her theodicy criticizes morality on several grounds. A helpful analytical device for organizing these criticisms is the distinction between normative ethics and metaethics or as I shall put it, following Mackie, the distinction between first and second-order moral issues.³⁸ First-order issues involve the internal characteristics of a particular moral theory or all existing moral theories and questions about whether any such theories are correct. Second-order issues involve the more abstract, metaethical questions about the ontological and epistemological status of first-order moral views that cannot be settled at that level. Skepticism at one level does not entail skepticism at the other and likewise with belief at either level.

In "Theodicy without Blame," she advances a first-order criticism of moral responsibility and desert especially as Augustine views those concepts. She argues

³⁷ Adams 1999c, 155.

³⁸ Mackie 1977.

that morality has application only if intentional action, consequence, and desert are proportionate. However, horrendous evils vastly exceed even the most excellent human's ability to conceive fully of the evil consequences that she causes. Thus humans cannot be fully responsible for horrors and horrendous punishments would only magnify the evil. Adams criticizes second-order views of morality most prominently in essays such as "Sin as Uncleaness" (1991) and "Evil and the God-Who-Does-Nothing-In-Particular" (1996). She argues top-down that divine transcendence not only entails that God lacks any moral obligations to creatures, but also morality is a wholly conventional structure that divine fiat contingently uses to relate humans to the divine. She argues bottom-up that sin is human incompetence that results from how our biology regularly dominates our personality especially in environments of scarcity. Morality remains valid as a pragmatically necessary way of organizing communities. Her second-order criticism draws on a range of sources: Rudolf Otto, Mary Douglas, Julian of Norwich, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham, and broad developmental psychology. Removing morality from its pedestal frees Adams to investigate value theories that may better articulate what is so bad about horrors and how transcendent goodness might defeat them. She focuses on codes of purity and defilement and of honor and shame and on Christian Platonist understandings of aesthetic goodness.

Adams also revises traditional grammars of divine goodness throughout her writings and especially in her book *Horrendous Evils*. She argues that for God to be perfectly good and loving God must guarantee beatific intimacy to all actual persons. She also recommends soteriological plot-lines where various forms of sympathetic and mystical identification between humans and God defeat horrors. She reasons that this may require the divine nature to be passible or mutable; she asserts that if divine passibility is voluntary this preserves the understanding of divine transcendence that her project requires. She also reasons that Chalcedonian Christology will be helpful for conceiving how God may identify with sufferers and overcome the conflicts between our personal and animal natures.

Horrendous evils and divine transcendence do the heavy lifting, critical and constructive, in Adams's project. They "disrupt conventional approaches to evil in philosophy *and* theology alike" insofar as "the conditions of the possibility of

defeating horrors constitute [Adams's] rubric for interpreting creedal commitments and adjusting traditional eschatologies."³⁹ Accordingly, Adams states, "Where evil is the problem . . . ontological and value incommensuration [is] key."⁴⁰

3. Status of Question

No doctoral study to date makes Marilyn Adams's work on the problem of evil its primary subject. Two doctoral studies treat her work alongside other writers regarding "mystical perception" and "anti-theodicy" treatments of evil.⁴¹ One master's study treats Adams's views on philosophical method and the authority of Christian theological traditions.⁴² The other secondary literature on Adams is limited.

I include 29 secondary works (symposium responses, journal articles, and review essays) on Adams and theodicy in this study's reference list whose authors and/or engagement with Adams warrant inclusion.⁴³ The essays of Philip L. Quinn, Charles Hefling, Katherin A. Rogers, and Rowan Williams, make the most substantial criticisms. They correspondingly receive more attention than the other secondary works in this doctoral study. Notably, the latter three authors treat discussions of Scotus and Ockham, Augustine and Anselm, and Augustine and Aquinas, respectively, as important to evaluating Adams. However, they conform to contemporary conventions about publishable essay length, and this prevents them from engaging Adams in the systematic, detailed manner this thesis affords. None discusses divine transcendence, horrendous evils, or morality, in as much detail as this thesis. None investigates the relevance of Hume or of participation metaphysics to the value theory issues that Adams raises.

³⁹ Adams 2002a, 468; emphasis added. See also Adams 2002b, 223-24.

⁴⁰ Adams 1996a, 125.

⁴¹ Stevens 1998; Kerlin 2004.

⁴² Chandra 2002.

⁴³ Arp 2000; Basinger 1999; Boyd 1996; Cameron 1999; Chignell 1998; Chignell 2001; Cobb 1997; Davies 2001; Fales 1992; Goetz 2003; Hefling 2001; Jackson 1995; Kvanvig 1993; Nobis 2001; Nobis 2002; Placher 2002; Rogers 2002; Quinn 1993; Quinn 2001; Schneider 2004, 226-62; Seymour 1998; Shaw 2001; Steinfels 2001; Sutherland 1989; Tobin 1993; Tracy 1992; Wainwright 1988; Walls 1992; Williams 1996.

This study's reference list also includes 4 review essays on Adams's work *William Ockham* that recognize her accomplishment as a historian of philosophy but do not otherwise contribute to an evaluation of her writings on theodicy.⁴⁴

4. Outline of Thesis

This dissertation is limited to the metaphysics and value theory that inform Adams's theodicy. The study performs two principal tasks: one is exegetical and the other is critical. First, it explicates Marilyn McCord Adams's work on the problem of evil for an audience that is theologically educated but is not necessarily conversant with her broad set of writings. Adams's most well known writing on theodicy, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, consolidates her writings on evil from 1986 to 1999. However, it does not address what I represent as some important lacunae and difficulties in her prior argumentation, and its economical presentation itself sometimes omits (or perhaps abandons) important details that Adams provides elsewhere. So Adams's work on theodicy would benefit from interpretation and attention to her range of writings including those that are less well-known. Secondly, this study puts Adams's work on theodicy into fuller conversation with Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas and with recent scholarship on them.

My thesis is that Christian Platonists such as Augustine and Aquinas provide sufficient resources to address horrendous evils and divine-human incommensuration without necessitating Adams's revisions of traditional Christian teachings especially on sin and morality. This can be understood with respect to at least two rival interpretations of Adams. On one interpretation, Adams's major claims regarding theodicy have no deep attachments to medieval arguments. Instead, those claims are either modern in provenance or independent of any medieval antecedents such that distinctively modern considerations provide sufficient backing for those claims. A reader need not accept a medieval Neoplatonic or Aristotelian ontology to benefit from her work on evil. On another interpretation, Adams's project incorporates significant modern ideas (e.g., from Rudolf Otto and Mary Douglas and arguably from David Hume) but medievals such as Anselm of Canterbury, John Duns Scotus, and Julian of Norwich, are no less important. In either case, medieval Christian

⁴⁴ Etzkorn 1987; Freddoso 1991; Read 1990; Spade 1990.

Platonists elude Adams's critique of how analytic philosophers formulate the problem of evil. Such medievals also arguably present a viable alternative to Adams's constructive arguments.

Nevertheless, my criticisms of Adams rest on some general agreements with her ideas in "Problems of Evil" and other essays. I suggest that the debates on evil and God in analytic and modern philosophy take over thoroughly theological problematics but attempt to do the work with non-theological tools. From a Platonizing perspective, these attempts are unsatisfactory because the problematics, premises, and chains of reasoning are unified wholes. Though a detailed reacquaintance with theological traditions will not convince skeptics or heal the world, it does show the strength and coherence of at least some such traditions. It also reorients the debate away from piecemeal inquiries and towards articulating and comparing rival philosophical-theological systems. Accordingly, this study treats evil with respect to divine simplicity, parts and wholes, participation metaphysics, suffering, natural law, and moral sentimentalism.

This study has five chapters that cover metaphysics and value theory. Chapter 1 is primarily exegetical. It examines the extent to which Adams appeals to the ideas of medieval philosopher theologians respecting metaphysics and value theory. Chapter 2 scrutinizes her appeal to a "mainstream medieval" concept of divine transcendence. It focuses on the dispute between Aquinas and Scotus on the metaphysics of composites, divine simplicity, and divine infinity. The study turns then from metaphysics to value theory. Chapter 3 distinguishes her two accounts of horrendous evils: a psychological account and a parts-whole account. The next two chapters scrutinize Adams's criticism that moral frameworks are unhelpful tools for understanding God and evil. Chapter 4 disputes Adams's first-order argument that Augustinian morality, however coherent, cannot handle horrific suffering. The core issue is whether Augustine's top-down value theory resists her objection's bottom-up premises and her extrapolations from Augustine to analytic and modern philosophers of religion. Chapter 5 disputes her second-order criticism that morality lacks objective roots. The relevant questions are: whether her criticism's bottom-up premises from developmental psychology are as evident as Adams represents them; and whether her top-down premises from divine transcendence are consistent and

admit alternative reasoning for morality's objectivity. The conclusion of my dissertation discusses the potential points of convergence and divergence between medieval and modern approaches to God and evil.

5. Interpretive Approach

5.1 Locating a Textual Center

Consider two influential treatments of evil among analytic philosophers of religion: Plantinga's Free Will Defense initially published in a 1965 essay by that title and refined in *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon 1974) and Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy published in *Evil and the God of Love* (Harper & Row 1966). If we take these as standards, then it would be premature to say as a blurb for *Horrendous Evils* does that Marilyn Adams's monograph has "transformed" the discussion on theodicy.⁴⁵ Plantinga's work from three-decades ago still looms large in Anglo-American philosophy of religion in a way that Adams's two-decades of publication do not. Her work has persuaded some distinguished philosophers and theologians to include 'horrendous evils' in their lexicon.⁴⁶ It is less clear that these scholars adopt Adams's analysis of why horrific suffering is bad or her solutions. A key vehicle for this influence is her 1999 book *Horrendous Evils*, which consolidated her ideas from prior writings and made them accessible to a wider audience.

My study is limited to Adams's published work from 2004 and before. I treat her writings on evil and give secondary attention to her medievalist writings. The

⁴⁵ Adams says (personal conversation, March 14, 2006, in Toronto, Ontario) her assertion of universal salvation is an impediment within the Society of Christian Philosophers. David Basinger (1999, 367) corroborates the point in part: "This version [of gratuitous evil] is a serious problem only for those who affirm a very specific understanding of God's moral obligations to those who suffer: namely, that a good God is obligated to ensure . . . 'that the sufferings of any particular person are outweighed by the good which the suffering produces for that person'. But I am aware of no atheist . . . who assumes this to be the relevant moral obligations. Nor am I aware of any theist apart from Stump and Adams who does so." This view of divine goodness does not entail universalism, says Stump (1986), because a Dantean hell is a way God loves unrepentant sinners; Adams (1993c; 1999c, 44-49) rejects this.

⁴⁶ For instance, Adams's former colleague Miroslav Volf freely dropped the term in a lecture at the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh as did Jonathan L. Kvanvig in comments after his presentation on the problem of hell at Wheaton College. Excluding review essays and conference responses, writings by scholars other than Adams that directly address horrors are still few in number. The essays of Peter Van Inwagen (2000) "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils" and of John R. Schneider (2004) "Seeing God Where the Wild Things Are: An Essay on the Defeat of Horrendous Evil" are notable exceptions.

present section examines the relationship of Adams's book *Horrendous Evils* to her prior and later writings on evil. I do so in three parts. First, I shall consider the argument that *Horrendous Evils* is the interpretative center for Adams's project. Secondly, I shall list the hermeneutic challenges to finding a textual center and to locating that center as her monograph. Thirdly, I shall attempt to balance the importance of Adams's monograph and her essays by making the texts secondary to thematic development in her theodicy.

5.1.1 *Horrendous Evils* as the locus of interpretation

Given the role of *Horrendous Evils* in disseminating Adams's ideas, some might argue that it, rather than her earlier essays, should be the locus for scholarly interpretation of her project. While the book states that it derives many of its ideas from those prior articles, it also states that those ideas "have undergone significant development, transformation, and recontextualization among new materials."⁴⁷ Both considerations suggest that a fair, rigorous treatment of Adams would need to take seriously any such developments and the texts in which they occur.

5.1.2 Problems with prioritizing *Horrendous Evils*

I would argue that the importance of *Horrendous Evils* does not mean we should immediately and always privilege its statements among her writings. Consider four reasons. First, we may have valid hunches about which writings contain Adams's best arguments, but we cannot legitimately decide that question prior to studying the range of arguments she actually proposes. What ideas *Horrendous Evils* reworks and whether they emerge improved are questions requiring comparative study of her earlier and later works. If our interests are philosophical, then Adams's arguments are more important than her conclusions and we shall want to be familiar with all of her project's phases. Secondly, Adams's essays contain much detailed argument that does not appear in her book, so to treat her book as the 'controlling authority' on what Adams thinks is to suggest that those earlier details are *obiter dicta*. It would be uncharitable to Adams to think that some 400-500 pages of essays and contributions on evil can be distilled without loss into a 200-page book that itself studies new sources. If *Horrendous Evils* omits segments from Adams's prior essays, it may

⁴⁷ Adams 1999c, x.

indicate her abandonment of certain arguments or resources. Alternatively, it may reflect Adams's desire to write economically and for a wider audience than analytic philosophers of religion.⁴⁸ Thirdly, insofar as her earlier essays are deemed provisional in comparison with *Horrendous Evils*, there is no principled reason for denying that her 1999 book is provisional. For instance, it does not incorporate her 1999 Gifford Lectures *The Coherence of Christology*, her 2003 DuBose Lectures *Three Great Theological Ideas from the Middle Ages*, or her 2005 Warfield Lectures *The Coherence of Christology: God Enmattered and Enmattering*, all of which inform Adams's 2006 volume *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology*. Fourthly, by raising the profile of her ideas about theodicy, *Horrendous Evils* exposed her ideas to more focused scholarly debate. It would be uncharitable to think that established scholars who criticize her views (e.g., Charles Hefling, William Placher, Katherin Rogers, and Rowan Williams) have nothing critical or constructive to say about her reasoning, just as it would be uncharitable to think that Adams pays no heed to her critics. Such exchanges may be just as important as *Horrendous Evils* to understanding Adams's ideas.

Patrick Shaw's positive review of *Horrendous Evils* in *Religious Studies* underscores the first three reasons of the foregoing argument:

One must . . . admire the range of scholarship and grasp of detail which McCord Adams brings to the exposition of the argument, and her sympathetic treatment of different approaches to the problem. . . . If there is a problem for the reader, it is chiefly in the overall structure of the argument. The discussion is wide-ranging and is drawn from previously published papers, and it is not always easy to see how the different parts of the thesis fit together. . . . The final impression of the book is that it is a stage in the author's continuing wrestling with the problem of evil rather than her definitive solution. To the very end she is still grappling with various rival positions, always in the spirit of one seeking and finding in them contributions to the truth rather than sources of error.⁴⁹

Shaw reads Adams correctly, given her book's final paragraph which concludes:

⁴⁸ Adams 1999c, 4: "This book is addressed to a broad readership that includes both analytic philosophers of religion and Christian philosophers. . . . The basic intuitions that first motivate my critique and then inspire my constructive position are not technical in nature. . . . [They] are often voiced by those who suffer, by their intimates who keep watch, and by those who agonize over the ruinous harms they have caused. I hope this book may also be of use to this wider audience."

⁴⁹ Shaw 2001, 226, 227, 230.

I hope to have convinced many readers of my central theses—[1] that horrendous evils can be defeated by the Goodness of God within the framework of the individual participant’s life and [2] that Christian belief contains many resources with which to explain how this can be so. But I have also intended . . . to disrupt . . . a family of discussions. There is so much to be learned about the meaning of suffering and the Goodness of God, why should we ever stop where we are? If along the way I have said something to offend almost everybody, I can take satisfaction that my effort has succeeded in its aporetic aims!⁵⁰

An advantage of *Horrendous Evils* over Adams’s earlier essays is it enables us to track the work her central theses do across a wider set of topics. The book is also important because it engages with some new sources. However, the disruption, which Adams intends, includes the second thesis about the relevance of Christian belief. She argues against Plantinga and others that metaphysical and value-theory pluralism follows from the inherent limits of inquiry. Thus, there is no one problem of evil: the problem is manifold and varies with one’s philosophical starting points. So Adams knowingly widens the range of questions that discussants may put to her. The final paragraph of *Horrendous Evils* accordingly denies that its reworkings and fresh material constitute a terminus. The book is deliberately aporetic: it is less an exclusive, final formulation of Adams’s doctrines than it is a stimulus for debate.

5.1.3 Finding an interpretive balance

The commentator’s challenge is to avoid rendering his subject’s writings superfluous at any stage unless there are compelling grounds for doing so. If Adams’s writings did not deserve such deference then she may not merit study. However, I contend that a reader can appreciate Adams’s 1999 monograph *Horrendous Evils* but still think it does not belong at the center of discussion. Certain ideas that she formulates and justifies in various ways over time, rather than any one text, provide the center. The book is one of several important stages in Adams’s development and key foci for her readers. This thesis treats *Horrendous Evils* as such.

The structure of my dissertation follows the book’s thematic movement: from deconstruction of standard approaches to critical reformulation and from metaphysics to value theory. Yet my study draws more substantially on Adams’s many essays than on her monograph. For those essays supply unique, crucial details as Shaw

⁵⁰ Adams 1999c, 208; numbering is added.

suggests. Additionally, my study stops short of the constructive value theorization and solutions to the problem of horrors found in *Horrendous Evils*. For a doctoral study's guidelines limits what it can discuss in adequate detail. Moreover, Adams's lengthier, considered discussions of soteriology, Christology, and solutions to the problem of horrors appear in later writings including three lecture series from 1999-2005 that Adams delivered and which appeared in publications only from 2004 onward. Limiting my study to Adams's work through 2004 only allows scrutiny of her initial thoughts on those subjects, which limits the value of a critical analysis.

A follow-up objection is that if my reading does not center on Adams's 1999 monograph, then I may underplay and thus distort its importance. I remain open to debate about how her arguments fit together and which of her arguments are superior and which are unnecessary. However, I resist this criticism on two grounds. First, readers who emphasize the importance of Adams's single volume to recent philosophical and theological discussions—a correct perception—may underplay and distort the two-decades of Adams's intellectual production regarding evil. Safe ground is not easily found. Secondly, I think both excesses can be avoided—whether readers largely work backwards from her monograph or forwards from her essays—if we identify important elements of Adams's idiom and attend to their development across her writings. This tactic requires us to deal with all of Adams's texts on God and evil including *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. This should lessen the likelihood that any one text will skew our interpretation. I seek to balance the accessibility of this dissertation to Adams's readership with the requirements of careful and comprehensive study of her work.

5.2 Critical Approach

Eliciting agreement on how to characterize the Adams's central claims is difficult for two sets of reasons: first, there are the hermeneutic complexities that the prior section discusses; secondly, Adams confronts the contentious problems of human suffering and the possibility of damnation. I try to minimize objections to my reading through identifying recurring terms in Adams's idiom, providing extensive documentation, and often quoting rather than paraphrasing her. These details should make Adams more accessible to readers. It should also make the basis of my thesis about the medieval Neoplatonist alternatives to Adams more transparent and easily criticized.

So even if my argument about an Augustinian and Thomist alternative to Adams fails, readers of Adams may find my work to be a useful footing for further inquiry.

My criticism takes some of its cues from Adams herself who has published several pieces on method in philosophical theology and Christian philosophy.⁵¹ Many of these pieces combine historical inquiry with normative conclusions. I want to examine two statements from her essay “Reviving Philosophical Theology: Some Medieval Models” (1998) in which she draws five methodological lessons or theses from the great medievals. Its second thesis points to the following salutary example:

[M]ainstream medieval theology had the advantage of being explicitly philosophical. . . . With Anselm at Bec, in the schools at Paris or Oxford, theologians could not get away with grafting this theological notion onto that piece of philosophical machinery, using this metaphysical structure to interpret that doctrine, without minutely working through the consequences of this ‘marriage’, the better to weed out the contradictions and nuance the formulations. The result was . . . to develop doctrine with unparalleled rigor and detail.⁵²

Transparency and consistency are two desiderata that Adams adopts. She argues that the modern compartmentalization of philosophy and theology obstructs the philosophical theologian’s achievement of each desideratum. I think this is correct, though her project is subject to objections on both grounds.

Some of Adams’s constructive metaphysical arguments lack clear articulations of their premises and mediating chains of inference. For a philosophical theologian, this is crucial because the goal of faith seeking understanding is to be able to provide an explanatory account of our theological assertions (or at least an explanation of why further explanation is neither possible nor necessary) using what we know about creatures. Opacity in our premises or chains-of-reasoning frustrates the goal of explanation, and in Adams’s case it leaves her readers with difficult options. Readers

⁵¹ As Adams (1994, 153) states in her autobiographical essay, “My current study of Anselm is part of my effort to learn how doing philosophical theology itself is a form of prayer.” See her essays: “Problems of Evil: More Advice for Christian Philosophers” (Adams 1988a); “*Fides Quaerens Intellectum*: St. Anselm’s Method in Philosophical Theology” (Adams 1992a); “Philosophy and the Bible: the Areopagus Speech” (Adams 1992c); “Praying the *Proslogion*: Anselm’s Theological Method” (Adams 1995d); “Reviving Philosophical Theology: Some Medieval Models” (Adams 1998d); “Elegant Necessity, Prayerful Disputation: Method in *Cur Deus Homo*” (Adams 1999a); “History of Philosophy as Tutor in Christian Philosophy” (Adams 1999b).

⁵² Adams 1998d, 64.

can: (1) reconstruct the substance behind Adams's claims from her other writings; (2) conjecture about what sources underwrite an assertion of Adams; (3) treat unexplained claims by Adams as if they were self-warranting 'intuitions'; (4) accept such claims on Adams's authority. With some caveats, options (1) and (2) are preferable to (3) and (4) especially when the task is philosophical explanation.

One reason that Adams is an interesting thinker is that she develops ideas from diverse resources including philosophy, theology, psychology, and biblical studies. This has the advantage of opening up many lines of argument that more narrow inquiries such as those of Mackie and Plantinga do not. However, Adams's approach renders some of her key ideas about metaphysics and value-theory inconclusive. For instance, Adams openly admits that the purity and defilement calculi and honor codes that her constructive argument deploys are *prima facie* irreconcilable.⁵³ Nevertheless, it is only by being relatively clear about those two systems of value that Adams is able to say that each does some work in explaining horrors but that they still leave us with a puzzle.⁵⁴ Though Adams does not try to explain why such inconsistencies occur or to show the unity behind their multiplicity, she does admit later that her metaphysics commits her to such a unity.⁵⁵

The next passage is from the third thesis of "Reviving Philosophical Theology" and it is on the role of disputation:

[F]ollowing the lead of theology, the medieval university as a whole institutionalized disagreement as a tool of progress. Ideally (as in its Anselmian paradigm), *quaestio/disputatio* was not hostile or competitive in a pejorative sense, but a collaborative effort undertaken in the conviction that the truth is most likely to emerge when powerful minds do their best to discover what can

⁵³ Adams 1999c, 206-207.

⁵⁴ This undercuts one leg of Adams's critique of Plantinga and others (see section 2.1.2). She argues that insofar as the theologian and atheologian agree per Plantinga's FWD that the logical problem of evil fails they equivocate. For the theologian (Plantinga) supplements the good of freedom with theological goods whereas the atheologian (Mackie) excludes these. On this analysis, Adams's appeal to inconsistent value-theories that both explain what is bad about horrors and how God can be good to participants in horrors is analogous to what she criticizes in the FWD. However, her criticism that Plantinga et al. misrepresent Christianity in their defense by saddling God with obligations to creatures, etc., still works.

⁵⁵ Adams 2002b, 216-18.

be said on both sides of a question, persistently face up to each other's challenges until *viae mediae* are cleared.⁵⁶

In this thesis project, I take several philosophical and theological positions that put me in serious disagreement with Adams. However, the standard that she articulates, in the essay that I am considering and in conversations with her, emphasizes good, rigorous arguments rather than reaching the same conclusions. Even if there are significant problems with her argument, the scholarly community would remain indebted to Adams for the philosophical and theological sources and puzzles that she presents and that people must confront to argue effectively for or against her. In her response to Katherin A. Rogers's review essay, Adams writes:

Throughout her paper, Rogers is vigorous in warning my readers and me that my views on suffering and salvation constitute a decidedly minority report. I do not deny it. I do, however, wish to lodge a counter-warning. The Christian tradition is a wide and mighty river, charging energetically over rapids, full of under-, cross- and counter-currents. We show its vitality by our vigorous disagreement. But we will all be losers, even betray what we mean to serve, if we go beyond this to narrow the stream by counting each other out!⁵⁷

While I likely agree more with Rogers theologically, my view of good philosophical debate is closer to what Adams articulates in her reply and in her recommendation of the medieval *disputatio* as a model for today. Even if my criticisms compelled Adams to retract an argument for some claim, she or another thinker might well find a less vulnerable and more powerful argument than what I anticipated. Refutations are rarely conclusive. Good criticism should neither shut down debate nor make debate an end in itself. It should refine debate as a proximate end that is ordered to our apprehension of the truth. I hope that this study will facilitate a new round of arguments just as Adams's *Horrendous Evils* and her subsequent work have.

In that sense, my thesis's defense of Augustine and Aquinas is not extraneous to Adams's discussion. She uses Augustine as a foil to her constructive arguments in "Theodicy without Blame" and in *Horrendous Evils*. Whether her criticisms are successful is a question that Adams herself raises. Moreover, the respectability of Augustine and Aquinas versus Adams on horrors is an avenue of criticism pressed by Katherin Rogers, Charles Hefling, and Rowan Williams, albeit in a more limited

⁵⁶ Adams 1998d, 65.

⁵⁷ Adams 2002b, 230.

form than my study allows. Even if my readers are unpersuaded that Adams's theodicy depends in any deep or interesting way on medieval thinkers, Adams and her respondents render Augustinian and Thomist alternatives germane to her project on horrific suffering.

5.3 Note on Translations

All translations are the author's except where otherwise noted.

PART I.

METAPHYSICS: GOD AND EVIL

CHAPTER 1

CONTEMPORARY THEODICY AND MIEVEAL THEORIES OF DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE

1. Introduction

The first appearance of the term ‘incommensurate’ and its cognates in Marilyn Adams’s writings on theodicy occurs in her essay “Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil” (1986).¹ Prior to that piece, Adams’s publications on evil consisted of three essays criticizing some classical philosophical justifications for traditional Christian teachings about hell.² In those early writings, incommensuration—let us provisionally define that term as the state of having no common measure between at least two items of comparison—is never mentioned when discussing the distinction between creator and creatures or any other issues. In contrast, Adams’s philosophical theology after “Redemptive Suffering” makes divine-human incommensuration an indispensable theological consideration for topics including sin, salvation, revelation, and eschatology.³ Adams states, “Where evil is the problem . . . ontological and value incommensuration is key.”⁴ Indeed, her

¹ Adams 1986a, 262-63, 265.

² Adams 1971, 1975, 1976.

³ See Adams 1986a, 262-63, 265; Adams 1987a, 488, 490, 495, 501; Adams 1988a, 135-36; Adams 1988c, 236-37, 239; Adams 1989a, 306, 308-309; Adams 1991b, 291; Adams 1991c, 3, 7, 8, 10-12, 14, 18, 21; Adams 1992a, 409-10, 425-26; Adams 1992e, 450; Adams 1993a, 50, 58-59; Adams 1993b, 168-69, 175, 181-82; Adams 1993c, 308-10, 312; Adams 1995d, 16, 18, 21fn.52, 27, 30, 33; Adams 1995e, 93, 95, 97; Adams 1996a, 112-13, 115, 118, 122-23, 125; Adams 1997a, 183, 185-86; Adams 1998a, 470; Adams 1998b, 330; Adams 1998e, 96, 103; Adams 1999a, 396; Adams 1999c, 82-85, 91, 104, 147, 155-56, 163, 165-68, 189, 196, 206-7; Adams 2002a, 471; Adams 2002b, 216, 220; Adams 2004, 144. Approximately 131 uses of ‘incommensurate’ and its cognates appear on the above pages. This count includes neither her use of ‘commensurate’ and its cognates nor that of the ‘ontological size-gap’ which Adams uses synonymously with incommensuration.

⁴ Adams 1996a, 125.

writings on evil “rivet attention” on the evils of horrific individual sufferings in order “to draw out some implications of the *incommensurate* goodness of God.”⁵

‘Incommensuration’ already has philosophical currency, which it gained through post-positivist discussions about rival scientific conceptual schemes.⁶ However, Adams says that no particular contemporary source, whether in moral philosophy or in the philosophy of science, is a model for her terminology or the content she ascribes to such terms.⁷ Her writings on theodicy are consistent with this claim. So this chapter will focus instead on her comments on incommensuration in order to disambiguate this key concept. I shall argue that there is a substantial exegetical case for thinking that Adams’s concept of divine incommensuration takes its content primarily from those whom she calls “mainstream medieval” thinkers.⁸ This interpretation has consequences not only for how we understand Adams’s claims but also for what criticisms are appropriate to her claims. However, my interpretation is not without its challenges. Some senior scholars would argue that Adams’s project does not appropriate ideas from medieval philosophical theology substantively or at all. She articulates a theodicy that is modern in its essentials. Her medieval concerns are those of a historian of philosophy and theology and those ideas appear separately in her historical writings. So this chapter has the twofold-task to document that Adams draws on the great medievals respecting divine-human ontological incommensuration and to dissuade such skepticism.

Section 2 sketches some reasons for the objection. The two subsequent sections reply to the objection. Section 3 reviews the exegetical grounds for my proposed interpretation. Section 4 presents Adams’s methodological advice that the great medievals are relevant to contemporary constructive argument despite modern skepticism towards medieval ideas. Her counsel puts her in good company, albeit a minority, among contemporary scholars. Section 5 posits a secondary objection in

⁵ Adams 1996a, 118; emphasis in original.

⁶ Kuhn 1970, 103: “The normal-scientific tradition that emerges from a scientific revolution is not only incompatible but often incommensurable with that which has gone before.” See also “Bibliography on Incommensurability”; available from <http://sun1.rrzn.uni-hannover.de/zeww/inc.conf.litlist.html/>; Internet; accessed October 16, 2006.

⁷ Personal conversation, May 27, 2004, at Ocean Terminal, Edinburgh.

⁸ For example, see: Adams 1988c, 134; Adams 2004b, 132.

terms of an alternative reading of ontological incommensuration that allows for but is distinct from readings that emphasize medieval sources. The section concludes that there are tenable alternative readings of Adams, but they reduce her arguments to conjecture. Section 6 discusses the implications of this argument for my thesis.

2. A Preliminary Objection

Consider the following four reasons for the objection that Adams keeps her work as a medievalist separate from her work on theodicy. First, medieval ideas are not conspicuous elements in her monograph *Horrendous Evils* where one would expect to find such claims. This question of fact is the most important problem. Secondly, medieval thought is a marginal, suspect resource in contemporary constructive philosophy and theology. The interpretation I propose would commit Adams to untenable systems such as substance metaphysics or to pernicious theological claims such as God has no genuine obligations to creatures.⁹ Thirdly, Adams's value-theory and metaphysics is explicitly modern in that monograph and elsewhere. Her arguments focus on suffering rather than transgressions of divine law. They emphasize the importance of moral sympathy and first-hand experience, incorporate divine passibility into divine transcendence, stipulate that humans naturally are in a Hobbesian war where perceived and actual material scarcity play a pivotal role, and attenuate human teleology. Fourthly, the inevitable conflicts between the modern philosophies that Adams uses and the medieval systems would entail an unpalatable conclusion: a Regius Professor of Divinity in her life's work commits philosophical howlers. These are four reasons that it is not only unfounded but also undesirable to attribute a "mainstream medieval" interpretation of ontological incommensuration to Adams. The burden of proof rests upon the interpretation's proponents. I shall rebut the first reason in section 3 and undermine the remaining three reasons in section 4.

⁹ Adams 1998d, 60; Mascall 1974, 489; Kerr 2006, 147. In each piece, the authors resist the objection.

3. Medieval Metaphysics in Adams's Theodicy (1987-2004)

3.1 Three foundational essays (1987-88)

The immediate difficulty with the objection is that Adams frequently defies such clean divisions.¹⁰ In her foundational essay "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers" (1988), Adams distinguishes the commonplace that God is a moral agent from Christian views with an appeal to medieval thinkers.

I have noted how atheologians appear to take for granted what Pike makes explicit: *viz.*, that God, as personal, has obligations to do one thing rather than another in creation. God . . . is morally responsible for what goes on in it. . . . Such assumptions are plausible within a value-theory whose ontology contains persons all of whom are on an ontological par with each other. But *Christians do not view God this way*. On the contrary, *mainstream medieval theologians argued* that because of God's unique status in the ontology (as necessarily existent Creator) and value theory (as Supremely Valuable object) the divine persons are not drawn down into the network of rights and obligations among created persons . . . Christian reticence on this matter in discussions of the problem of evil has given the philosophical reading public the wrong impression.¹¹

This is part of Adams's general criticism of Plantinga and Pike that they limit themselves to relatively religion-neutral assumptions about ontology and value theory. She argues that this widespread approach "of Christian philosophers has inadvertently contributed an obscuring of Christian views of the matter".¹² She references the warrants for this criticism with the shorthand phrase "mainstream medieval theologians". That phrase is not a throwaway line, for earlier in the essay Adams specifies the medieval thinkers that put her contemporaries in question:

Whereas atheistic value-theories assign all persons a common ontological status as humans, and find it natural to see all persons as woven into a common web of rights and obligations, *medieval Christian thinkers* saw the divine persons as free from any such entanglements. (i) *Anselm* argued that obligation was correlated with ontological dependence, freedom from obligation with ontological independence. Consequently, God the Creator, who exists by the necessity of His nature, has no obligations to creatures, who nevertheless have unconditional obligations to Him. (ii) Others (e.g., *John Duns Scotus* and *William Ockham*) argued that since God is the most valuable being, right reason would dictate that He ought to be loved above all and for His own sake.

¹⁰ At the end of *Horrendous Evils*, Adams (1999c, 205-207) states this explicitly.

¹¹ Adams 1988, 134; emphasis added. The paper was delivered April 10, 1987, as the first Baker-Thompson Lecture on Christian Philosophy at the University of Dayton.

¹² Adams 1988c, 133.

Since God is personal, that dictum implies another: that created persons have an unconditional obligations to obey God's commands. On the other hand, God has no unconditional obligation to love any finite good and so has no obligations to created persons.¹³

Adams references particular medieval thinkers and theses. According to the objection I am considering, Adams personally rejects such medieval ideas as historically interesting but intellectually obsolete. However, if the objection's reading is correct, then Adams cannot honestly say on the grounds she submits that scholars such as Plantinga inadvertently mislead the philosophical reading public. A person might dispute this reply on several grounds. First, these passages may be unrepresentative. For they are consistent with Adams using the great medievals to display a range of options but not appropriating their ideas' contents. Secondly, her 1988 essay's use of medieval thinkers is superficial. A few sentences cannot establish my interpretation. Thirdly, even if the essay's appeal to medieval ideas is representative and thoughtful, Adams arguably abandons any such claims in her 1999 monograph on theodicy. The objection still stands. I shall take each rebuttal point in turn.

The first dispute is whether there is evidence that Adams's statements in her essay "Problems of Evil" (1988) are representative of her project from at least the mid- to late-1980s. Does Adams write contemporaneous essays (i) on medieval contributions to theodicy that (ii) have indicators for being thoughtful and deliberate? The essays "Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God" (1987) and "St. Anselm on the Goodness of God" (1987), offer a reasonable starting point. I shall initially show that each essay is a proper constituent of Adams's project on theodicy. Consider the following parallel passages from her 1988 essay's middle, constructive section and from her 1987 essays' introductions.

¹³ Adams 1988c, 128; emphasis added.

“Problems of Evil” (1988a)	“Duns Scotus on God” (1987a)	“St. Anselm on God” (1987b)
<p>“Over the last thirty years, analytical philosophers have treated the problem of evil primarily under its aspect as an argument against the existence of God, and understood its resolution primarily in terms of defense. Perhaps this was all the climate of those times allowed; the world of analytical philosophy has been hostile to theism, much less to Christianity. Further, much has been learned from these discussions, so lucidly epitomized in the writings of Pike and Plantinga” (133).</p>	<p>“Over the last thirty years or so, we analytic philosophers of religion have tended to grapple with the religious problem of suffering under the guise of the so-called ‘logical’ argument from evil for atheism . . . Many of us have agreed that solutions (if any) must take the form of generating logically possible morally sufficient reasons that even a perfect being might have for not preventing or eliminating evils . . . [M]any of us have conducted searches for such divine excuses from the posture of defense, seeking to undermine the charge of inconsistency by appeal to value-premises that the atheistic arguer qua atheist might accept (or at least not conclusively discredit) rather than to doctrinal claims peculiar to believers” (486).</p>	<p>“Over the last thirty years, analytic philosophers of religion have attended to the notion of Divine goodness almost exclusively in the context of discussions of the problem of evil, which calls it into question. Moreover, such discussions take for granted that Divine goodness is to be understood in terms of maximal <i>moral</i> goodness in some ‘ordinary’ sense, defined by mores recognizable by secular as well as religious moral theories. . . . [T]he accusation is that He treats created persons badly. And this is a failure of morals, not of taste, skill, or prudence” (75).</p>

The first sentence in each of Adams’s 1987 essays closely follows that of her 1988 essay. Each declares that it contributes to a common end: they aim to destabilize the consensus among analytic philosophers of religion that the problem of evil should be approached with religion-neutral tools. The tools that most trouble Adams are moral value theories. For many philosophers of religion think morality applies to all agents such that the divine nature essentially involves being a well behaved agent; they infer that a theodicy ought to explain how God can be well behaved although God creates and sustains a world involving evil and suffering. The articles continue:

“Problems of Evil” (1988a)	“Duns Scotus on God” (1987a)	“St. Anselm on God” (1987b)
“Nevertheless, the nearly exclusive preoccupation with defense on the part of Christian philosophers has inadvertently contributed to an obscuring of Christian views of the matter on several key points” (133).	“Whatever the merits of such defenses, they have the defect of leading us away from the religious question that gives rise to the atheistic argument in the first place. . . . I would like to suggest a methodological change of pace. What if some of us Christian philosophers shifted off the project of defense and tried to articulate what we actually believe about God’s goodness and how he is solving the problem of evil? Christian metaphysics would examine the goodness of God as he is, while soteriology would chart how God is being good <i>to</i> created persons” (487).	“I question this reasoning on two grounds. First, it is not obvious to me that morality is the kind of goodness that governs all personal relationships. According to many, morality has to do with mores, social customs or conventions . . . Theologically, the legitimacy of drawing God down into such networks of mutual obligations is highly questionable [a footnote here references “Problems of Evil” and “Duns Scotus on God”]. Second, it seems wrong to suppose that the categories of moral goodness, and, more broadly, <i>goodness to persons</i> are so independent of other departments of Value Theory as these discussions imply” (76).

So the three essays not only deconstruct the same target but they also have the same basic constructive end: Christian philosophers should recognize and avail themselves of metaphysics and value theories on which Christian theology has exercised a distinctive influence. This is especially appropriate on questions of theodicy. This second set of passages presents the idea negatively in comparison with the standard approaches of analytic philosophers and more positively in anticipation of examining Duns Scotus and Anselm. Notice also the continuity of Adams’s 1987-88 essays with her 1999 monograph. As I noted earlier, the final paragraph of *Horrendous Evils* distills her theodicy into two theses of which the second is: “Christian belief contains many resources with which to explain how” horrendous evils can be defeated.¹⁴

The foregoing analysis shows that Adams’s 1988 essay “Problems of Evil” and her 1987 essays “Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God” and “St. Anselm on the Goodness of God” are on the same page. Their appeal to the great medievals is representative of her project on several grounds. Adams constructs a three-essay base

¹⁴ Adams 1999c, 208; see quotation at fn.51 in this thesis’s introduction.

from medieval ideas for her theodicy. Additionally, her 1988 essay points broadly to the doctrine of God of two sets of medieval thinkers—on one hand Anselm and on the other Scotus and Ockham—and her 1987 essays develops the details. Such detail and division of labor suggest that these essays’ common ideas do real constructive work. The effort that Adams expends would be unnecessary if she was arguing a peripheral point. Lastly, Adams considers their ideas significant enough to present them in distinct venues: two essays appear in early issues of *Faith and Philosophy*, which is now a major journal for Christian philosophy, and the other appears in *Medioevo*, a specialist journal for medieval philosophy. Adams frames each essay as advice for constructive work on evil and the Christian God, and she thinks her arguments can withstand the scrutiny of historical and contemporary studies.

The second dispute is whether Adams’s use of the medievals is superficial. Consider again her 1987 essays on Duns Scotus and Anselm. Each essay’s introduction summarizes the intellectual resources that it will examine.

“Duns Scotus on God” (1987a)

“Although my purpose is methodological, my approach is historical. To illustrate my proposal, I shall begin by reviewing Duns Scotus’ many-faceted conception of divine goodness. I choose Scotus because he is perhaps less known than others, and because his picture of God’s creative and redemptive purpose is novel and stimulating. As we shall see, his resultant theology is not immune to the problem of evil. But our investigation will reidentify its location in the light of Christian soteriology” (487).

“St. Anselm on God” (1987b)

“St. Anselm’s approach is different. He begins with the firm conviction that God is the Good, appropriate relations to which (i.e., through clear knowledge and unequivocal love) will be overwhelmingly beatifying for humans. . . . Philosophically Anselm’s naturalism takes for granted that in the paradigm case various dimensions of value ultimately converge. Likewise, his methodology takes for granted that philosophical naturalism and Christian soteriology admit of deep integration which will disclose the goodness of God” (76).

Adams represents the ideas of Duns Scotus and Anselm as consequential both in themselves and respecting theodicy. Scotus offers analytic philosophers novel ideas about divine transcendence and its upshot for divine goodness and human salvation. An important measure of divine goodness is that God has no natural obligations to creatures whatsoever. Scotus infers that God is thus free respecting salvation itself *and* the means of atonement. Divine transcendence also shapes Anselm’s views on many matters: humanity’s final end in God; ethics grounded in the natural, ordered powers of creatures; the hierarchy and unity of value theory; and the congruence of nature and grace. However, Anselm famously argues that while God freely elects to

save humans from sin that the atonement's means are necessary. While Scotus and Anselm disagree on the latter point, they agree that divine transcendence is foundational to metaphysics, ethics, and theology. They also agree that divine transcendence includes perfection and excludes mutability and temporality.

This common concern of Scotus and Anselm arguably provides a serious alternative to the now common views that God is a moral agent and that evil is an intellectual problem respecting God's moral duties to creatures. Both medieval thinkers resolve the apparent inconsistency of God and evil by appealing to divine goodness's implications for our healing from sin and for divine blamelessness. They think the creaturely good of human freedom only accounts for our responsibility for sin. Major contemporary treatments largely ignore the former ideas and emphasize the explanatory power of creaturely goods such as freedom or moral and spiritual development. These differences between medieval and analytic philosophers render Adams's appeal to "mainstream medieval theologians" non-superficial.

A person might make a twofold rejoinder. "Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God" is explicitly methodological in purpose; and if the 1987-88 essays serve a common purpose, then arguably the other two essays are also methodological. Now methodological and doctrinal purposes are separable. So on one hand, even if Adams thinks the medievals have a better doctrine of God than most analytic philosophers of religion, it does not follow that she endorses medieval Neoplatonist and Aristotelian accounts. Mainstream analytic and medieval accounts of God may both be false. On the other hand, her methodological point may have merit even if in her 1999 monograph she abandons or brackets whatever doctrinal interest in the great medievals she expressed in the late 1980s. Denying that her mature project appropriates distinctively medieval doctrines does no obvious violence to her writings. Indeed, the first two chapters of *Horrendous Evils* draw heavily on "Problems of Evil"; but those chapters strikingly omit any appeal to the medievals regarding divine obligations, etc. The passages that I present from Adams's 1987-88 essays may answer the first and second disputes (i.e., whether texts that suggest Adams appropriates medieval doctrines are unrepresentative or inconsequential). However, those quotations leave the third dispute untouched (i.e., whether Adams abandons her medieval claims in her 1999 book). I shall now answer that argument.

3.2 Further Appeals to the Medievals (1989-2002)

Adams's work after 1988 maintains that understanding divine-human relationships in terms of morality is a mistake, and ontological incommensuration remains the key premise. Her essay "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians" (1993) contains a typical passage. Adams contrasts her approach to hell and evil with that of her interlocutors William Lane Craig and Richard Swinburne, writing:

I merely join the consensus of the great medieval and reformation theologians in recognizing that God and creatures are *ontologically incommensurate*. God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived, the infinite being, in relation to which finite creatures are "almost nothing". Drawing on social analogies, Anselm contends that God is so far above, so different in kind from us, as not to be enmeshed in merely human networks of rights and obligations; God is not the kind of thing that could be obligated in any way. Duns Scotus concurs, reasoning that God has no obligation to love creatures, because although the finite *goodness* of each provides a reason to love it, the fact of its *finitude* means that this reason is always defeasible, indeed negligible, almost nothing in comparison with the reason divine goodness has to love itself. Their conclusion is that God will not be *unjust* to created persons no matter what He does.¹⁵

The great philosopher theologians to whom Adams appeals in this passage from 1993 include two of the three medievals on whom she has substantial scholarship: Anselm, Duns Scotus, and Ockham. The passage is representative of her theodicy's use of the medievals as the following excerpts from 1991 to 2002 confirm.¹⁶

Fundamentally, sin is uncleanness arising from the incommensuration of Divine and created natures . . . The latter claim divides into two: that finite creatures are not naturally or intrinsically valuable enough to command God's love or to be or to do anything that could render him fitting honor. Developing the first point, the great Franciscan theologians, Scotus and Ockham, measure the gap between finite and infinite by their intuition that if it is rational to love valuable things in proportion to their intrinsic worth, yet it is not necessarily irrational not to love finite goods even a little bit, [then it is] not always foolish to love the lesser more than the greater. As for the second claim, to be a natural sign of value, by nature the currency of honor, things have to be sufficiently valuable in themselves. Cardboard crowns and plastic rings are not naturally suited to honor kings, but rather gold and diamonds.¹⁷

¹⁵ Adams 1993c, 308; emphasis in original.

¹⁶ See also: Adams 1987a, 488, 490; Adams 1988a, 128, 134; Adams 1998b, 330; Adams 2002b; Adams 2004b.

¹⁷ Adams 1991c, 21. Notably, this passage from her essay on theodicy "Sin as Uncleanness" references (ibid., 21, 27n.128) her medievalist essay "The Structure of Ockham's Moral Theory" (Adams 1986b, 5-6) with respect to the Oxford Franciscans and incommensuration.

I agree with the great medieval theologians (including Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham) that . . . our metaphysical puniness carries the consequence that God has no obligations to any creatures, even the personal ones. I thus share their intuition that the gap between infinite and finite is greater than that between personal and impersonal.¹⁸

Modern moral theory encourages us to treat the whole human race as one community. . . . My converse contention is that where agent-capacities are sufficiently incommensurate (as ours are with those of insects and worms and clams), the beings in question are not members of the same community. . . . Thus, though we are persons in the image of God, we are such distant mirrors as not to have any rights against God. Likewise, as the great medieval Franciscans acknowledged, if God has any obligations, they are to Godself.¹⁹

Parties to the debate Mackie spawned seem mostly to agree with each other both that *only* persons are moral agents, and that *any and all* persons—no matter whether human, angelic, or Divine—are moral agents, networked into a system of mutual rights and obligations. One sure way to skirt his logical problem of evil . . . would be to deny that God is personal at all (in the sense that an agency works through thought and choice). . . . Another way is to deny that persons are necessarily moral agents. Medieval Christian theologians such as Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, did not begin from below, with human agency, and then conceive of God’s agency to be the same kind, so that Divine and human capacities for thought and choice differ only in degree. Rather they started at the top, assigning to God both the simplicity, immutability, and eternity of Plotinus’s One and the paradigmatic thought of Plotinus’s Intelligence as well.²⁰

Although my book *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Cornell University Press, 1999) takes its polemical starting point from discussions of the problem of evil by analytic philosophers from the 1950s onwards, it has an underlying theological perspective which begins with Job (and shades of 4 Ezra), continues with Christology, and stretches forward to the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. My medieval friends—Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham—reinforce and give philosophical interpretation to Job’s ‘size-gap’ between God and creatures.²¹

The first three quotations in this quintet are from her essays “Sin as Uncleaness” (1991), “God and Evil: Polarities of a Problem” (1993), and “Evil-and-the-God-Who-Does-Nothing-In-Particular” (1996). These passages minimize the relevance of moral frameworks to theodicy on the basis of medieval philosophical arguments

¹⁸ Adams 1993b, 180-81.

¹⁹ Adams 1996a, 122.

²⁰ Adams 1999c, 64; cf. *ibid.*, 140.

²¹ Adams 2002a, 468.

from divine transcendence. Adams's argument that sin is metaphysical uncleanness takes as a central premise the Oxford Franciscans' idea that divine transcendence renders most precepts of natural law ethics dispensable. The final two quotations in the quintet are from *Horrendous Evils* (1999) and from Adams's essay "Horrors in Theological Context" (2002) which responds to William Placher's critique of her monograph. Reviewing those two quotations in succession is helpful because the fifth quotation indicates the fourth is not an offhanded historical observation. Adams views the fourth as setting forth a credible, philosophical claim that she asserts.

3.3 Appeals to the Medievals after Horrendous Evils (2002-2004)

How the preceding texts apply to our inquiry is not clear-cut. As I have noted, Adams is reserved in *Horrendous Evils* about how she regards medieval theories of divine transcendence. The book's first and second chapters draw on her 1988 essay "Problems of Evil" but leave aside its claims about the corrective that "mainstream medieval theologians" offer. Given such reticence, perhaps the fifth quotation in the quintet above, from Adams's 2002 reply to Placher's review essay, represents an inconsequential appeal to medieval ideas. For argument's sake, I shall grant that the two sets of quotations from 1987-2002 do not settle matters. Even so, those texts provide a backdrop against which two additional texts do settle matters.

The first text is her other reply essay titled "Neglected Values, Shrunken Agents, Happy Endings" (2002), which answers Katherin A. Rogers's review essay on *Horrendous Evils*. I generally view Adams's 2002 reply essays as 'controlling authorities' in the interpretation of *Horrendous Evils*. Those essays are subsequent to and expressly address how to interpret her 1999 book on theodicy. The Adams-Rogers exchange is especially useful here because it examines whether *Horrendous Evils* undercuts medieval metaphysical theologies of sin. The second text is "The Metaphysical Size Gap" (2004). It is the first of her three DuBose Lectures "Three Great Theological Ideas from the Middle Ages", which she delivered in 2003 and published in 2004. Their language underscores how deliberately Adams appropriates distinctively medieval claims in her theodicy. The first lecture is her project's only writing that focuses on ontological incommensuration prior to 2004.

Adams's reply to Rogers suggests that medieval views of God's nature are important to contemporary theodicy because of their implications for value-theory

and soteriology. The trio of medieval theologians she identifies as significant are the same that she invokes in “Problems of Evil”: Anselm, Scotus, and Ockham. The following passages are representative of her appeals in “Neglected Values”.

Certainly in my book and earlier articles, I offer readers plenty of reasons to doubt my commitment to *moral* realism. . . . At the same time, I meant to take a page from Anselm in endorsing a metaphysical realism about what medievals sometimes call *natural goodness*. Without worrying the now-controversial concept of nature, I have—like Anselm—taken it for granted that God is Goodness Itself, that natures form an excellence hierarchy, that the metaphysical size-gap between Divine and other natures is so vast that created natures are almost nothing although they are yet something insofar as they are somehow Godlike. Without entering into the vexed debate on just how to draw the line between realism and anti-realism, I was assuming such comparative natural excellences to be facts of the matter, prior in order of explanation to any human thoughts or conventions about it. I also supposed that the goodness of Divine and created natures (unlike the existence of the latter) was not a product of contingent Divine choice. My proposed solutions to the problem of horrors rest on a variety of theses—that God is incommensurate Goodness, that appropriate intimacy with God is incommensurately good-for created persons, that one proper function of created persons is meaning-making, that personal animality cannot be properly coordinated without functional collaboration with the Inner Teacher—claims that I understood to be facts about (what Rogers calls) “absolutely objective” facts of the matter—facts about what God is and what human beings are.²²

As to my wiggle-worm analogy [which holds that if a worm’s actions are neither more or less appropriate respecting humans, then so much more is the case respecting our actions and a transcendent God] . . . I meant to be signing on to the Franciscan appreciation that finite goods cannot command the Divine will, that none is intrinsically worthy of Divine acceptance—a point that Scotus presses and that Ockham dramatizes with his declaration that God would do nothing wrong in damning those who loved and conferring eternal beatitude on those who hated God most! . . . Bottom up, however, the perspective is different. I have gone along with the Anselmian idea that all creatable natures have a Godward thrust—find God compelling in the (alternative) sense that they just are imperfect ways of being Godlike. Thus, there is something intrinsically and naturally appropriate for worms in aiming Godward.²³

Adams states that some of her theodicy’s key assumptions are distinctively medieval. They carry significant consequences for metaphysics, value-theory, and theology. She concurs with the medieval harmonization of the biblical and conciliar language that Latin Christian tradition associates with God and the Platonic Idea of the Good

²² Adams 2002b, 216; emphasis in original.

²³ Adams 2002b, 219-20; referencing Adams 1999c, 95.

in which all forms and finite goods find unity and are virtually present. She asserts the related doctrine of an excellence hierarchy where God is both the hierarchy's apex and different in kind from all other members of the hierarchy. These doctrines are facts of the matter according to Adams, and their anthropological implications are among her theodicy's central theses. She also asserts a Franciscan Aristotelian interpretation of the excellence hierarchy where the precepts of natural law that follow from human nature are a means to approach God although God can set aside natural law when determining rewards and punishments of creatures.

Adams similarly indicates that her theodicy's use of the medievals is not just heuristic or methodological in her first DuBose Lecture. She "commends" the great medievals' metaphysical views on divine transcendence as "great ideas" and a "true cosmological picture." In Adams's judgment, these ideas are "necessary" for "true and wholesome philosophical theology." She also says that the metaphysical size-gap is "dear to my heart" because it entails that "God can defeat horrors."

[T]he thesis that God is of a different metaphysical category from any and every creature . . . has been taken in many different and incompatible philosophical and theological directions. My point is not that the metaphysical size gap is *sufficient* for true and wholesome philosophical theology, but that it is *necessary*. My purpose is to commend (what I shall—perhaps contentiously—call) a "mainstream medieval" interpretation of it and to press my case for its systematic importance with examples from medieval thought. . . . [T]he mainstream medieval approach on which I want to focus (an approach sponsored by Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham) invests the ultimate explainer with personality—that is, God functions by thought and will. . . .

The personified metaphysical gap is a great theological idea because it focuses a distinctive and—I would say—true cosmological picture. Equally impressive and of no less moment is the range of soteriological consequences to which it is thought to give rise. . . .

The personified metaphysical size gap is dear to my heart because it makes God big enough to solve the problem of horrendous evils. . . . [D]ivine goodness is incommensurate with both merely created goods and merely created evils. Because the metaphysical size gap is *personalized*, that we can relate to the incommensurate good person-to-person(s), and have personal intimacy with God that is on the whole and in the end beatific, is incommensurately good for us. This means that God can defeat horrors.²⁴

²⁴ Adams 2004b, 132-33, 137, 143-44 (emphasis in original).

Though the passage is a composite, it accurately represents Adams's first lecture "The Metaphysical Size Gap" and the assumptions operative in her subsequent lectures.²⁵ Her first lecture traces the implications of medieval theories of divine transcendence for several topics: God's personality and knowability; Christian soteriology (sin, grace, human agency, evil's origin); and how God may defeat horrendous evils. Her later lectures expand on these ideas when discussing medieval teachings on divine courtesy to personal creatures and medieval Christology.

"Neglected Values" and "The Metaphysical Size Gap" preclude the readings that I consider in section 3.1. Those readings contend that Adams's appeals to medieval philosophical theology are unrepresentative and superficial or that Adams abandons those appeals in *Horrendous Evils* and afterwards. In the context of the full range of Adams's writings on theodicy the passages in the present section about her medieval metaphysical and value-theory assumptions seem fitting. However, it is understandable that a scholar such as Rogers did not recognize in her review essay that all of these medieval ideas are in play in *Horrendous Evils*. Adams's 200-page book sometimes omits the assumptions of her arguments to which she more easily points in the 400-500 pages of writing theodicy that Adams published through 1998. The literary genre of the short monograph, the broader audience at which Adams aims, and the burden of treating fresh topics, all contribute the compressed argumentation in *Horrendous Evils*. This situation illustrates why I maintain in this thesis's introduction what Patrick Shaw suggests: the book is an important stage in Adams's project, but it should be read alongside her other work.

4. Medieval Approaches to Modern Problems

The preceding section documents how Adams drafts the great medievals into the service of contemporary philosophical theology. However, it does not address the

²⁵ The first lecture "The Metaphysical Size Gap" has 58 footnotes that reference the following figures listed in descending frequency: Julian of Norwich (24), Anselm (14), Duns Scotus (11), Aquinas (3), Plotinus (1), Pseudo-Dionysius (1), Maimonides (1), R. Otto (1), Tillich (1), M. Adams (1). The latter two lectures are consistent with this focus on medieval theologians. "Courtesy, Human and Divine" has 117 footnotes: Julian (59), Bonaventure (26), Thomas of Celano (15), Maurice Keen (8), Cicero (7), St. Francis (1), Mary Blundell (1). "The Primacy of Christ" has 64 footnotes: Grosseteste (18), Scotus (18), Bonaventure (11), Anselm (9), Aquinas (5), James McEvoy (1), Zach Hayes (1), R. Chisholm (1). The number of uses of 'horrors' or 'horrendous evils' in her lectures' bodies are as follows: "The Metaphysical Size Gap" (17); "The Primacy of Christ" (18).

resistance that this move will encounter from many in her audience. Medieval Platonist and Aristotelian philosophies structure the thought of a decided minority of Anglo-American analytic philosophers. This is true even among the subset who are Christians and philosophical theologians. For instance, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff hold to the ‘great things of the gospels’, as Plantinga sometimes puts it, and are highly influential on contemporary Anglo-American Christian philosophy. Although they give the great medieval theologians their due as rigorous thinkers, Plantinga and Wolterstorff openly reject medieval metaphysical theologies on philosophical and theological grounds.²⁶ Knowing what Adams espouses about incommensuration and the medievals does not settle how we ought to handle those ideas. Where a subject’s claims would result in inconsistencies or absurdities, her interpreter may be well justified in circumventing those claims.

Her writings on method in Christian philosophy and philosophical theology are relevant here. Adams opines that medieval ideas are philosophically fruitful despite admitting that medieval ideas are marginal today and invite skepticism. Attenuating any distinctively medieval ideas in her philosophical theology is no minor repair. After making that argument, I briefly review three distinguished scholars’ related opinions. They suggest that while Adams’s stance regarding medieval metaphysical and religious ideas puts her in the minority, it is a respectable minority.

4.1 Medieval Remedies to Modern Biases

Adams conceived of her project with attention to the contrast between contemporary analytic philosophy of religion and medieval philosophical theology. She argues in three essays on theodicy from 1987-88 that analytic philosophy has discouraged many Anglo-American Christian philosophers from enriching their metaphysics and value-theories with theological ideas. Most solutions to the problem of evil in analytic philosophy strive for religion-neutral theorization. She elaborates elsewhere that modern habits of mind compartmentalize disciplines such as philosophy and theology. Among mid-twentieth century analytic philosophers, “[e]mpiricist and verificationist biases” led to skepticism about metaphysics and non-observables or to

²⁶ Plantinga 1980; Wolterstorff 1982; Wolterstorff 1988; Wolterstorff 1991. See also Burrell 2004, 3-19, 129-42.

“antirealist construal[s]” of religion.²⁷ That history still influences what ideas analytic philosophers tolerate when they debate concepts of God. Her autobiographical essay “Love of Learning, Reality of God” (1994) tells how her medievalist studies helped correct such defects in her training as an analytic philosopher. For medieval Christian thinkers understood theology to guide and to complete their philosophical inquiries. She writes, “Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham were real, first-rate philosophers from whom one might learn something different from what Gilbert Ryle had to say.”²⁸

Medieval philosophical theology is sufficiently relevant to contemporary work, in Adams’s judgment, that she repeatedly recommends its study to the Christian philosophical community. In her 1993 Georgetown University symposium paper “History of Philosophy as Tutor of Christian Philosophy”, published in 1999, she initially suggests immersion in the wider history of philosophy as an antidote to the aforementioned problems in analytic philosophy. Adams then writes more candidly:

This time my shamelessly biased suggestion is more specific, but once again responds to Gilson’s cue: some—perhaps many or most, but not all—of us Christians who grew up philosophically in the analytic school will be helped in recovering our identity as Christian philosophers by putting ourselves to school in the history of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages. . . . Spanning a thousand years, their coterie offers variety both of method and of substance. Even where our philosophical sympathies are wildly divergent, chances are good that we will be able to find some whose conception of their project we can comfortably try on for size and perhaps even borrow or share.²⁹

Adams agrees with Étienne Gilson on the viability of a Christian philosophy and the importance of medieval thought to this project. However, her paper re-characterizes Gilson’s proposal for the majority of western philosophers today who, like her, reject classical theories of knowledge. Such theories hold that a good philosophical argument’s conclusions follow necessarily from self-evident premises and forms of inference and will compel the assent of all rational persons (with qualifications about improper education or cognitive function). The near-consensus today in analytic

²⁷ Adams 1999b, 50-51. Cf. Adams 1994, 147-48.

²⁸ See Adams 1994, 149.

²⁹ Adams 1999b, 54. See also Adams 1992a, Adams 1995b, Adams 1998d, Adams 1999a, Adams 1999b.

philosophy against classical epistemologies is that claims are rational only versus some set of fundamentally controversial premises.

What I mean when I say I am a skeptic is that I do not think that, if we were all basically careful in formulating our beliefs, all fundamental disagreements in philosophy could be settled. . . . I guess that is part of what motivates . . . my lack of interest in St. Thomas's division [between natural reason and sacred revelation]. I have the impression that he was much more optimistic than I am about what "natural light" could yield, about the amount of agreement there could be about interesting philosophical claims. Once you begin to think that fundamental philosophical disagreements might be unresolvable, that proofs are not available to us, then the idea that what we should be trying to do is develop our intuitions into coherent theories as best we can has a little more appeal. At that point, a concern for what is provable and what is not drops away, because you don't think the starting points are provable.³⁰

Her paper correspondingly states that, "For better or worse, philosophy is 'trendy', blown by doctrinal winds."³¹ W. V. O. Quine, David Lewis, David Armstrong, Robert Nozick, and Alvin Plantinga, are among the recent philosophers who articulate variants of these arguments. It logically allows *inter alia* that medieval doctrines, such as those that Adams asserts, may be viable as long as a proponent makes 'adequate' mutual adjustments in the web of the medieval and non-medieval ideas that she espouses. If Adams is to be convicted of a mistake in espousing medieval metaphysical doctrines, then her critics' reasoning must contend with her skepticism about starting points. Nevertheless, Adams has a non-perspectival understanding of truth. She calls her position "skeptical realism" in that while she thinks no interesting arguments will compel everyone's assent, she also rejects instrumentalism: "I count myself a realist about philosophical/theological theories in that I believe (contrary to Carnap) there is some fact of the matter, prior to and independently of what we think, believe, or conceive of in our theories."³² She appeals to epistemic desiderata such as simplicity, consistency, fecundity, and so forth. Her position raises interesting difficulties regarding rationality, true opinion, knowledge, and impediments thereto, but I shall set them aside here.

³⁰ Adams 1999b, 57; cf. Adams 1988a, 138-39.

³¹ Adams 1999b, 51.

³² Adams 1999b, 40.

Though Adams is realistic about how her proposal would be received, she does not yield. The first long passage from Adams's symposium paper distinguishes what medieval thinkers can teach us about "method" and about "substance." The latter term is what her conference paper "Reviving Philosophical Theology: Some Medieval Models" (1998) refers to as the "material conclusions" of the medievals: "e.g., the two-natures/one supposit doctrine of Christology, transubstantiation as an interpretation of the eucharist, or hylomorphism as a solution to the mind-body problem".³³ Although these papers presuppose that some non-trivial, medieval ideas may be agreeable to Christian analytic philosophers, Adams admits that many would find their "philosophical sympathies" are "wildly divergent" from those of the great medievals. Her 1998 paper's first paragraph articulates this pointedly:

Generally speaking, Protestant theology participates in a culture that rejects the Middle Ages with its Aristotelian underpinnings, and has tended to see medieval theology as inimical at worst and irrelevant at best. 'Substance-metaphysics' is widely declaimed as teetering between the incredible and the unintelligible. Its putative hierarchical tendencies and monarchial models are regularly blamed for social inequalities, at the same time its scholastic aridity is accused of practical irrelevance. Its God is alternately too aloof or self-determined the wrong way; its Divine portraits colored by metaphysical deductions alien to the Bible rather than by Scripture read through the lens of the distinctive experience of oppressed peoples. Either its philosophies are wrong, or philosophy itself is irrelevant. For some theological orthodoxies call for a return to the Bible, while fresh starts would take up the tools of social anthropology and economics instead of philosophy.

However, in the text that immediately follows, Adams refuses the objection.

As an Anglican, I am entitled, sometimes expected to participate in this reaction. Unsurprisingly, as an Anglo-catholic medievalist, who straddles both sides of the Reformation divide, I must decline. My own interest is in the contemporary flourishing of philosophical theology. My contrary contention is that medieval theology offers contemporary theologians models that are at once attractive and corrective. . . . I wish to single out as collectively paradigmatic and worthy of contemporary emulation, four great thinkers—Sts. Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, the Blessed John Duns Scotus, and William Ockham—who integrate philosophy with theology, philosophize their way through theological syllabi, albeit in somewhat different ways.³⁴

Adams admits her "Franciscan sympathies" and says "I have learned much at the level of content from my engagement with these four thinkers" and "hope to

³³ Adams 1998d, 61.

³⁴ Adams 1998d, 60. Cf. Mascall 1974, 489; Kerr 2006, 147.

champion medieval interpretations of Chalcedon on another occasion (in my Gifford Lectures).”³⁵ In *Horrendous Evils*, she further states that, “My Christological approach appeals to substance-ontology”.³⁶ However, her 1998 paper on method does not recommend any of the great medieval theologians’ “material conclusions” but only “some broadly methodological features that these thinkers share”.³⁷ None of her papers on method defends “substance-ontology” philosophically. She also says that “slavish adherence” to their material conclusions is not sensible: treating the great medievals as infallible authorities would both misrepresent their disputations, respecting its value to us and how the doctors represent their arguments, and further tax the patience of her intended audience.³⁸

Adams’s project’s medieval interests are not careless or simplistic. She has read modern philosophers such as Hume and Kant who rigorously and fundamentally challenge medieval Platonist and Aristotelian philosophies. She recognizes that medieval ideas are peripheral in contemporary constructive philosophy and philosophical theology. The balance she wants to strike is complex. Her writings do not conceive of medieval contributions to contemporary argument in terms of attending exclusively to medieval ideas or to one medieval thinker (as her 1998 essay on method indicates) or in terms of rejecting modern studies in social anthropology, empirical psychology, biblical studies, or analytic philosophy (as her constructive writings demonstrate). Adams is an eclectic reader. Nevertheless, her project openly prioritizes medieval contributions to modern theodicy in writings such as her DuBose Lectures and her reply to Katherin Rogers.

4.2 Medieval Ideas in Recent Constructive Philosophy and Theology

Although medieval resources are peripheral in contemporary analytic philosophy, Adams’s attention to the medievals puts her in good company. Her essay “Praying the *Proslogion*: Anselm’s Theological Method” (1995) also promotes the great medievals as tutors for contemporary philosophy. Therein she writes:

³⁵ Adams 1998d, 61.

³⁶ Adams 1999c, 179; she contrast her position with that of “process thinkers [who] advance a metaphysics of events or occasions” (ibid.).

³⁷ Adams 1998d, 61.

³⁸ Adams 1998d, 61.

In 1978, the founding of the Society of Christian Philosophers and the adoption of its motto, “*Fides quaerens intellectum*” (faith in search of understanding), challenged its members to reassess the relationship of faith and philosophy. The thoroughly secular atmosphere of mid-twentieth-century British-American analytic philosophy had fostered compartmentalization. It was natural for some of us to leapfrog back to the middle ages for alternative models. Many take their inspiration from Aquinas . . . I reach back to Anselm of Canterbury, the author of our slogan, and to the *Proslogion*, alternatively entitled thereby. . . . Anselm’s cognitive psychology contrasts with that of later medieval Aristotelians, because it denies the existence of “unaided natural reason” and treats all creative problem solving as essentially collaborative.³⁹

When Adams says that many of her colleagues take inspiration from Aquinas, she refers to persons who contributed for instance to the recent journal symposiums in *The Monist* (“Analytical Thomism,” 1997) and *New Blackfriars* (“Thomists and the Future of Catholic Philosophy,” 1999) and several authors in the recent Aquinas symposium in *Modern Theology* (“Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-First Century,” 2004). She also thereby refers to contributors to edited volumes including *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue* (Ashgate 2006). The forty-eight authors in these texts include John Haldane, Ralph McInerny, Fergus Kerr OP, David Burrell CSC, Eleonore Stump, Brian Davies OP, Denys Turner, and Hilary Putnam. (Putnam says at most he is an ‘Analytic Maimonidean’.) Their forerunners include Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Anthony Kenny, Herbert McCabe, and Norman Kretzmann. Some similar analytically trained philosophers such as Allan Wolter OFM, Thomas Williams, and Richard Cross, like Adams, look to Scotus. In both cases, medieval Aristotelians tend to dominate their interests. Adams is somewhat unique among such philosophers with her Anselmian emphasis. Now sociological context cannot establish whether these thinkers are mistaken or correct about the relevance and viability of distinctively medieval ideas. However, it does matter to how ought we to interpret Adams. If we treat distinctively medieval ideas as an afterthought in Adams, then we should be willing to do so with all these thinkers. However, the latter move would misrepresent relationships within a family of projects in recent analytic philosophy and would be no more legitimate than were we to excise summarily Quine’s controversial ideas within the projects he inspired.

³⁹ Adams 1995d, 13, 37.

More detailed comparisons of Adams's claims with those of three distinguished, contemporary scholars in philosophy and theology provides perspective. My aim here is again not to advance a philosophical justification for some version of substance metaphysics. I merely want to balance the anomalous and potentially unreasonable appearance of Adams's claims.

Theodore Scaltsas is Professor of Ancient Philosophy at University of Edinburgh. In writings including *Substances and Universals in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Cornell 1994) and "Is a Whole Identical to its Parts?" (*Mind* 1990), Scaltsas advances a reading of Aristotle on non-mereological composition.⁴⁰ Such composition involves the substantial unity of constituents as in the limbs of a human body as distinguished from the aggregation of parts as in some logs in a cord of firewood. Scaltsas defends the idea against thinkers including David Armstrong and the late David Lewis who are among the most influential analytic metaphysicians and whose respective views on states-of-affairs and on classes exclude Aristotelian substances. Scaltsas uses his interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics of substance to handle problems that occupy his interlocutors concerning entities in modern experimental science. His work on Aristotelian metaphysics is not merely historical but engages major contemporary metaphysicians constructively.

The late Eric Mascall was an Anglo-catholic theologian at Oxford University and King's College London and the 1970 Gifford Lecturer at University of Edinburgh. He considered Aquinas's substance metaphysics to be philosophically viable. In a 1974 Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies symposium contribution titled "Guidelines from St. Thomas for Theology Today", Mascall writes:

It would not be difficult to list a great number of individual points which St. Thomas may have much to teach the world of the late twentieth century and to defend him against criticism and misunderstandings. For example, in reply to the common accusation that the category of substance ought to be abandoned as static and outmoded, it could plausibly be affirmed that, substance in its philosophical sense being equivalent to the Greek *ousia* or "being", it is difficult to see how one can do without it, and that if (which is doubtful) St. Thomas's doctrine of substance was too static, what is needed is not no doctrine of substance but a more dynamic one.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Scaltsas 1990; Scaltsas 1994.

⁴¹ Mascall 1974, 501.

This opinion is noteworthy not only because of Mascall's accomplishment in philosophical theology and historical theology but also because he was conversant with science and mathematics. Mascall was a Wrangler at Cambridge and studied quantum mechanics and relativity under George Birtwistle at Pembroke College. Mascall also delivered the 1956 Bampton Lectures which were published that year in the well-received volume *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (Longmans). He was not persuaded that modern philosophy and experimental and theoretical sciences discredit substance metaphysics and related theologies, although he was in a better position than most scholars to assess the different sides of that proposition.

As a counterpoint, consider Hilary Putnam's paper for the 1997 "Analytical Thomism" symposium in *The Monist*. Putnam is the John Cogan University Professor Emeritus at Harvard University and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. Putnam ranks with Quine and Lewis, and his pragmatist philosophy is far removed from Aquinas. In his paper, he recounts, "[A] distinguished Christian philosopher told me that he thought that the problem with predication with respect to God was the result of a sort of 'hang up' that the medievals had about God's 'unity', and that we should simply drop the idea that we have to think of God in that way."⁴² Surprisingly, Putnam argues that these medievals offer a corrective to his Christian interlocutor: "Frankly, this conception of God—if it really was my interlocutor's—the conception of God as a being undergoing change in time—seems to me unacceptably anthropomorphic. It certainly would have seemed so to Maimonides or to Thomas Aquinas."⁴³ While rejecting the philosophical account that Aquinas and Maimonides use to explain divine simplicity, Putnam argues that they have "good religious reasons" for denying that God has distinct attributes and is subject to change and temporal sequence.⁴⁴

Putnam does not address whether the claim that 'such properties are appropriate to humans but not to God' requires a philosophical basis stronger than his pragmatism can provide, and if so what bases would be adequate. Nonetheless, he complicates the modern dismissals of medieval metaphysical theologies as obsolete.

⁴² Putnam 1997, 493.

⁴³ Putnam 1997, 493-94.

⁴⁴ Putnam 1997, 494.

For he thinks such moves distract us from salutary religious lessons. Moreover, his wider pragmatist writings indicate that the typical rational grounds of modern objections to medieval theories are no surer than the latter theories. The antecedents to such objections are often popular notions of what modern science establishes about reality: for instance, natures are “dynamic” and “complexes of events related together in space-time” and “event and relation” are the key metaphysical categories.⁴⁵ Ancient and medieval variants of Platonism and Aristotelianism held that our *immaterial minds* have *direct* or *near-direct access* to reality that *representations* do not mediate.⁴⁶ Modern empiricism and the Lockean Way of Ideas deny such ideas. However, Putnam extends the Kantian point that indirect, empirical access to a fundamental reality also fails under scrutiny because there is no way to corroborate our theories’ representations.⁴⁷ Empiricist traditions undercut modern materialist essentialism no less than pre-modern immaterialist essentialism. Indeed, the complaints of Locke, Hume, and Kant, against Aristotelian metaphysical projects are prior to experimental physics. So nothing as evident as using electric lights or modern medical discoveries settles these debates. Disputations of medieval metaphysics and theologies cannot be resolved at the level of physics. Putnam suggests that the fundamental issue for medieval metaphysical theologies is the viability of their direct, non-representationalist theories of cognition.

My argument thus far advances three ideas. First, there is persuasive textual evidence that Adams’s theodicy appropriates ideas from medieval philosophical theology about the ontological incommensuration between God and humans and its consequences. Secondly, Adams recognizes that her project is in the minority respecting those medieval tools but she remains unmoved. Her “skeptical realism” is of service here. Thirdly, a comparison with the some of her distinguished colleagues shows that this minority status does not place her project and conceptual tools such as substance metaphysics outside of serious, constructive scholarship. However, the unscrutinized opinions of likeminded scholars neither render substance metaphysics less controversial nor answer specific modern criticisms.

⁴⁵ Gunton 1978, 19.

⁴⁶ E.g., Augustine *De Trin.* 8.6.9; Aquinas *ST* 1.75, 1.85-86.

⁴⁷ See Putnam 1982.

5. A Second Objection

I have argued that it is reasonable to analyze Adams's concept of divine-human ontological incommensuration with reference to those she calls "mainstream medieval" thinkers. However, I have not shown that these thinkers' metaphysical assumptions are viable. A reader may still object that it does not follow from my exegesis that a sensible interpretation of Adams must proceed with medieval concepts of divine transcendence in mind. For we can distinguish:

- (P1) ontological difference between God and creatures; and
- (P2) medieval interpretations of (P1).⁴⁸

To account for Adams's narrower focus from her 1988 essay "Problems of Evil" to the first of her 2003 DuBose Lectures, (P2) can be recast as:

- (P2') "mainstream medieval" interpretations of (P1).

This distinction is valid insofar as (P1) is a broader subject than either (P2) or (P2'). Adams's writings provide some support to (P1). She does not invoke (P2') in her early work on theodicy such as her conference paper "Horrendous Evils" for the 1989 Mind Association and Aristotelian Society Joint Session. That paper asserts ontological difference primarily in a generic sense when discussing its value to solutions to horrendous evils. (Five pages discuss incommensuration of which three pages mention two medieval theories and two modern theories.) Moreover, the first of Adams's 2003 DuBose Lectures clearly supports the distinction of (P1) and (P2'). She commends "a 'mainstream medieval' interpretation" of the "metaphysical size gap" but only after noting that "the thesis that God is of a different metaphysical category from any and every creature . . . has been taken in many different and incompatible philosophical and theological directions."⁴⁹

Here is my criticism. Given the distinction between (P1) and (P2'), a valid argument from ontological difference would need to show two things: (a) that the analytic philosophers that Adams criticizes lack something respecting (P1); and (b) that there is a respectable argument for why that deficit is non-trivial. But if we interpret Adams in terms of (P1) alone, then we cannot show (a) or (b); a valid

⁴⁸ I thank Prof. David Fergusson for suggesting this distinction and its first textual support.

⁴⁹ Adams 2004b, 132.

argument for why Adams's colleagues should consider or reconsider ontological difference needs specifics such as (P2') and its consequents.

I conclude that Adams can make an interesting conjecture that alternatives to (P2') are relevant to theodicy but not a deductively valid argument. We can treat Adams's assertion of (P2') as primarily providing illustrations. However, I think an alternative interpretation that de-emphasizes (P2') carries the cost of reducing the distinctiveness of Adams's project versus other treatments of God and evil in analytic philosophy. Nonetheless, there are reasonable alternatives to (P2') for those whose primary source is her book *Horrendous Evils* or those who are familiar with her more candid essays but reject the material conclusions of medieval metaphysics and theologies. Blunting the force of her project may be an acceptable cost if the cost of accepting (P2') is even less acceptable. My criticism has three subsections.

5.1 Emphasis on (P1) Renders Adams's Project Redundant

Contemporary and classic treatments of evil explicitly recognize (P1) ontological difference. The debate on J.L. Mackie's article "Evil and Omnipotence" (1955) as well as the Epicurean formulation are generated precisely because God is taken as having unique, impressive powers such as omnipotence or foreknowledge. Plantinga criticizes Mackie for mistakenly assuming that divine omnipotence entails God can actualize any possible world including one in which no free agent ever commits moral evil. But Mackie cannot show that it is impossible for significantly free creatures to limit which possible worlds God can actualize. Plantinga concludes that there is no logical inconsistency between the existence of evil and existence of God who is essentially omnipotent. In essays from 1987-88, Adams frames her project in part as a solution to problems with this influential debate. However, her criticism founders if we take her to argue that Mackie and Plantinga overlook (P1) although they carefully debate how we should understand divine omnipotence.

5.2 Alternatives to (P2') Render Adams's Project Inconsequential

If Adams's point about ontological difference is non-trivial, then her criticism needs to be more specific. Her criticism would need to conjoin (P1) with theses that follow from it. Consider three implications of ontological incommensuration that Adams's project asserts.

- (T1) God is not a moral agent and thus has no moral obligations to creatures;
- (T2) By nature humans are finite and incompetent and are not fully culpable for their misdeeds.
- (T3) An individual person's beatific intimacy with God is necessary and sufficient for defeating horrific suffering.

If it is an error to overlook (T1)-(T3), or considering them is at least an advantage for Adams, then she makes a real contribution to the contemporary debate. The difficulty is that (T1)-(T3) do not follow from (P1) without some intervening claims that are not entailed by (P1). As this thesis's introduction documents, Adams's earliest discussions of horrors from 1987-88 invoke (P2) and (P2') in order to reach claims such as (T1)-(T3). Without specifications such as a "mainstream medieval" theory, generic ontological difference seems to be either inert or a 'black box' that sanctions arbitrary conclusions. Plantinga and likeminded persons would deny that (P1) entails any non-trivial conclusions that they lack even on a favorable reading of Adams.

One way to repair the alternative interpretation is to argue that the salient alternative to (P2) or (P2') is not (P1) but:

- (P3) non-medieval interpretations of (P1).

Now Adams's work prior to 1999 does little work with (P1) or (P3). Chapters 4 and 8 of *Horrendous Evils* alter this situation. They survey prominent contemporary thinkers on divine agency and transcendence (e.g., Paul Tillich, David Burrell, Kathryn Tanner, C. E. Rolt, Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin, Simone Weil, and Jürgen Moltmann) and weigh their positions' usefulness respecting (T3). Their views draw on a range of ancient, medieval, and modern ideas. Chapter 8 of the book argues that these surveys present "*a variety of philosophical frameworks*" that "*would afford God the means for defeating horrors*", and this claim applies to (P2') and (P3).⁵⁰ While Adams may be less clear about the implications of (P1) and (P3) for (T1)-(T2), it is false that alternatives to (P2') are trivial. A straightforward way to assess this rebuttal is to review the three texts that I cited in support of (P1) and (P3).

The first textual support is Adams's paper "Horrendous Evils" (1989). It approaches ontological difference in a generic manner like (P1), whereas her paper "Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God" (1987) and paper "Problems of Evil" (1989)

⁵⁰ Adams 1999c, 178-80; emphasis added.

both invoke (P2') at key points. However, this contrast is of negligible value. For "Horrendous Evils" approvingly references "Problems of Evil" as foundational; and normal considerations of division of labor and audience adequately explain the differences in emphases between these two papers.⁵¹ Moreover, only one page of her 1989 paper considers two positions under (P3) that are "contrary to medieval theology": divine passibility in general and Rudolf Otto on feeling-responses to the numinous divine.⁵² This passage from "Horrendous Evils" focuses on (T3) but is silent about (T1)-(T2). In it Adams is vague about whether she thinks these modern resources supplement or supplant (P2'). However, subsequent writings harmonize these modern ideas with a framework from classical theology.

(i) According to her DuBose Lectures, (P2') involves a "personified metaphysical size gap" or the idea that God has intellect and will. Modern theologies tend to criticize this aspect of (P2') and to put divine personality and transcendence into competition. Adams notably resists the latter move in her use of Otto. Her 1989 paper is silent about the issue. However, her essay "Sin as Uncleaness" (1991) openly rejects Otto's Kantian notion that divine transcendence renders the divine noumenon perceptible only through feelings but precludes any humanly-knowable, divine persona.⁵³ Turning to *Horrendous Evils*, Adams reiterates this rejection in chapter 5.⁵⁴ She concludes chapter 4 titled "Divine Agency, Remodeled" by stating again that she "joins the mainstream of Christian theological tradition" in its claim that the divine is personal.⁵⁵ (ii) In same chapter's conclusion, Adams says "I follow classical theology" when she summarizes her own views on divine power and causation, human freedom and divine coercion, and being and goodness.⁵⁶ She defines classical theology in chapter 8: "On its *metaphysical* interpretation, this [political] picture [of a self-sufficient ruler] spawned what I have called the classical explanatory model, with its corollary that the ultimate explainer must be pure

⁵¹ Adams 1989a, 293fn.3, 310fn.20; they reference: Adams 1988a, 121-43; *ibid.*, 127-35.

⁵² Adams 1989a, 308.

⁵³ Adams 1991c, 4.

⁵⁴ Adams 1999c, 88.

⁵⁵ Adams 1999c, 81.

⁵⁶ Adams 1999c, 84-85.

actuality and so lack any capacity to be causally acted upon or affected by any alien power.”⁵⁷ (iii) The conclusion of chapter 4 harmonizes the classical prioritization of divine goodness and being with the modernist insistence of C. E. Rolt and Charles Hartshorne on a relational, passible God. Her solution is to treat divine passibility as somehow non-essential: divine passibility is “within Divine power to prevent” in a way that apparently differs from divine ‘attributes’ such as necessary existence.⁵⁸ The “classical explanatory model” or (P2’) provides the framework that Adams modifies using elements from (P3) and not vice versa.⁵⁹ Note: (ii) and (iii) show that section 3.3 above unnecessarily concedes that Adams’s *Horrendous Evils* and her 2002 reply essays and 2003 DuBose Lectures split on the relevance of medieval ideas.

The second textual support is “The Metaphysical Size Gap” which is the first of her 2003 DuBose Lectures. There she identifies a general “thesis” about God’s nature or (P1) that only situates (P2’) within intellectual history. Several features of this text support my argument that one cannot validly reach (T1)-(T3) from (P1) without further specification. (i) In the third long quotation in section 3.3 (p. 35 above), Adams notes that “many different and incompatible” theories properly exemplify (P1). It follows from this we cannot construct a valid argument from (P1) apart from choosing a specific, internally consistent theory or family of theories. (ii) In the same quotation, Adams advances what she calls a “mainstream medieval” interpretation of divine transcendence or (P2’) and admits that this appellation is “perhaps contentiously” asserted. Both quoted phrases reflect the fact that her arguments from (P2’) are valid only if the disputes between mainstream medieval figures do not render (P2’) an internally contradictory premise. (iii) These analyses imply that (P3) apart from further specification also lacks such entailments. For (P3) includes ancient, modern, and postmodern thinkers; and thinkers of these periods articulate numerous incompatible theories of divine transcendence.

⁵⁷ Adams 1999c, 168-69; emphasis in original.

⁵⁸ Adams 1999c, 85; cf. *ibid.*, 170-71.

⁵⁹ Adams 1999c, 169: “I have already sketched (in chapter 4) how the classical explanatory model might be modified to permit the Divine essence to be casually affected by creatures without giving passive power such prominence as Rolt and Hartshorne do.”

The third textual support comes from chapters 4 and 8 of Adams's 1999 book *Horrendous Evils*. I have discussed chapter 4 already. So I shall focus on chapter 8 and its concluding discussion of the five frameworks (those of C. E. Rolt and Charles Hartshorne, Simone Weil, Julian of Norwich, the Council of Chalcedon, and Jürgen Moltmann) considered within the chapter. Adams writes:

[T]he five proposals discussed above [in chapter 8] do run the gamut from classical to process to nineteenth and twentieth-century German philosophies. My strategy thus bears an analogy to that adopted by Alston in answering evidential arguments from evil. Just as multiplication of reasons God might have for permitting a given evil undercuts the presumption that the evil in question is pointless, so—I suggest—showing how *a variety of philosophical frameworks would afford God the means for defeating horrors* erodes any presumption that no philosophically coherent theory including both God and evil can be found. Modally speaking, my claim to “solve” the logical problem of horrendous evil can thus be no stronger than Pike's at the end of his article.⁶⁰

This passage restores context to the quotation that I italicized (p. 50) just after first distinguishing (P3) from (P1). To my knowledge, that quotation is the strongest textual warrant for (P3) as an alternative to (P2') in Adams's project through 2004. However, three features of her argument temper this conclusion.

(i) Though Adams treats specific theories of (P3) and thereby avoids the unqualified triviality of (P1), (P3) remains trivial on balance. Adams primarily shifts the burden of proof. She suggests that if atheologians fail to refute each framework or to show that each founders versus horrors, then this “erodes any presumption” that this world's horrors and God's existences are logically incompatible. She also endorses Nelson Pike's modest conclusion that “a Scottish verdict of ‘not proven’ must be rendered” on arguments from evil against God's existence.⁶¹ In contrast, her first DuBose Lecture claims forthrightly that (P2') makes “God big enough to solve the problem of horrendous evils” and presents a “true cosmological picture.”⁶² (ii) Adams supplies little of the heavy lifting that each theoretical variant of (P3) needs if we want to argue validly to (T3) or any other substantial conclusions about theodicy. Chapter 8 of *Horrendous Evils* treats Moltmann in three-pages and Weil in two-

⁶⁰ Adams 1999c, 179-80.

⁶¹ Adams 1999c, 18.

⁶² Adams 2004b, 137, 143.

pages. It is doubtful if we can properly evaluate their ideas and thus their prospects for solving the problem of horrendous evils on such a slim basis. Though Adams's book represents Rolt and Hartshorne somewhat better in about sixteen-pages total, similar concerns apply. Prioritizing (P3) in our interpretation of Adams renders her project a footnote to the intellectual systems of a Moltmann or a Hartshorne. (iii) In contrast, Adams's account of (P2') and the elements she assimilates to it from (P3) provides substantial resources from which she can infer (T3) as well as other distinctive conclusions such as (T1)-(T2). Her argumentation for medieval Christology's usefulness to contemporary theodicy totals several-hundred pages. Her initial piece titled "Chalcedonian Christology: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil" was published in 1997. Adams expanded on its ideas in subsequent endowed lecture series. Her 1999 Aquinas Lecture is titled *What Kind of Nature?: Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology*. As I mentioned before, Adams comments in a 1998 paper: "I hope to champion medieval interpretations of Chalcedon on another occasion (in my [1999] Gifford lectures)."⁶³ Her final 2003 DuBose Lecture titled "The Primacy of Christ" focuses on Anselm, Grosseteste, Bonaventure, and Scotus. Her 300-page volume *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* published in 2006 incorporates the three lecture series.

My general objection in this section is not to (P3) itself. Variants of (P3) may be both tenable and rationally preferable to (P2'). My objection is that the writings and lectures that comprise Adams's project on theodicy give markedly greater attention to (P2'), and asserting (P3) as a substitute trivializes much of her argument.

5.3 Arguments from (P2'), Conjectures from (P3)

The idea that thinkers such as Rolt, Hartshorne, Weil, or Moltmann, inadvertently solve the problem of horrendous evils is interesting. However, Adams's project would amount more to useful conjecture than to valid argument, if she inspires others to argue sustainedly from (P3) to explanations of and solutions to horrendous evils.

Adams acknowledges explicitly in *Horrendous Evils*, chapter 8, and implicitly in her skeptical realism that such explanations and solutions may obtain from (P3). Nonetheless, (P3) lacks an adequate rational foundation insofar as Adams provides

⁶³ Adams 1998d, 61.

minimal help to understand and scrutinize such modern thinkers. It follows that our studies will need to concentrate on such thinkers rather than on Adams, if we want to advance a theodicy rigorously from a variant of (P3). For we need to assess how rationally tenable is a variant of (P3) in itself and versus its rivals. We also need to assess whether a variant of (P3) and related intermediate premises enable us to arrive validly at the conclusions (T1)-(T3). Her project would appear even more conjectural, if the alternatives to (P2') were to abandon her substantial attention to her conclusions that (T1) God is not a moral agent and (T2) sin is developmental incompetence rather than moral rebellion. *Horrendous Evils*, chapter 8, is noticeably vague about whether we can validly reason from variants of (P3) alone to Adams's major conclusions aside from (T3). Her 1991 essay "Sin as Uncleaness" uses Otto's ideas to remove scriptural obstacles to (T2) but the text does not use Otto to ground (T1) or (T2) positively.

This distinction between conjecture and argument to which I appeal might seem odd given Adams's skepticism about starting points. However, it observes Adams's own explicit standards and those that are implicit in analytic philosophy. In the following passage from *Horrendous Evils*, Adams indicates philosophy's positive task is still ambitious notwithstanding the "skeptical realism" she has just sketched.

Given this outlook, I conceive of the task of philosophy as that of mapping the problems by formulating the alternative positions as thoroughly as possible. . . . Each philosopher will have a certain set of intuitions . . . [and] will have a particular commitment to develop that particular theoretical outlook so thoroughly and rigorously as to exhibit it as a viable competitor in the theoretical marketplace, where alternative frameworks will be assessed for clarity, coherence, simplicity, fruitfulness, and explanatory power. But demonstrative proofs—for example, that idealism or incompatibilist freedom is true, that materialism or consequentialism are false—will not be in the offing.⁶⁴

Adams works out the ontological and value-theory implications of (P2') in her essays and lectures in philosophical theology and medieval studies, and it is the fundamental framework to which she gestures in *Horrendous Evils*. (P3) lacks comparable attention in her writings. Consider Plantinga's criticism of Mackie on the nature and limits of divine omnipotence. Plantinga insists his Free Will Defense is a defense

⁶⁴ Adams 1999c, 180.

rather than a theodicy insofar as it only “might possibly be” true.⁶⁵ What makes his defense an argument are the possible world semantics of modality that Plantinga develops in *The Nature of Necessity* from Saul Kripke and others. Without his 1974 monograph’s treatment of modality, Plantinga could still intelligently say that Kripke’s work may help undercut Mackie but that thesis would be conjecture.

6. Conclusion

Studying Marilyn Adams’s ideas alongside those of the great medievals does not impose foreign concepts on her theodicy. The relevance of medieval ideas is a conversation that her philosophical theology invites. However, Adams is neither an anti-modern reactionary nor a neoscholastic. Her ideas reflect her training and work as an analytic philosopher, as a medievalist, and as an Anglo-catholic priest. Her project is part a broader conversation to which the 1931-32 Gifford Lecturer and medievalist Étienne Gilson contributed greatly and to which other recent analytic philosophers and Gifford Lecturers (of whom some are also medievalists) including John Haldane, Alasdair MacIntyre, Ralph McInerny, and Eleonore Stump, have made their own contributions. There is no easy way to summarize their uses of medieval philosophy, but each proposes medieval thought as a potent source for contemporary constructive philosophy and theology.

In this chapter, I have tried to document and to illuminate how Adams’s theodicy concurs with these proposals especially where it discusses divine-human ontological incommensuration. The great medievals are a source of distinctive philosophical and theological tools for Adams. They are also a source of serious problems due not only to the tools themselves but also to how Adams employs them. The next chapter discusses a problem that Adams recognized in her first DuBose Lecture. A “mainstream medieval” interpretation of divine transcendence is contentious just because it presupposes a philosophically useful agreement between the great medievals that Adams elsewhere provides strong reasons for disputing.

⁶⁵ Plantinga 1974a, 28. See also Walls 1991; Plantinga 1991.

CHAPTER 2

MEDIEVAL CONFLICT ON DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE: AQUINAS VERSUS SCOTUS

1. Introduction

I have argued that divine transcendence is central to Marilyn Adams's project on evil. I have also argued that she focuses on a "mainstream medieval" interpretation of divine-human ontological incommensuration. By "mainstream medieval" Adams says she refers to Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, and so forth. Her project appeals to these thinkers from the essays "Duns Scotus and the Goodness of God" (1987) and "Problems of Evil" (1988) onwards.

The prior chapter analyzes many lengthy passages from those texts. In them, Adams offers many glosses on the medieval ideas that she appropriates: God is the being who is uniquely necessarily existent, ontologically independent, supremely valuable, greater-than-which-cannot-be-conceived, infinite, and so forth. In that chapter, I argued that some of Adams's essays on theodicy—including "Neglected Values, Shrunken Agents, Happy Endings" (2002) and "The Metaphysical Size Gap" (2004)—go beyond that list of terms and offer theoretical detail. Yet the latter essays mostly indicate who are important medieval exponents of divine-human ontological incommensuration and what Adams takes to be their theories' consequences for theodicy and philosophical theology. Her project on evil lacks detail on several crucial issues: the premises and the history of debates that inform her claim that God and creatures are incommensurate; the philosophical and theological motivations for great medievals' assertion of divine incommensuration; and the compatibility and incompatibility of their particular metaphysical theories of divine transcendence.

In this chapter, I shall argue that Adams's "mainstream medieval" interpretation of divine transcendence is needlessly non-explanatory on issues that are basic to her project. Section 2 argues that her "mainstream medieval" interpretation is broad-brush. Consequently, it obscures rather than resolves some major disagreements on divine transcendence and participation metaphysics that the

medieval reception of Aristotle occasioned. These disagreements obstruct her project where she invokes medieval ideas about divine transcendence. However, I shall also argue that Adams helps us remedy these problems. Beginning with section 3, I shall outline how Adams helps us recognize and remedy her project's overgeneralizations. Her theodicy consistently appeals to particular medieval thinkers and texts. Also, her medievalist studies comment in detail on medieval theories of divine transcendence. Other medievalists such as David Burrell, Mark Jordan, Richard Cross, and Allan Wolter, help to rectify problems in her coverage. Sections 4-6 will focus on Aquinas and Scotus who are representative of the medieval divide. Once we clarify the medieval disputes on divine transcendence using this range of primary and secondary sources, we can assess the related inferences in Adams's theodicy.

This chapter serves ends besides repairing Adams's premises. First, it holds her "mainstream medieval" interpretation of divine transcendence to a critical standard that is consistent with that which I applied to non-medieval interpretations in the prior chapter. Secondly, this chapter sets up my larger thesis: thinkers such as Aquinas present an alternative both to Adams and to the analytic philosophers whom she criticizes; and thinkers such as Scotus are more suited to her project's claims. Her "mainstream medieval" interpretation obscures these differences between medieval thinkers. Thirdly, these criticisms align Adams's project's details with her broad outlook. Her foundational essay "Problems of Evil: More Advice for Christian Philosophers" (1988) states that the most influential treatments of God and evil in analytic philosophy illegitimately sidestep the rife disagreements about metaphysics and value theory in contemporary philosophy. For those treatments takes 'standard theism' and 'ordinary moral theory' as presuppositions. She concludes: "the structure of any fair-minded debate about the problem of evil will be much more complicated" than how most major analytic philosophers of religion has represented the debate; the real task is that of "mapping the problems by formulating the alternative positions as fully as possible."¹ However, Adams's broad-brush, "mainstream medieval" interpretation of divine transcendence oversimplifies the metaphysical questions that she raises. This unnecessarily frustrates her intention to map the problem of evil more adequately than do the standard approaches in analytic philosophy.

¹ Adams 1988a, 132, 139.

2. Problems with Adams's Account

Adams's project on theodicy references a small number of medieval arguments about the divine attributes and divine transcendence. A careful reading turns up three works that provide the most substantial pointers: "Duns Scotus and the Goodness of God" (1987), "St. Anselm and the Goodness of God" (1987), and "The Metaphysical Size Gap" (2004). She cites Scotus's Aristotelian arguments in his *Ordinatio* and *De Primo Principio* that God is the principal efficient and final cause (*primum efficiens* and *primus finis*) of all possible and actual beings and is the first in excellence (*primum eminens*); Scotus infers from this triple primacy (*triplex primitas*) that God is intensively infinite (*infinitum intensive*), which Adams does not explain beyond stating that it purportedly gives God a "kind of integrity that creatures cannot have".² Somewhat more frequently, her writings on theodicy reference Anselm's Platonist argument in *Monologion* that of all natures God necessarily is the one, supreme nature (*unam naturam, summam omnium quae sunt*) and in comparison to God we are almost nothing and scarcely something (*fere non esse et vix esse*).³ She also twice cites his famous argument in *Proslogion* that God is the being greater than which cannot be conceived (*id quo majus cogitari non potest*).⁴ While Adams's category of "mainstream medieval" includes other significant thinkers, these examples are the only medieval arguments about God's nature to which her project points.

These examples acquaint us with the conclusions and technical vocabulary of some arguments from Scotus and Anselm. However, Adams's presentation leaves the arguments largely unrehearsed. This prevents her examples from providing an adequate foundation for her arguments from divine transcendence to theodicy. The obstacle to our understanding is particularly acute where the medieval arguments are unfamiliar to most readers or generate an enormous number of rival interpretations as is the case, respectively, with Scotus's Aristotelian proofs and Anselm's ontological argument. We need to know how to characterize the relevant arguments before we can assess their cogency and their implications for the problem of evil.

² Adams 1987a, 488; Adams 2004b, 131; referencing Scotus *Ord.* 1.2.1-3; Scotus *De Prim. Prin.* 3-4.

³ Adams 1987b, 76-79; Adams 1988c, 229, 239; Adams 1993b, 169; Adams 1993c, 308; Adams 1999c, 89, 140; Adams 2002b, 216; referencing Anselm *Mon.* 1, 15-17, 28.

⁴ Adams 1987b, 79; Adams 1993c, 308; referencing Anselm *Pros.* 2.

Adams provides readers with slightly more detail about the Platonist argument in the *Monologion*. The intelligibility of numerous creaturely goods and natures depends necessarily on a metaphysically prior, supreme nature. Inasmuch as God's nature is not dependent on any prior thing for its intelligibility, God's perfection cannot involve the same multiplicity that required explanation in creatures. Somehow God is rather than has all perfections and all creatures have their perfections through participating in God's perfections. If Adams were to add to her basic sketch, she might also say that Anselm raises issues about which the great medieval theologians were concerned regardless of whether their arguments frame intelligibility using the frameworks of Platonic forms or Aristotelian causes. However, it does not follow that the *Monologion* itself grounds a philosophically useful, "mainstream medieval" interpretation of divine transcendence. The *Monologion* investigates questions about how creatures depend on God and how God is metaphysically prior and supreme. Adams invites the further question about whether the great medievals agree enough about those matters for there to be a fairly unified medieval interpretation of divine transcendence. Her project on evil provides no substantial answers and this undermines her theodicy. What most prompt these reservations about her theodicy's "mainstream medieval" interpretation are her medievalist writings.

Divine-human ontological incommensuration is a central feature of medieval metaphysical theologies, and it is among the topics that Adams examines in her scholarship on medieval philosopher theologians. In her essay "Praying the *Proslogion*: Anselm's Theological Method" (1995), which analyzes the *Proslogion* in light of Anselm's earlier efforts in the *Monologion*, Adams writes:

Having thus reached the limits of human understanding [in the *Proslogion*, c. ix-x], Anselm restates his answer to the c. v question, "what (*quid*) are You, Lord God?", reasserting the prima facie problematic c. vi list but adding some *Monologion*, c. xv, inclusions: living, wise, good, eternal. After drawing the *Monologion*, c. xvi, conclusion that God is whatever He is *per se* and not *per aliud*, which was identified there as a root of our troubles in adapting human language to talk about the Divine essence, Anselm turns to the attribute of eternity, which functioned in the *Monologion*, along with Divine simplicity, to precipitate a sense of the ontological incommensuration between God and creatures. . . . The remaining chapters, xviii, xxiii, [of the *Proslogion*] return to

the attributes—eternity, simplicity, and unity—that most contribute to the ontological contrast between God and creatures.⁵

As Adams explains in her essay “Scotus and Ockham on the Connection of the Virtues” (1996), the term ‘divine simplicity’ denotes how God lacks no perfection and yet does not have perfections as parts or constituents. How perfection without parts is possible was a matter of dispute in medieval thought.

Medieval theology inherited at least two conceptions of Divine simplicity. The first, driven by the “Aristotelian” worry that a complex God might “come apart”, nevertheless invites us to conceive of God as an aggregate of independently maximized attributes necessarily “stuck together” by metaphysical or essential “glue”—say, the organizing, meta-feature of being a being whose essence includes all perfections. To a Neo-Platonizing value-eye, this picture seems inadequate, because the Supreme Good must be homogeneously perfect. It will not do to concentrate perfect knowledge in one (albeit inseparable) metaphysical constituent, perfect justice in another. Rather God must be supreme through and through.⁶

Adams divides the medieval accounts into rival Aristotelian and Neoplatonist families. What is at issue is whether the relation of imitating God constitutes creaturely natures. Is the dependence relation of creatures on their divine creator metaphysically prior to the creaturely natures that are thus related? Her essay “Reviving Philosophical Theology: Some Medieval Models” (1998) states:

For Anselm and Aquinas, the Divine essence is Truth and Goodness; no genuine power could make it otherwise. According to them, created natures are defined as differing ways of imperfectly imitating the Divine. Scotus and Ockham disagree, insisting that because relations are metaphysically posterior to their relata, the “contents” of created natures pertained to them “of themselves”: if they could exist of themselves, they would be such of themselves. If they owe their being to God, nevertheless, omnipotence does not include power to make bovine or human nature to be differently constituted.⁷

Adams’s essay “Ockham on Truth” (1989) explains that Scotus and Ockham progressively denied that creatures participate in God or “that the perfections of creatures are contained in God” in any form other than metaphor.⁸ “Ockham was no Christian-Platonist”, writes Adams, but rather, “Where middle and neo-Platonists

⁵ Adams 1995d, 33.

⁶ Adams 1996b, 521.

⁷ Adams 1998d, 62. She returns to this item of intellectual history in her other writings on medieval ethics and philosophical method in medieval thought (Adams 1987d, 223-28; Adams 1989b, 158-62; Adams 1996b, 521; Adams 1999d, 247-49).

⁸ Adams 1989b, 161.

tried to read Plato and Aristotle as saying the same thing . . . Ockham's Aristotle is freed from Platonizing themes to an unprecedented extent (probably more than the original Aristotle was)."⁹ She notes that Scotus made the initial move versus Henry of Ghent when Scotus denied that imitability relations are prior to creaturely relata.

Adams's analysis of the great medievals on divine simplicity and imitability relations conflicts with her assertion of a "mainstream medieval" interpretation of divine transcendence. It follows that Adams rightly admits in "The Metaphysical Size Gap" (2004) that she "perhaps contentiously" asserts that there is a "mainstream medieval" interpretation of divine transcendence.¹⁰ The standards that Adams outlines in "Problems of Evil" (1988) necessitate an explanation for why the *prima facie* conflict between her theodicy and medievalist research is only apparent.

The conflict that Adams sketches in preceding quotations does not bar her from offering a way to reconcile the Platonist and anti-Platonist Aristotelian families of medieval thought. Any plausible solution would be interesting. However, I contend that it is unlikely that Adams can offer a genuine, philosophical reconciliation between Platonists and anti-Platonists on the question of divine transcendence. If she wants to use medieval ideas on transcendence as premises for her theodicy, then she will have to choose between rival theoretical families. My argument will focus on the contrasting approaches of Aquinas and Scotus to divine simplicity and infinity. Adams's two-volume *William Ockham* (1987) is helpful on this matter. It carefully analyzes the highly technical thirteenth- and fourteenth-century debates on topics including composite natures, time, unity, and divine simplicity.¹¹ Chapter 21, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Attributes, and the Meaning of Divine Names" is particularly interesting. The following section will examine Adams's synopsis of the reasons that drove the great medievals to confess and assert a doctrine of divine simplicity.

⁹ Adams 1989b, 158. See also Burrell 2001, 214-15; Gerson 2005.

¹⁰ Adams 2004b, 132.

¹¹ See Adams 1987c, 2:633-960

3. Medieval Motivations for the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

“To say that a being is simple is to deny that it is a composite,” writes Adams.¹²

Medieval metaphysical theologies commonly held that God is not metaphysically composite. For some features of compositeness, arguably, are inconsistent with the divine nature’s goodness and perfection. Adams lists four such features.

Heterogeneity. “All composites are heterogeneous in some way.” And the perfection of a composite’s whole is different than that of its components, because as “Aquinas and Scotus maintain . . . the perfection of the whole is different than that of the parts.” But “God is supposed to be maximally perfect” and therefore “maximally perfect ‘through and through’.” Hence, God is not composite.

Posteriority. According to Anselm and Aquinas, every composite is “posterior to” (i.e., “made out of” or “compounded from”) its components. “But it seems contrary to the characterization of God as the supreme nature or first being to suppose that there are any components C_m and C_n , neither of which, taken alone, is God, but out of which God is made or compounded. Rather everything that is not God was made by God out of nothing.”

These analyses of heterogeneity and posteriority imply that the “anything that has distinguishable components of some sort or other” is metaphysically composite.

From this we can define divine simplicity as follows.

(A) ‘ x is simple’ = df. ‘ x has no components of any sort’.

This reasoning gave medieval thinkers tools with which to assert philosophically what biblical tradition taught them to confess theologically: the One God is utterly good and perfect and the ultimate source of all goodness and perfection.

Adams goes on to sketch an alternative medieval interpretation of composition in terms of dissolubility and unity.

Dissolubility. Aquinas argues that “(a) composition is only from diverse things and diverse things themselves need an agent to unite them,” and “(b) every composition is potentially dissoluble.” He “concludes that since God is the first efficient cause, [God] cannot be composite. Scotus argues that God cannot be a compound of matter and form for the same reason.”

Unity. “Different composites have different degrees of unity. A pile of logs or pennies are merely aggregated or collected together; they do not have the paradigmatic unity that substances have. The components of such substances—matter and one or more substantial forms—are said to unite to make something that is absolutely or *per se* one. . . . [A] composite is assigned that degree of unity, only if one of its components has potentiality that the other actualizes . . .

¹² Adams 1987c, 2:903. This section paraphrases or directly quotes Adams (ibid., 904-8, 920). (A)-(D) are direct quotations. My (B*) explicates how (D) relates to (B)-(C).

Thus, Aquinas and Scotus agree that in a human being, matter is in potentiality with respect to being inhered in by substantial form. . . . [That is,] matter is in potentiality with respect to any substantial form that is not inhering in it, and the inherence of a substantial form renders it determinate with respect to one as opposed to the others. . . . Thus, x is a composite that possesses the highest unity possible for composites, only if x is compounded from components C_m and C_n such that (i) C_m is indeterminate and determinable and in potentiality with respect to being rendered determinate by C_n , or vice versa; and (ii) it is logically possible that C_m be rendered determinate by something other than C_n , or vice versa; and therefore (iii) it is logically possible that C_m exist without C_n in something other than x , or vice versa.

If God were a composite, His unity would not be merely that of an aggregate or a collection, but rather the highest unity possible for composites. Hence, His components would have to be related as potency to act in the above way. But Aquinas argues that as first cause, God contains no potentiality of any kind. And Scotus argues that since God is infinite, nothing in God can be in potentiality with respect to anything else in God, the way genus is in potentiality with respect to differentiae. For the differentia limits the genus to one species as opposed to another; whereas what is infinite is really the same as whatever is compossible with it.”

The analyses of dissolubility and unity are valid “only if composites exclude entities with logically inseparable components.” Adams takes this reasoning to generate the following definition of composition.

(B) ‘ x is composite’ = df. ‘ x is compounded from components C_m and C_n (where $C_m \neq C_n$) such that it is logically possible that C_m exist without C_n whether in x or in something else, and/or logically possible that C_n exist without C_m whether in x or in something else’.

If this analysis is sound, then God is simple in the following sense.

(C) ‘ x is simple’ = df. ‘It is not the case that x is compounded from components C_m and C_n such that it is logically possible that C_m exist without C_n whether in x or in something else, and/or logically possible that C_n exist without C_m whether in x or in something else’.

Adams concludes her discussion of the medieval motivations for divine simplicity noting that definition (A) is stronger than (C). For whatever satisfies (A) satisfies (C), but not everything that satisfies (C) satisfies (A): what lacks components of any sort is logically inseparable, but what is inseparable may have components.¹³ Adams

¹³ My supervisor Nicholas S. Adams objected that on brief inspection (C) does not appear weaker than (A) because nothing appears to satisfy (C) without satisfying (A). The distinction here is what separates Platonic forms from their images in material natures and from Aristotelian universals. The definitions are negations of putatively distinct modes of composition. Insofar as a person concedes the distinction of those modes, she concedes the difference (A) and (C) mark.

states that Aquinas argues for divine simplicity in terms of both definitions. Her wider medievalist writings further suggest that (A) is a broadly Platonist notion whereas (C), when taken as an exclusive disjunct of (A), corresponds to an anti-Platonist construal of goodness and perfection that is characteristic of only some Aristotelians.

4. Scotus's Criticism of Aquinas on Divine Simplicity

Adams then addresses how the four features and three definitions are interpreted when combined with the metaphysical and semantic assumptions of particular medieval figures. The balance of *William Ockham*, chapter 21, examines the series of formulations, critiques, and reformulations regarding divine simplicity that span the writings of Maimonides, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Ockham. I shall focus here on what Adams represents as Scotus's critique of Aquinas regarding two theses:

- (T1) "The simple thing that is the divine essence genuinely corresponds to distinct *rationes* or falls under distinct concepts of" perfections including "wisdom and goodness" and can be thought of as such without thereby positing distinction of any sort in God.¹⁴
- (T2) "The human intellect is not capable in this life of forming concepts that apply univocally to God and creatures."¹⁵

Now Adams's account does not acknowledge two issues that complicate her study. First, Aquinas arguably did not receive an honest hearing from generations of Franciscans following Bishop Tempier's condemnation of 218 theses in 1277.¹⁶ Secondly, Scotus took Henry of Ghent rather than Aquinas to be his most important interlocutor. So Scotus's reading of Aquinas may be unreliable and Adams may mistakenly project Scotus's critiques of Henry awkwardly onto Aquinas. Constructing a debate between Aquinas and Scotus is more difficult than many modern commentators including Adams suggest. Nevertheless, Adams remains helpful on the central issues of whether the broad belief systems of Aquinas and Scotus are compatible and whether we can find focal points that facilitate comparisons. Where her account lacks the resources to correct itself, other scholars provide assistance. So these complications need not preclude my use of Adams to

¹⁴ Adams 1987c, 2:926.

¹⁵ Adams 1987c, 2:922.

¹⁶ Jordan 1982; Boulnois 1995; Rosier 1995.

illustrate medieval conflicts on divine simplicity and to argue that this lack of consensus hinders her theodicy's argument.

4.1 *Distinction and Reference*

On Scotus's reading of Aquinas, says Adams, (T1) entails "that there is only a distinction of reason between divine wisdom and divine goodness."¹⁷ For Scotus, a *distinction of reason* obtains between concepts when those concepts "conceive the same formal object under different logical and grammatical modes" but their difference does not correspond to distinct aspects that, prior to the action of the intellect, are in the object.¹⁸ Hence, there is a distinction of reason between, say, the author of *The Age of Innocence* and Edith Wharton or between 'wise' and 'wisdom'.

Scotus argues that logical and grammatical differences cannot underwrite Aquinas's distinction between 'divine wisdom' and 'divine goodness'.¹⁹ This leaves Aquinas with an epistemological trilemma.²⁰ Either (i) the divine perfection concepts do not genuinely correspond to some aspect of the divine essence, hence they are vain and false; or (ii) the concepts do correspond, but they are not distinct concepts (and claims about their content may require review); or (iii) the concepts correspond and are distinct but only because prior to any act of the intellect the divine essence contains distinction of some sort. (T1) is false in all cases. Scotus himself affirms a form of the third alternative: a distinction of essential perfections exists in God's simplicity before all operations of the intellect, such that both wisdom and goodness are in God *ex natura rei* but neither perfection is formally included in or formally identical with the other perfection.²¹ The relative positions of Scotus and Aquinas on positive attribution becomes clearer if we review Scotus's formal distinction.

¹⁷ Adams 1987c, 2:925.

¹⁸ Adams 1987c, 2:925.

¹⁹ Scotus *Lect.* 1.8.1.4, nn.172-73 (Vatican 17:62): "The essential perfections in the divine are in the thing before the operation of the intellect. . . . [I]f the perfection's distinctions were caused by the operation of the intellect, insofar as they would thus differ solely in accordance with reason, 'volition' and 'wisdom' would be no more different than 'wise' and 'wisdom', because the latter differ in accordance with reason."

²⁰ Adams 1987c, 2:926. See also *ibid.*, 1:22-29.

²¹ Scotus *Lect.* 1.8.1.4, n.175; Scotus *Ord.* 1.8.1.4, nn.192-194.

4.2 Formal Distinction

Scotus locates formal distinction between distinction of reason and real distinction. A nominal definition of *real distinction* is that x and y are really distinct if and only if it is logically possible for x and y to be separable, i.e., to exist without the other.²²

Logically possible separability is here understood to be a sufficient condition both for (i) x and y to be distinguishable prior to any act of the intellect and (ii) x and y to fall under distinct concepts; but it is not necessary for (i) and (ii) either individually or jointly. Note the correspondence with definition (B) above.

The trilemma that Scotus attributes to Aquinas neatly summarizes the formal distinction's epistemological motivations. Adams discusses the formal distinction's metaphysical motivations in *William Ockham*, chapter 2, where she outlines the distinction's earlier and later versions. The distinction's later version is much more complex than its predecessor, so for present purposes the early version is adequate.

Often in philosophy and theology there is reason to deny that x and y are really distinct things (*res*) and yet apparent cause to affirm that x is F and y is not F . But the Indiscernibility of Identicals, which unquestionably applies to everything that exists in reality, implies that nothing real that is in every way the same can be F and not F . If it were possible to distinguish within what is really one and the same thing (*res*) nonidentical or distinct property-bearers, [Scotus argues] the way might seem open for a solution to such problems.²³

In his *Lectura* and *Ordinatio*, Scotus indicates that we can indeed distinguish nonidentical constituents that nevertheless are really inseparable. Adams derives the following criterion for formal non-identity from his statements.

[*Formal Non-Identity.*] x and y are formally non-identical or distinct, if and only if (a) x and y are or are in what is really one thing (*res*); and (b) if x and y are capable of definition, the definition of x does not include y and the definition of y does not include x ; and (c) if x and y are not capable of definition, then if they were capable of definition, the definition of x would not include y and the definition of y would not include x .²⁴

So formal non-identity involves constituents that are really inseparable but whose definitions are or would be mutually non-inclusive.

²² Adams 1987c, 1:17-29. See also Cross 1999, 43-45, 149; King 2003, 21-25.

²³ Adams 1987c, 1:22-23.

²⁴ Adams 1987c, 1:24-25. See also Cross 1999, 43-45, 149, regarding formal nonidentity and lexical range.

If perfections like divine wisdom and divine goodness are formally non-identical individuals (*formalitates*), then the divine essence would appear composite and thus imperfect. Scotus advances several arguments to deny this consequence. Theologically, he points out that Christians make distinctions that resemble his formal distinction when talking about God’s communicable and incommunicable aspects and internal Trinitarian relations; however, they do not conclude that those traditional distinctions entail that the divine essence is composite.²⁵ So by traditional standards, the unanalyzed appearance of composition is insufficient to establish that entailment. Scotus also advances several philosophical arguments for why God is simple. His most characteristic argument is that something is composite only if it contains two or more entities—whether both are distinct *res* or *formalitates*—where one is in potentiality with respect to another.²⁶ But each, formally distinct divine perfection is an infinite entity, and an infinite entity is both the “same as any entity that is compossible with it” and “in potentiality with respect to none.”²⁷ Thus, a plurality of *formalitates* in a thing does not necessarily entail that the thing is composite. Scotus further argues that the concept most appropriate to God is infinite being which “virtually includes the concepts ‘infinite truth’ and ‘infinite good’ and the concept of every absolute perfection under the aspect of infinity.”²⁸

4.3 Infinity and Intrinsic Modes

For Scotus if x is an infinite entity then x is not in potentiality with respect to anything. Metaphysically, x ’s perfection (i) “cannot be added to by another entity”

²⁵ Scotus *Lect.* 1.8.1.4, n.176.

²⁶ In her earlier discussion of universals, Adams (1987c, 1:25) says a *res* is strictly speaking composite “only if” one of its two constituent *res* is in potentiality with respect to the other; whereas broadly speaking, a *res* is composite “if” one of its two constituent realities or formalities is in potentiality with respect to the other. In her later discussion of simplicity, Adams (1987c, 2:933) uses the operator “only if” for both the strict and broad sense of composition. I have followed Adams’s second statement because (i) lacking potentiality is necessary for lacking composition and (ii) an infinite intrinsic mode is sufficient but not necessary for lacking potentiality.

²⁷ Adams 1987c, 1:25-26. See the following citations: first efficient cause (Scotus *Lect.* 1.8.1.1-2, nn.10-12; Scotus *Ord.* 1.8.1.1, nn.9-10), infinity (Scotus *Lect.* 1.8.1.3, nn.102, 108; 1.8.1.4, n.186; and Scotus *Ord.* 1.8.1.1, nn.17, 19; 1.8.1.3, nn.106-107; 1.8.1.4, nn.213, 215, 220; 2.3.1.5-6, n.190), perfection (Scotus *Lect.* 1.8.1.1, nn.26-27; Scotus *Ord.* 1.8.1.1, nn.17-18).

²⁸ Adams 1987c, 2:931.

and (ii) cannot be a genus because “the reality that pertains to a genus must be indeterminate and determinable in some respect and in potentiality with respect to being actualized by some differentia.”²⁹ Semantically, ‘infinite’ should be distinguished from the superlative ‘highest.’ For ‘highest’ is used as a relative term whereas Scotus thinks (iii) infinity is an “intrinsic mode.” Or ‘highest’ signifies something that cannot be exceeded whereas Scotus thinks (iv) an unsurpassable “degree of perfection is more explicitly conceived under the notion of infinity.”³⁰

Richard Cross explains that the “target” of Scotus’s account of infinity is Aquinas’s claim that finiteness and infinity are “relational properties” in that finitude is defined in “relation to a limiting entity” and infinity is the “lack of [such] a relation.”³¹ Scotus argues that Aquinas affirms the consequent with arguments of the form ‘if *x* is limited by matter then *x* is finite, however God is not limited by matter, therefore God is not finite but infinite’.³² Quite the contrary, replies Scotus, “If an entity is finite or infinite, it is so not by reason of something incidental to it, but because it has its own intrinsic degree of finite or infinite perfection respectively.”³³ On Cross’s analysis, ‘intrinsic mode’ (*modus intrinsecus* or *intrinsecus gradus*) is a set of real properties, which includes degrees of perfection like finiteness and infinity.³⁴ “Such properties are *modes* of some attribute in the sense that they determine the *way* in which that attribute is instantiated. They are *intrinsic* to the

²⁹ Adams 1987c, 2:933. I am unsure whether Scotus thinks intrinsic mode and therefore properties (i) and (ii) apply to constituent *res* as well as to *formalitates*. Ockham argues that because any two *res* that are constituents in one *res* render the latter composite, regardless of whether those constituents are infinite, that the intrinsic mode of infinity cannot do the metaphysical work Scotus assigns to it (see *ibid.*, 2:939-41).

³⁰ Adams 1987c, 2:931.

³¹ Cross 1999, 39-40. Cross (*ibid.*, 40, 169-70n.39) notes that Scotus’s early account of infinity (*In Metaph.* 2.6, n.2) resembles that of Aquinas as a negation of finitude or limit.

³² Scotus *Ord.* 1.2.1.1-2, n.140, 143 (Vatican 2:211, 4-6; 2:212, 5-8): “The final proposition is declared from negation of an extrinsic reason, because form is made finite through matter; therefore what is not by nature to be in matter, is infinite. . . . Again it is argued ‘if form is made finite in consequence of matter, therefore if not for that, it is not made finite’; [this is] a fallacy of [affirming] the consequence.”

³³ Cross 1999, 40 (translating Scotus *Ord.* 1.2.1.1-2, n.142 [Vatican 2:212.1-4]).

³⁴ See Cross 1999, 40-42, 170n.52. Cross references the following works regarding Scotus’s intrinsic modes: Wolter 1946, 24-27; King 1992, 51-76; Cross 1998, ch.9. See also Frank and Wolter 1995, 148-50, 155; King 2003, 25-28.

attribute in that the attribute could never be instantiated without such a property.”³⁵ So perfections and their intrinsic modes seem to meet the criteria of formal non-identity and inseparability, and should thus be formally distinct.³⁶

In Scotus’s terms, God is intensively infinite (*infinitum intensive*). William A. Frank and Allan B. Wolter argue that the conceptual roots of Scotus’s understanding of infinity are twofold: “being is a concept whose content can be qualified by greater or lesser degrees of excellence” and “one can extrapolate from a scale whose measurements represent proportioned numbers a number that is incommensurately greater than any number you could possibly situate on the scale.”³⁷ Scotus wants us to make several imaginative moves: from a concrete comparison, to a comparison that is familiar but employs a more abstract scale, to a notion where ‘scale’ no longer applies because the items compared are thoroughly disproportionate. If we think of the excellence of being in this way we will arrive at a notion of “the plenitude of a perfection so complete that with respect to the whole composed by it and others, the excellence of the whole will not be increased or diminished by addition or subtraction of the other” perfections.³⁸ Scotus distinguishes between additive and non-additive properties with the corresponding modifiers extensive and intensive.³⁹

In sum, with Scotus, “the extrinsic mathematical notion of infinity proper to finite collections is gradually transformed into an attribute describing the radical fullness of the first being.”⁴⁰ Yet, the infinite can be “aligned according to an

³⁵ Cross 1999, 42; emphasis in original.

³⁶ Cross 1999, 42. Cross (ibid., 170n.53) qualifies this stating intrinsic modes are not quidditative because they tell us “an amount of something” but not what “sort of thing we are dealing with”. He does not explain his implicit premise ‘*x* is a formality only if *x* is a quiddity’. Peter King (2003, 25) fills this in arguing: Scotus’s “modal distinction . . . is meant to be an even lesser distinction than formal distinction, but nevertheless real in the broad sense. . . . [I]t makes no sense to speak of degrees without saying of what they are degrees. Hence, the intrinsic mode is not formally distinct from its nature, since the mode can only be (adequately) grasped through the *ratio* or definition of the nature.” This difficulty may relate to Scotus’s different versions of the formal distinction (Adams 1987c, 1:26-29). According to his earlier version, formal non-identity implies a plurality of quidditative entities within a single *res*. His later version denies that such pluralities exist.

³⁷ Frank and Wolter 1995, 92.

³⁸ Frank and Wolter 1995, 92

³⁹ Frank and Wolter 1995, 154.

⁴⁰ Frank and Wolter 1995, 104.

essential order with something it excels, but its superiority will not be measurable in any definite degree, for then it would be finite.’⁴¹ The alignment’s axis is the transcendental, ‘being’, which Scotus thinks applies univocally to God and creatures. I examine Scotus on univocity and being below.

4.4 Complications: Scotus’s Development and Ockham’s Critique

This sketch brackets three relevant complexities. First, the later version of Scotus’s formal distinction, featured in his *Reportatio Parisiensis* 1A and *Logica*, “denies that this [distinction] involves distinguishing a plurality of entities or property-bearers within what is really one and the same thing (*res*).”⁴² Adams writes that Scotus did not convince his Parisian critics that the formal distinction’s early formulations in his *Lectura* and *Ordinatio* did not compromise divine simplicity.⁴³ A more complete comparison would need to review Adams’s rehearsal of Scotus’s later arguments versus Aquinas. Secondly, Ockham rejects both Scotus’s formal distinction and his broader theory of universals. Some of those objections—particularly those concerning the consistency of Scotus’s thought—would be admissible in a debate between Scotus and Aquinas (as would some of Ockham’s criticisms of Aquinas). Thirdly, Adams’s narration of Ockham’s critique suggests how difficult a full debate between Scotus and Aquinas would be. She repeatedly notes that Ockham begs the question against Scotus and Scotus could revise his account to overcome Ockham’s attack: “Ockham’s efforts to reduce the first version of [Scotus’s] moderate realism to a contradiction are unsuccessful. His arguments serve more to articulate the contrasting conceptions of the metaphysical structure of particulars than to refute his opponents.”⁴⁴ The most telling arguments Ockham makes against Scotus, on Adams’s account, are those attacking Scotus’s consistency. So too we might expect regarding conflict between Aquinas and Scotus.

5. Aquinas on Naming God

Though Adams does not supply a Thomist rejoinder to the Scotist epistemological trilemma, Aquinas undoubtedly would be dissatisfied with the criticism on two

⁴¹ Scotus *Quodl.* 5.9; quoted in Frank and Wolter 1995, 154.

⁴² Adams 1987c, 1:26.

⁴³ Adams 1987c, 1:26; referencing Gelber 1974.

⁴⁴ Adams 1987c, 1:58-59; cf. *ibid.*, 1:46-59.

levels: Scotus appears to begin from very different premises than Aquinas, and the Scotist objection misconstrues Aquinas. Adams's medievalist studies are helpful on both points. In the initial chapter of *William Ockham* on universals, she writes:

Scotus insists that distinctions in conceived objects must be mirrored by distinctions within real things, if the real things are to fall under distinct concepts simultaneously.⁴⁵

She reiterates the statement in the book's later chapter on divine simplicity, divine attributes, and theories of theological language:

Scotus at first seems to have regarded . . . formal non-identity as a criterion of the presence of distinct entities (realities, formalities, formal aspects, etc.) within what is really one and the same thing (*res*). Thus, divine wisdom, divine goodness, and the other divine perfections would be distinct entities or realities within the thing (*res*) that is the divine essence. And it is the distinction of these entities or realities that corresponds to the distinct concepts 'wisdom', 'goodness', etc. and guarantees that the divine essence falls under each of them.⁴⁶

The position that Scotus imputes or would impute to Aquinas, according to Adams, is the following:

[Scotus] rejects Aquinas's contention that there is only a distinction of reason between divine wisdom and divine goodness.⁴⁷

Adams offers no citation from Aquinas for corroboration. However, this reading fits with the Scotist trilemma that I outlined in section 4.1 and whose application I shall now explain. The trilemma's third disjunct is that the perfection terms correspond to distinctions within the divine nature. This idea is unavailable to Aquinas because, without recourse to Scotus's formal distinction, it would require real distinctions and compromise divine simplicity. The other disjuncts are less clear cut. Presumably the argument is that Aquinas cannot affirm the trilemma's first disjunct that the different perfection terms lack any referent whatsoever in the divine nature. For the resultant skepticism sits poorly with his *Summa Theologiae*. That work from its outset states that theology results in *scientia* and that the creator is the *principium et finis* of all things including creaturely perfections (*ST* 1.1.3, 7). What remains is the second

⁴⁵ Adams 1987c, 1:23.

⁴⁶ Adams 1987c, 2:932. Adams (*ibid.*, 934) indicates that Scotus's later theory of formal non-identity abandons the notion of "distinct entities" that ground the formal distinction. However, he does not abandon the idea that God's wisdom and goodness are formally distinct, i.e., fall under distinct definitions prior to any act of the intellect.

⁴⁷ Adams 1987c, 2:925.

disjunct where the different perfection terms have the very same referent in God and differ only in the notional sense that the morning star and the evening star differ.

The *Summa Theologiae* addresses these issues in *prima pars*, question 13. Its argument is resistant towards Scotus. Aquinas contends that concepts correspond to the things they signify through likeness. Concepts do not simply fail if they are not identical to or do not mirror the things they purportedly signify. Concepts may perfectly or imperfectly signify their referents. Consider Aquinas's discussion of whether the perfections that Christians attribute to God are synonymous:

Such names that signify the divine essence, although imperfectly . . . have diverse *ratio*. For a *ratio*, which signifies a name, is a concept of the intellect which comes from the thing signified by the name. However, our intellect, when it cognizes God from creatures, forms concepts for understanding God that are proportional to the perfections proceeding from God to creatures. What perfections certainly pre-exist united and simple in God are truly received divided and multiple in creatures. Therefore just as to the diverse perfections of creatures there corresponds one simple principle that those diverse perfections represent variously and multiply; so by varying and multiple concepts our intellect corresponds to one altogether simple thing which in accordance with such concepts is imperfectly understood. And therefore the names attributed to God, although they signify one thing, still because they signify this thing under multiple and diverse *ratio*, are not synonymous.⁴⁸

The Scotus of Adams's *William Ockham* misinterprets Aquinas regarding the meaning of *ratio* and the reference of *diversae perfectiones*. The *ratio* of terms such as 'good' and 'wise' are diverse, according to Aquinas, but diverse respecting the range of creaturely expressions of God's perfections. Here are the details. In this passage, *ratio* does not point to a distinction of reason. It signifies the intentional object of human cognition. What drives the misreading of Aquinas is the Scotist emphasis on identicalness. For prioritizing identicalness over similitude favors more direct models of knowing God, and such models truncate the role that Aquinas assigns to knowing creatures. He argues that we know God indirectly from knowing creatures and their perfections directly. He thinks that effects resemble their cause though not always in the same way or to the same degree. So we can reason from creatures to God, but we cannot purify our language of its creatureliness. Now the Five Ways teach that for God to be the beginning and end of all that is God must lack creaturely features: contingency, potentiality, etc. So we must stretch the only tool,

⁴⁸ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.4co. (Leonine 4:144-45).

our language from creaturely effects, when we talk about God. Our theological tools are imperfect but legitimate: we can truthfully say the perfections as we know them are distinct and God is *omnino simplex*.

Aquinas puts in question both the Scotist critique and the theory of language on which it rests. We have strong reason to think that Adams's narration of the medieval debate is mistaken on these points. For chapter 21 of her study *William Ockham*, in which these errors appear, also articulates the correct reading of Aquinas. Just before discussing Scotus's trilemma, Adams explains why Ockham's related critique fails:

[When Aquinas] says that divine wisdom and divine goodness are really the same but distinct *rationes*, he means only that the real thing that is divine goodness and divine wisdom corresponds by resemblance to distinct thought objects.⁴⁹

Furthermore, when Adams treats Aquinas apart from his Franciscan critics, she verges on saying his *Summa Theologiae* (1.13.4) and Commentary on the *Sentences* (1.2.1.3) anticipate the first two horns of Scotus's trilemma. Without acknowledging these passages' implications versus Scotus, Adams writes that in them:

[Aquinas rejects the] assumption that the *rationes* will be vain and false, unless the correspondence involved is one of corresponding distinction; it is enough if there is a corresponding likeness. . . . A being who is simple in sense (A) [having no metaphysical components whatsoever] can be simultaneously similar to many concepts, and thereby be said to have a plurality of attributes.⁵⁰

Aquinas thinks that strict structural isomorphism is unnecessary for our words truthfully and without equivocation to signify the things signified. In *Summa contra Gentiles* (1.14) and *Summa Theologiae* (1.3 prologue), among other places, Aquinas argues that in this life, in an important sense, we cannot know what God is (*quid sit*) but only that God is (*an sit*). His focus on similitude reflects this restriction. Eminent successors such as Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus thought that such a view leads to unnecessary, debilitating skepticism. An instructive consequence of these contrasting approaches is that Scotus argues *ens infinitum* is the name most proper to God and it is uniquely so; for Aquinas *qui est*, which God reveals to Moses, is the most proper divine name because of all names it is the most common name.

⁴⁹ Adams 1987c, 2:924.

⁵⁰ Adams 1987c, 2:921.

This overview is insufficient to establish that Aquinas’s view on positive theological attributions is rationally sustainable in itself or in comparison with Scotus’s view. So the remaining discussion in sections 5 and 6 works out this comparative reading of Aquinas in greater detail. It substantiates my broader argument that a serious disagreement obtains between Christian Platonists and Anti-Platonists on divine transcendence. A philosophically useful, medieval consensus does not obtain on that subject *pace* Adams’s project on theodicy.

5.1 Scotus and Identicalness

The epistemological premise that Scotus’s trilemma assumes is better understood in terms of the Indiscernability of Identicals and its converse. Adams defines the former principle in *William Ockham* as: “for every individual x and y and every property F , if x is identical with y , then x is F if and only if y is F ” or $(x=y) \rightarrow \forall F(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy)$; and this entails that “if x is really the same as y , x is necessarily identical with y ; and if really distinct, necessarily really distinct.”⁵¹ This formulation appears in a comment on Ockham for whom Adams says “contradiction is both ‘the most powerful way’ of proving a distinction among real things” and the principle that enables our speech to be true or false rather than wholly equivocal.⁵²

If Scotus uses a form of the Indiscernability of Identicals as his criterion of distinction, then his version differs importantly from that of Ockham. At times, Adams herself is ambivalent or negative about associating Scotus with the principle. She writes that the “Indiscernability of Identicals does not necessarily hold where x and y are really the same but lacking in formal identity.”⁵³ Scotus also “rejects any nontrivial versions of the Identity of Indiscernibles” or $\forall F(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy) \rightarrow (x=y)$ where “properties, no one of which could individuate by itself, individuate in combination.”⁵⁴ Peter King likewise states that “the Indiscernability of Identicals

⁵¹ Adams 1987c, 1:16.

⁵² Adams 1987c, 1:16; quoting Ockham *Ord.* 1.2.11.

⁵³ Adams 1987c, 1:29; *ibid.*: Scotus’s later version of his formal distinction also entails that the “Transitivity $[(x=y) \cdot (y=z) \rightarrow (x=z)]$ and Symmetry of Identity $[(x=y) \leftrightarrow (y=x)]$ do not necessarily apply where x and y are really, but not adequately the same.” See also *ibid.*, 1:24, 47, 51.

⁵⁴ Adams 1987c, 2:677; cf. *ibid.*, 2:679.

fails” on Scotus’s account of formal and modal distinction.⁵⁵ So how is framing Scotus in terms of this principle helpful?

First, Adams implicates the principle where she mediates between Scotus and Ockham on the formal distinction. She says that Ockham’s main complaint against Scotus’s ontology apparently is that formally distinct entities would compromise the Indiscernability of Identicals and thus the principle of non-contradiction. However,

Ockham realizes what Scotus’s reply would be: viz., “that real non-identity can be proved through primary contradictories, but this cannot be done through other contradictories.” Propositions that are implicitly or explicitly of the form ‘ x is formally F ’ and ‘ y is not formally F ’ are not primary contradictories,” however, because the ‘formally’ diminishes the supposition from the thing (*res*) of which x and y are alike constituents, to the constituent formality x and y , respectively. Ockham’s recurrent answer, that “all contradictories are equally incompatible” and that ‘formally’ and ‘really’ cannot function to distract or diminish the supposition, represent a persistent begging of the question against Scotus’s ontology.⁵⁶

Not all versions of the Indiscernability of Identicals fail. Scotus proposes that certain philosophical and theological exceptions to the principle require us to add a level of ontological detail to which terms like contradictory, identical, and distinct, relate. Ockham’s view oversimplifies matters. Scotus also rejects versions of the Identity of Indiscernibles wherein accidents (e.g., quantity, location, or color) are logically sufficient to individuate composite entities. He contends instead that *haecceitas*—a positive entity “other than matter and substantial form or accidental form” that is formally distinct from the contracted common nature—individuates.⁵⁷ However, this claim is consistent with the Identity of Indiscernibles and its contraposition the Distinctness of Discernibles or $\sim(x=y) \rightarrow \forall F \sim(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy)$. *Haecceitas* is a property that is logically sufficient to differentiate two otherwise identical composite individuals.

Secondly, Scotus’s theory of univocity specifies conditions for meaningful signification that comport with a focus on identicalness and distinctness. Scotus’s *Ordinatio* (1.3.1.1-2, nn. 25-40) argues that the concept F is univocal only if it (i) possesses enough unity that for some entity x a contradiction results if we affirm x is F and deny x is F and (ii) suffices for the middle term of a syllogism such that the

⁵⁵ King 2003, 22.

⁵⁶ Adams 1987c, 1:49; quoting Ockham *Ord.* 1.2.6.

⁵⁷ Adams 1987c, 2:679. See also Noone 2003, 121.

syllogistic extremes are united without committing the fallacy of equivocation. He goes on to argue that the concept ‘being’ is univocal as follows. Major Premise: if we have a concept about which we are certain and some concepts about which we are dubious, it is clear that the certain concept is distinct from and other than the dubious concepts. Proof: no self-same concept can be both certain and dubious, therefore either the certain concept is other than the dubious concept or there can be no certitude about any concept. As Adams notes, in thus arguing Scotus “invokes the Indiscernability of Identicals.”⁵⁸ Minor Premise: people can believe with certainty that God is a being while doubting whether this being is finite or infinite, created or uncreated. Proof: it is a “historical fact” that philosophers have been certain that the first principle was a being like fire or water but uncertain whether that being was created or uncreated, wholly prior or posterior to another principle, and so forth. Scotus like Aquinas is a conceptual empiricist who thinks that in this life what we know of God comes from knowing creatures.⁵⁹ So on his schema of contradictories, we can cognize ‘being’ apart from the creaturely intrinsic modes with which we encounter it (being and its intrinsic modes are formally distinct but not really separable), and this permits our theological inferences to be cognitive. Moreover, without such univocity we cannot validly infer anything about God from creatures. The formal distinction allows Scotus to reach his conclusion without the compounded concept ‘infinite being’ undermining divine simplicity. Ergo: being is a univocal concept and (T2) is false.

Ockham objects saying that rather than people being certain of one concept (*ens*) and its conjunction with two uncertain concepts (*infinitum* or *finitum*) we can interpret people as being certain of two concepts under disjunction (*ens infinitum* or *ens finitum*). Adams argues that Ockham’s solution seems unavailable to Aquinas:

⁵⁸ Adams 1987c, 2:928.

⁵⁹ Adams 1987c, 2:926. Scotus follows Aristotle in thinking concrete objects are efficient causes of sense data which our senses process and store in our imagination. From these sense images or phantasms, the agent intellect abstracts terms of first intention, i.e., intelligible species with reference to the object. First intentions are non-cognitive, and the agent intellect abstracts from them terms of second intention, i.e., intelligible species with reference to the object’s form, which are therefore cognitive. Through comparison of universals with respect to form and the negation of their imperfections, we are provided with conceptual elements from which we can construct composite concepts that are proper to God. See Langston 1983; Pasnau 2003; Frank and Wolter 1995, 108-83; Perler 2003; Noone 2003.

“For how could he consistently allow us the ability to form a concept of infinite being that contained no components in common with our concept of finite being? Each of the components of all our concepts must apply univocally to composite entities on Aquinas’s account.”⁶⁰ This analysis appears to weaken Aquinas’s ability to disagree with Scotus philosophically. For if consistency requires Aquinas to grant that Scotus’s theory of univocity holds in all cases except God (assuming that the composition and simplicity distinguish creature from Creator) then one might expect that few non-theological warrants would favor Aquinas over Scotus.

Now Adams is correct that Aquinas could not consistently advocate Ockham’s suggestion. However, she is incorrect about what ideas constrain Aquinas. First, Aquinas argues that a term applies univocally between entities—even composite entities—only if they are metaphysically proportional (*secundum proportionem*).⁶¹ Our ability to use univocal language about several creatures will be restricted if those entities are metaphysically disproportionate to each other. Aquinas’s standard example is the sun and its diverse terrestrial effects. So Adams’s claim that “all concepts must apply univocally to composite entities on Aquinas’s account” seems false. She offers no textual corroboration to the contrary. However, her claim is only *prima facie* false given that Scotus thinks that his theological predecessors agreed with his univocity theory in practice regardless of their own theories.⁶² Secondly, several considerations complicate the proposal of Ockham that Adams sketches. Viewing finite and infinite being as two concepts under disjunction does not seem to answer Scotus. For this is the theory of signification that Scotus’s univocity theory criticizes as entailing skepticism about God.⁶³ The reasoning is that because we obtain all of our concepts from knowing creatures that we cannot arrive at a wholly different concept of God. Adams does not say why Ockham’s suggestion avoids this problem. The main target of Scotus’s criticism is Henry of Ghent. On the standard reading (which recent scholarship undermines) Henry claims there is no common reality between God and creatures; the commonness or analogy that humans ascribe

⁶⁰ Adams 1987c, 2:928.

⁶¹ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.5.

⁶² Scotus *Lect.* 1.3, n.29.

⁶³ Scotus *Ord.* 1.3., nn.30, 40.

to positive divine and creaturely concepts rests on our psychological fuzziness or confusion about such concepts.⁶⁴ Now Richard Cross explicitly assimilates Aquinas's position on positive theological language to this standard reading of Henry.⁶⁵ However, Cross is incorrect about what ideas constrain Aquinas. In his *Summa Theologiae* (1.13.2, 5), Aquinas rejects both the notion of Moses Maimonides that no positive terms apply to God as well as the notion that positive terms apply equivocally to God and creatures. Aquinas agrees that a rationally sustainable, metaphysical theology cannot rest on equivocal language. His argument is that we can sustain an understanding of theological language that collapses into neither univocity nor equivocality. However, we cannot properly judge Aquinas's contention without analyzing his theory in greater detail.

5.2 Aquinas on Likeness

Scotus and Aquinas differ not only in their conclusions about how the language of natural theology works but more importantly in their premises. This does not mean that their conflict rests on a clash of free-standing 'intuitions'. Aquinas differentiates real distinction and distinction of reason. He recognizes that distinctness, identity, and contradiction are linked. He faces the challenge of coordinating these tools with the tradition of attributing both simplicity and a plurality of perfections to God. In all these matters, Aquinas and Scotus are alike. However, Scotus responds to the challenge with a sophisticated theory of how distinctness, identity, and contradiction relate. Aquinas thinks properly articulating the Creator-creature relationship requires different philosophical tools: distinctions between hierarchies of divine names—some more perfect and some less perfect—and an account of analogy that avoids the compounding of univocal concepts or of primarily diverse, equivocal concepts.⁶⁶

Where Adams is not rehearsing the Franciscan Aristotelian objections to Aquinas, she acknowledges that Aquinas's account possesses resources with which he could respond to Scotus. She correctly states that for Thomas:

We can conceive of [God] by the requisite plurality of *rationes* . . . because our concepts represent Him imperfectly. The only perfect conception of the divine

⁶⁴ Decorte 1996.

⁶⁵ Cross 1996, 34-35.

⁶⁶ Burrell 1979; Burrell 2004, 91-112; Jordan 1983.

essence is the Divine Word itself. Even if a created intellect were able to apprehend the divine essence directly, as humans will be able to do only in the next life, it would not be able to apprehend the whole in a single conception.⁶⁷

She also correctly identifies why Aquinas thinks our concepts of God are necessarily imperfect:

[The divine names] are imposed from creatures . . . [and] the things from which a name is imposed, partially determines the content of our concept by determining the mode in which the thing is signified. . . . Since both the thing signified and the mode of signifying determine the content of our concepts, our concepts are imperfect representations of the goodness, wisdom, power, and life of God.⁶⁸

Aquinas's view is our words (*voces*) signify things (*res*) indirectly through concepts (*conceptiones*).⁶⁹ Concepts relate to the mind through the relationship of inherence or inhering in the mind. A concept's intentional object (*ratio*) is the thing signified (*res significata*), i.e., the thing's substantial form or a component form of it, which the mind abstracts from individuals. Concepts are formed through the mind's acts of understanding (*intellectus*) which are likenesses of things (*rerum similitudines*). When the mind successfully understands the thing's form, it has become adequate to or like the form, in the mind's particular way of becoming like the sensible things whose forms affect the mind. A concept's adequacy is a function of the likeness's perfection, which may vary for several reasons: we may lack certain intellectual and moral virtues, have certain cognitive impairments, the subject may exceed our natural capacities, etc.⁷⁰ Scotus thinks our intellect's proper object is 'being'.⁷¹ But Aquinas thinks material individuals, which are composite and temporal, are connatural to human understanding.⁷² This follows from his premises: (i) the thing that is known is in the knower in accordance with the knower's mode of being; and (ii) our immortal soul through which we know things is naturally united to a form of

⁶⁷ Adams 1987c, 2:916.

⁶⁸ Adams 1987c, 2:919.

⁶⁹ Adams 1987c, 2:914-22; Davies 1992, 125-28.

⁷⁰ Aquinas *ST* 1.12-13, 1.85.6-7, 1-2.57-58.

⁷¹ Scotus *Ord.* 1.3.1.1-2, nn.137-51.

⁷² Aquinas *ST* 1.12.4, 1.84.7, 1.86.2, 1.88.1-3.

particular matter.⁷³ It also follows that the human mind has limited natural capacity to become adequate to angelic natures, which are self-subsistent apart from matter, or *a fortiori* to the divine which Aquinas says is self-subsistent *esse*.

In her explanation of why Aquinas thinks our concepts of God are imperfect, Adams invokes two standard distinctions. One is between ‘that from which a word is imposed to signify’ and ‘that for which a word is imposed to signify’ (*id a quo imponitur nomen ad significandum* and *id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur*) or, more plainly, a word’s origin and its referent.⁷⁴ This distinction corresponds to Aquinas’s conceptual empiricism.⁷⁵ Scotus agrees with the Aristotelian thesis that in this life humans learn to talk about God indirectly from knowing creatures.⁷⁶ So the *a quo/ad quod* distinction is insufficient to account for their disagreement about univocity and analogy (though it does help mark off Aquinas and Scotus from thinkers who are less Aristotelian about cognition). The other distinction between ‘thing signified’ and ‘mode of signifying’ (*res significata* and *modus significandi*) is a better tool for articulating Aquinas’s limits.⁷⁷ On that matter, Adams omits some important details that we can fill in with the help of David Burrell and Mark Jordan.

5.3 The Res-Modus Distinction and Linguistic Failure

Medieval attention to semantic and grammatical modes of signification predates Aquinas.⁷⁸ A community of inquirers commonly will explicate the ambiguities and tensions of canonical texts by distinguishing senses of meaning. The history of Christian inquiry about the Bible and its respected commentators is no different. Arguments of early theologians like Origen, Augustine, Gregory, and Cassian, develop the fourfold sense of scripture.⁷⁹ In the high medieval period, the activity of making distinctions became more structured with Anselm of Canterbury and with

⁷³ See Wippel 1988; Aquinas *ST* 1.75.5, 1.76.1.

⁷⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.2.ad2; 1.13.8co., ad1; 1.13.11ad1. See Adams 1987c, 2:918-922; McCabe 1964, 104-105; Jordan 1983, 164-65.

⁷⁵ Aquinas *ST* 1.12.11-12; 1.13.1, 12; 1.79.3; 1.84.7.

⁷⁶ Scotus *Ord.* 1.3.1.1-2, nn.56-62.

⁷⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.1co.; 1.13.3co., ad3; 1.13.5co.; 1.13.6co.; 1.13.9obj.1; 1.13.11ad1; 1.13.12co., ad1.

⁷⁸ See Burrell 1979, 3-11.

⁷⁹ Aquinas *ST* 1.1.10.

Peter Lombard whose *Sententiae* set the baccalaureate student's task as mediating conflicts between established authorities on a syllabus of disputed questions. Such sustained reflection and debate on grammatical and semantic senses, verbal propriety and impropriety, and so forth, is philosophically fertile ground. It can train one to be more aware of the capacities and limits of human signification, which may be instructive when inquiring whether and how we can speak truthfully about God.

Aquinas comes from this tradition, and his discussion of how we name God regularly reflects on how verbs and participles imply temporal succession, concrete nouns imply composition and limitation, abstract nouns imply uninstantiated form, and so forth.⁸⁰ This suggests that there is symmetry between such features of natural languages and things that have contexts and modes; and this symmetry is what makes natural languages suited for truthful and sometimes precise signification about creatures. Burrell comments: "All our expressions are articulated to fit modalities" or "structures" of some object and thus to "isolate it sufficiently from other things [in order] to consider it."⁸¹ The *res/modus* distinction adds the precision that though terms that look and sound similar can be used in diverse contexts and from diverse perspectives. Though the modes of terms may vary, their meanings may be related and not opposed because the thing signified is common. However, Burrell warns that the *res/modus* distinction "does not yield any privileged access to the *res*" or "a univocal core of meaning."⁸² We have no unmannered language (i.e., no atemporal verbs and participles, no nouns that avoid both composition and uninstantiation) and any language purporting to be unmannered at best indicates the limits or failure of any language to be such. The *res/modus* distinction does not pick out particulars, as Scotus might argue, but reflects what must be the case with respect to any usable language without saying how it can be so. Burrell advances this interpretation and argues that the *res/modus* distinction is a 'formal feature' of language: formal features are not "attributes or characteristics" but what "concern our manner of locating the subject for characterization, and hence belong to a stage prior to

⁸⁰ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.1ad3; 1.13.7obj.4; 1.13.9co., ad2; 1.13.11co. Cf. Aquinas *ST* 1.3.3ad1.

⁸¹ Burrell 1979, 16, 18-19.

⁸² Burrell 1979, 10, 57.

considering attributes as such—a stage which will in part determine which attributes are relevant and certainly how they are to be attributed to the subject in question.”⁸³

Aquinas contends in the Five Ways that the world cannot account for itself though its very structure (e.g., motion, causation, modality) calls for an accounting. Herbert McCabe construes the argument as saying that whatever ultimately account for the world, we call God, and insofar as God accounts for that order and stops the regress, he must not involve what stood in need of explanation like composition or temporality.⁸⁴ So when Marilyn Adams states that through the Five Ways “[w]e can get some clue about how [Aquinas thinks] the mode of signifying proper to God differs from that proper to creatures” we need to be cautious.⁸⁵ For Aquinas arguably thinks that God has no mode properly speaking. Burrell claims that a central thesis of *Summa Theologiae* (1.3-12) is that God is the “unmannered source of being” and “God’s way of being is not a *mode* of being, but being itself.”⁸⁶ So if “all our expressions are formulated to express modalities” as argued above, then assertions about God will fail in important ways if not altogether. Accordingly, Aquinas begins the *prima pars* arguing that in this life we cannot know what God is in himself but rather what he is not (*quid non sit*).⁸⁷ God as first cause is disproportionate to secondary causes, which are his effects; we can only argue to his existence from effects.⁸⁸ Burrell comments, “Besides being unable to say the right things about God, we can never even put our statements correctly. . . . The inquiry into this particular nature cannot hope to circumscribe its object. One can only mark that object by noting precisely how different purported descriptions fail.”⁸⁹

A reasonable reader may conclude that this interpretation of *prima pars*, questions 3-13, is self-defeating. For instance, Mark Jordan remarks that Burrell’s

⁸³ Burrell 2004, 5. See also Burrell 1979, 14-17.

⁸⁴ McCabe 1980a.

⁸⁵ Adams 1987c, 2:919.

⁸⁶ Burrell 1979, 18, 53; emphasis in original. Cf. *ibid.*, 10, 19.

⁸⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.3pr.

⁸⁸ Aquinas *ST* 1.2.2ad3.

⁸⁹ Burrell 1979, 14.

reading “push[es] the Thomist account over into that of Maimonides”⁹⁰ On a standard reading, Maimonides thinks that theological predications only signify (i) what God is not or (ii) what God causes to be in creatures: saying ‘God is living’ only signifies that God is not an inanimate thing but it does not signify that God is a thing or is animate; saying ‘God is wise’ only signifies that God creates creatures that are wise. However, as I suggested earlier, Aquinas criticizes both limits as rendering talk about God arbitrary and as contrary to our intentions to say that God is good and wise essentially.⁹¹ So Jordan concludes that the error belongs to Burrell’s interpretation rather than to Aquinas’s account.

I want to suggest that Burrell and Jordan are not so divergent in their readings of Aquinas. We can read Burrell’s *Aquinas: God and Action* as indebted to analytic philosophers and especially Wittgenstein whose work he leverages to highlight Thomas’s attention to logic and language. We can also read his book as indebted to monastic traditions whose writings are spiritual exercises for readers. On the latter view, Burrell wants to help his readers to appreciate how when we talk about the Creator God that the logic of the matter entails that our most perfect utterances about God will renounce our command of language. The book reminds readers that even when we say legitimate things about God, such as ‘God is wise’, in an important sense we do not understand what we say.⁹² These exercises illuminate what Burrell takes to be a deep purpose of Aquinas’s philosophy: ongoing criticism rather than the construction of deductive, theoretical accounts regarding God.⁹³

Finding no place to stand regarding a doctrine of God when reading Burrell and Aquinas may help readers to recognize that they have a “native desire for explanation” and consider how they might discipline that desire if that which they pursue “is beyond the reach of scientific explanation.”⁹⁴ Burrell suggests that the right discipline involves holding in tension both that there is “appropriate discourse”

⁹⁰ Jordan 1983, 189n.34. Cf. Cross 1999, 45.

⁹¹ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.2, 6.

⁹² Burrell 1979, 22, 65.

⁹³ Burrell 1979, 29; cf. *ibid.*, 43. Adams (1988a, 127-28; 1994, 147-49; 1999c, 11-12) rejects Wittgensteinian, ordinary language philosophy projects; Burrell himself may not now articulate his readings of Aquinas in the idiom of ordinary language philosophy.

⁹⁴ Burrell 1979, 71; cf. *ibid.*, 15-16, 67, 73.

about God and that it “must fail by misleading” insofar as every statement we make is mannered and contextual but God is unmannered.⁹⁵ That is, truthful talk about God cannot stand still but requires the continual movement of correction or confession of its inadequacy. Nicholas Lash reminds us this is a central function of the Trinitarian creeds.⁹⁶ Such practices do not deliver a metaphysical description and “domesticate [God] within a conceptual framework”; they suggest how we might “use language as a pointer beyond [our present] state [of knowing], by carefully ascertaining its limits.”⁹⁷ Thus follows Burrell’s claim that when inquiring about the divine we “can only mark that object by noting precisely how different purported descriptions fail.”

Jordan likewise summarizes Thomas’s doctrine of divine names stating that in this life “the surest approach to the divine is by scrutiny of linguistic failure.”⁹⁸ What is more distinctive about Jordan’s commentary is his argument that Aquinas thinks “there is a hierarchy of meaningful names about God.”⁹⁹ The varieties of speech about God can be organized into categories that can be ordered in terms of their appropriateness or perfection of likeness. So we have terms about how creatures relate to God, metaphorical terms like rock or lion, and literal perfection names like good or wise.¹⁰⁰ As we ascend the hierarchy, our words become less imperfect and more playful or recalcitrant to precise, controlled articulation of what those words mean: “human knowing is inverted as it approaches the divine.”¹⁰¹ At the top are perfection terms like ‘good’ or ‘wise’ or ‘living’ which are predicated of the divine substance literally. In contrast, words like ‘rock’ or ‘lion’ are predicated of God metaphorically. We attribute terms like ‘rock’ to God while saying ‘God is not really

⁹⁵ Burrell 1979, 19, 68.

⁹⁶ Lash (1992, 33) writes that because the Trinity is metaphysically simple “that nothing that is said of any one of them will be appropriately said except in relation to the other two. At every turn, our understanding of one ‘person’ will be modified, adjusted, and corrected from the standpoint of our understanding of the others . . . [T]he very form of the Creed provides a pattern of self-correction, of restraint upon the range of misuse.”

⁹⁷ Burrell 1979, 29, 54.

⁹⁸ Jordan 1983, 161.

⁹⁹ Jordan 1983, 166. See also *ibid.*, 169, 175, 177, 179-83.

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.1, 2, 3, 6.

¹⁰¹ Jordan 1983, 173.

a rock'. However, when we attribute perfection terms to God it makes no sense to say 'God is not really good' or 'God is not really wise'.¹⁰² The difference, Aquinas argues, is that words said metaphorically of God are those for which corporeality is intrinsic to what they signify whereas words said literally involve corporeality only in their mode of signification.¹⁰³ Corporeality involves change, parts, and potentiality, which are among those things which stand in need of explanation, whereas pure perfections are ways in which things are fully actual.¹⁰⁴

So when used of God, metaphor requires negation regarding its *res* and *modus* whereas literal speech require negation only regarding its *modus*. Aquinas reasons that these things can be predicated of God because God is their cause as the Five Ways indicate and every effect is contained in its cause somehow (*effectus praeexistit virtute in causa agente*) according to segments of the metaphysical traditions with which Aquinas works.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, God must be his own *essentia* and *esse* because God is in no way composite (we know *that* this must be but not *how* this can be); and as self-subsisting *esse* God must include all perfections, which are how anything has *esse* or actuality.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Aquinas capitalizes on the resonance between this philosophical argument and a key scriptural text, Ex. 3:14-15, to argue *Qui est* is God's most appropriate name.¹⁰⁷

5.4 Analogy and Metaphysical Asymmetry

Scotus would deny that these arguments lend credibility to Aquinas's view that speech about God can be appropriate yet fail. As both Scotus's argument for univocity and Adams's comments on it indicate, from the Scotist philosophical perspective, it is false that (T2) humans are presently incapable of forming concepts that apply univocally to God and creatures. Moreover, according to Adams, Scotus would argue that (T2) also fails on the Thomist account: "Aquinas seems to . . . say that the essence of wisdom, which is found in creatures, does pertain to God, but in a

¹⁰² Davies 1992, 67.

¹⁰³ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.3ad3.

¹⁰⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.

¹⁰⁵ Aquinas *ST* 1.2.3, 1.4.2, 1.13.2.

¹⁰⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.3.3-4, 1.4.2, 1.13.2-3.

¹⁰⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.11.

different and more eminent way . . . [H]ow [then] can Aquinas consistently claim that we are psychologically unable to abstract a concept of wisdom that is univocal to God and creatures?”¹⁰⁸ As I stated earlier, Scotus thinks his predecessors implicitly agreed with his univocity theory regardless of their protests otherwise.

While it is no part of Aquinas’s account to deny that the subjects he treats can be intelligently described differently, he would deny that his view implicitly relies on univocity. Aquinas thinks theological language can both be appropriate in one sense and fail in another sense: no concept applies univocally to God and creatures because the relationship between God and creatures is asymmetrical.¹⁰⁹ Consider how people may learn the rule that we can properly say ‘a portrait painting resembles the person who is its subject’ but in an important sense the converse is an improper statement. Similarly, Aquinas reasons that we can say that creatures necessarily resemble God in some ways although in no way can we say that God resembles creatures.¹¹⁰ Insofar as the logic of creaturely dependence on God entails some sort of resemblance of creature to God, then our concepts do not apply equivocally to God and creatures. Aquinas says they are analogical. The rule regarding portraits makes sense because it reflects the ontological priority of the person over the painting—viz., the person is a formal cause of the painting and not vice versa, the person ranks higher in an ontological hierarchy, the person is chronologically prior to the portrait, etc. The rule regarding theology makes sense because the uncaused cause is uniquely metaphysically prior to and thus necessarily disproportionate to its effects.¹¹¹

Aquinas’s focus on hierarchy and asymmetry is something he learns from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as his *Summa Theologiae* shows and Jordan states.¹¹² However, Dionysius arguably “lacks the conceptual and logical tools in which to state the grounds” on which his apophatic theology rests.¹¹³ Aquinas’s

¹⁰⁸ Adams 1987c, 2:930. Adams (ibid., 2:928-29) lists two other Scotist objections to (T2), but she concludes those arguments are ineffective or question begging.

¹⁰⁹ Aquinas *ST* 1.2.2ad3, 1.3.5ad2, 1.13.5-6, 1.44.3, 1.45.7, 1.47.1.

¹¹⁰ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.3ad4.

¹¹¹ Aquinas *ST* 1.2.2ad3, 1.3.5ad2, 1.4.3, 1.13.2.

¹¹² O’Brien 1974, 183: “In St Thomas’s works Dionysius is cited over 1700 times, more than any other single *auctoritas*.”

¹¹³ Turner 1995, 35.

Summa Theologiae furnishes two analytical tools regarding likeness and relations that elucidate the Thomist-Dionysian rule.

Tool one: he argues that a likeness (*similitudo*) (i) obtains where things share a form (*forma*) and (ii) is more or less perfect depending on whether things also share the same type and degree (*ratio* and *modus*).¹¹⁴ Aquinas presents some of the variety of likenesses through three examples. A most perfect likeness obtains between two equally white things because their whiteness has the same form, type, and degree. But two unequally white things have an imperfect likeness because they have the same form and type but different degrees. His third example shifts the subject matter to cause and effect. Aquinas calls the likeness of things that share a form but not the same type non-univocal. With a human begetting another human we have a univocal likeness because the cause and its effect share the same species and thus the same type; in contrast, the sun and its many effects differ in species such that the likeness of effect to cause is not univocal but analogical. Aquinas argues that the likeness of Creator and creation is the latter sort because the divine belongs to neither a genus nor a species and therefore shares neither classification with creatures.¹¹⁵ But insofar as all things have *esse* they must resemble God who is the first and universal source of *esse*, although God has *esse* through his essence and creatures through participation in God.¹¹⁶

Tool two: Aquinas gives some rigor to idea of non-univocal relations with his account of relations (*relationes*).¹¹⁷ He argues that any *x* and *y* can be related in three ways depending on whether the relation obtains from what is the nature of one or both things or from only the mind's way of understanding one or both.¹¹⁸ In the first case, *x* and *y* are related solely through the mind's operation as with self-identity ($x=x$) wherein the mind treats one thing as if there were two or a comparison of

¹¹⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.3.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Aquinas *ST* 1.3.5.

¹¹⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.3. Cf. Burrell 1979, 51-54.

¹¹⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.7, 1.28.1-3. Burrell (1979, 84-86) comments on this argument but does not articulate it in terms of asymmetry nor does he connect it to Pseudo-Dionysius. The absence of the latter figure from Burrell's treatments of divine simpleness is an important lacuna in his account, and the former term would help unify his comments.

¹¹⁸ I use McCabe's device of translating Thomas's *duo extrema* with the variables *x* and *y*.

something and nothing wherein non-being is treated like a substantial term. In the second case, x and y may be related because of something real in each as with comparisons (e.g., bigger-smaller or more-less) or causal relationships (e.g., paternity or a moved object and its mover). In the third case, x is related to y due to something real in x although y is related to x but not due to something real in y , because x and y are not of the same order. For instance, perception and scientific knowledge involve something knowable and an act of knowing. Aquinas asserts that an act of knowing has a real relation to the thing known (the known thing's form is a key constituent of the act of knowing) whereas the knowable thing does not have a real relation to the act of knowing (the act of knowing is in no way a constituent of the knowable thing). (Aquinas could not know how quantum mechanics may undercut his example.) He then takes the idea that things of different orders may be related, though in unusual ways, to argue that God who is of a different order than creatures necessarily has an asymmetrical relationship with them. Real relationship comes from the nature of things, thus creatures necessarily have real relationship to God; no necessity of God's nature relates him to creatures, but rather his relationship is through intellect and will or is intentional.¹¹⁹ Notice that Aquinas talks here of relations rather than distinctions like Scotus. The broader category encompasses tools Scotus employs such as distinction, identity, and contradiction, but allows for others such as likeness and for alternatives to real relationships and relationships of reason such as intentional relationships. Aquinas carves out logical space to which Adams and Cross pay no attention. So while distinctions of reason and real distinctions are inadequate means for dealing with the theological problematic Aquinas inherits, Scotus's formal distinction is neither the only nor perhaps the most satisfactory remedy.

If Aquinas's view fails to stand up to scrutiny, it is not because his account smuggles in univocity. Consider further his hierarchy of divine names. Aquinas argues that while metaphorical terms apply primarily to creatures and secondarily to God, the *res significata* of perfection concepts apply primarily to God and secondarily to creatures.¹²⁰ This nicely ties together the metaphysics and semantics

¹¹⁹ Aquinas *ST* 1.28.1ad3.

¹²⁰ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.6. Contrast this with the statements of Aquinas (*ST* 1.3.8, 1.4.1, 1.44.2) about God's relationship with prime matter. He argues God is the creator of prime matter,

explored above. It completes Aquinas's reasoning about the differences between how anthropomorphisms and perfection terms apply to God: the former metaphorically and the latter literally, the former negating *modus* and *res* and latter negating *modus* but not *res*. These aspects of literal signification about God can be clarified.

Denying *modus*: though we deny the unavoidably creaturely manner in which perfections are predicated of God, such denials do not generate univocal concepts or enable us to "think the simplicity of God."¹²¹ Knowing that perfections are not possessed in one manner does not tell us the perfections are possessed in another manner.¹²² Aquinas rejects schemes in which divine perfections are 'properties' that God 'possesses'.¹²³ God just is his deity, life, *esse*, and whatever other perfections properly predicated of the divine.¹²⁴ We may have some useful analogies (as Burrell argues regarding action theory) that limber up our minds and make such statements palatable. However, Aquinas is not therefore offering us a description. We do not know how God just is his *esse* and *essentia*. The Five Ways compels us to assert this identity as a consequence of God lacking any potentiality whatsoever, etc. About God we know that certain things are true though we do not know how they are true, just as Aquinas argues we know that God is (*an sit*) but not what God is (*quid sit*). For Aquinas divine simplicity is a rule of speech about God; he does not conceive of it as a property as some analytic philosophers suggest.¹²⁵ Indeed, when Scotus argues that the formal distinction repairs the nonsense of saying (T1) goodness and wisdom are not distinct in God, he thereby admits that Aquinas fails to offer a description.

Asserting *res*: Aquinas contends that it is precisely the analogical (neither univocal nor equivocal) character of the perfections that allows them to be properly predicated of God. Burrell provides examples of how common speech uses the perfections analogically: we "speak of a virus being alive, and apply the same term to a symphony performance" and Socrates famously teaches us that "a wise man is one

though prime matter *qua* pure potentiality is utterly unlike God. This partly explains why material things can only provide non-literal ways of signifying the divine.

¹²¹ Jordan 1983, 167.

¹²² Aquinas *ST* 1.13.3.1. Cf. *ibid.*, 1.86.2co.

¹²³ Davies 1987, 58-59.

¹²⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.3.3-4, 1.4.2.

¹²⁵ Plantinga 1980, 26-61.

who realizes he is not wise.”¹²⁶ That these terms can function literally in varied, disparate contexts is what empowers them to do their jobs when they are applied to creatures, says Burrell. This remarkable flexibility enables perfection terms to mean more than whatever meanings we can articulate. That claim along with the claim that any perfection creatures have or are flows from God, their primary cause, give us confidence that we can use them literally of God.¹²⁷ When arguing that *Qui est* is the most appropriate divine name, Aquinas alludes to this capacity, saying that “to the extent that names of God are less determinate and more common and unconditional, so much more do we properly use them of God.”¹²⁸ The perfections and *esse* transcend our contexts and signify the ways things are actual and are thus fitting means to signify that which is most knowable and therefore unknowable.¹²⁹ On Aquinas’s construal, the pure perfections do not have sufficient unity such that contradiction results from affirming and denying a perfection of something: “a wise man is one who realizes he is not wise.” So again, Scotus’s objection fails, and the idea that perfections apply primarily to God makes sense of why our linguistic uses of them are inherently analogical. Language about God can be appropriate and still fail because the relationship between God and creatures is asymmetrical.

5.5 Imprecision and Theological Truth

We can bring the cumulative difference between Scotus and Aquinas to a point in two ways. First, for Aquinas there is no ideal language for talking about God whereas Scotus verges on such a claim. Secondly, for Aquinas truthful discourse about God is more a matter of performance and faithfulness than about structural isomorphism as it is apparently for Scotus.

Scotus associates the most proper concepts of God at which we can arrive, like *ens infinitum*, with those that are descriptive and do not befit creatures.¹³⁰ In contrast, the most appropriate divine name according to Aquinas, *Qui est*, is “in a way, the

¹²⁶ Burrell 1979, 9-10.

¹²⁷ Burrell 1979, 9-10, 55-67. See also McCabe 1964, 104-107.

¹²⁸ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.11co. (Leonine 4:162).

¹²⁹ Aquinas *ST* 1.12.1.

¹³⁰ Scotus *Ord.* 1.3.1.1-2, n.58 (Vatican 3:40).

most common name.”¹³¹ Burrell comments that Aquinas thinks the perfections do not deliver “an extraordinary language to articulate or a superior faculty to apprehend” what God is.¹³² For as Aquinas suggests in *prima pars*, question 12, and elsewhere, no words can express that “fullness of being” or “plenitude of perfection” that Scotus thinks *ens infinitum* captures.¹³³ We can still speak truthfully about God using the creaturely models connatural to us of which some candidates fit not as well and are metaphorical and others fit better and are literal.¹³⁴ But even valid, literal speech is literal only because it is able to mean more than we can explain it to mean. Pointing towards God’s unique fullness requires numerous, conflicting languages of which many will be non-philosophical (e.g., poetry, history, law, mathematics, trade) and many will have non-verbal foci (e.g., music, architecture, dance, the sacraments).¹³⁵ This follows from Aquinas’s teaching on the Five Ways and divine names and from his Augustinian reflections on topics such as whether creaturely things bear vestiges of the Trinity and whether all signs of holy things are sacraments.¹³⁶

Aquinas has other reasons for thinking that truthful theological reflection requires common speech. In *Summa Theologiae, prima pars*, question 9, Aquinas asks whether it is right to use metaphorical and symbolic speech—proper to low teaching and poetry—in matters of sacred doctrine. He says it is proper, and his most interesting argument answers the third objection. Metaphors and anthropomorphisms preserve us from error, says Aquinas, because more elevated symbols might fool us into thinking our words get God right. We are less likely to think ‘God is a rock’ needs no correction than say ‘God is intelligent’. More earthy symbols also promote

¹³¹ Jordan 1983, 167. Aquinas (*ST* 1.13.11co.) and Scotus (*Rep.* 1A 1.2.1.1-3, n.50 [Wolter and Adams 1982, 282-83]) both enlist John Damascene (*De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.9) regarding what is the most appropriate divine name.

¹³² Burrell 1979, 47.

¹³³ Frank and Wolter 1995, 92.

¹³⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.13.12ad3.

¹³⁵ Burrell 2004, 104; Jordan 1983, 179-80; Turner 1995, 20. This would not compromise the negativity of the approach to God as Turner (1995, 22-23) states: “Good theology, Denys thinks . . . leads to that silence which is found only on the other side of general linguistic embarrassment. But . . . to reach that point . . . it is necessary for theology to talk too much.”

¹³⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.2.3, 1.13, 1.45.7, 3.60.2.

a more genuine estimation that God is beyond what we speak or think.¹³⁷ Aquinas corroborates this argument as much from Pseudo-Dionysius as from holy scripture. Denys Turner helps clarify the Dionysian concern.

In a pious vocabulary of unshocking, ‘appropriate’ names, lies the danger of the theologian’s being all the more tempted to suppose that our language about God has succeeded in capturing the divine reality in an ultimately adequate way. Tactically preferable is the multiplicity of vulgar images which, because they lack any plausibility as comprehensive of appropriate names, paradoxically have a more uplifting effect: “Indeed the sheer crassness of the signs is a goad so that even the materially inclined cannot accept that it could be permitted or true that the celestial and divine sights could be conveyed by such shameful things.”¹³⁸

Besides fitting nicely with *prima pars*, questions 1-13, this move gives us reasons other than scripture’s authority for thinking that metaphysics cannot replace holy writ. Aquinas’s first question in his *Summa Theologiae* like Augustine’s *Confessions* recognizes that theologians ought not disdain the commonness of scripture and by extension that of the world.

The best reading of the Scotist corpus may ultimately accord with these Thomist-Dionysian concerns. My rehearsal of Scotus in section 4 is too brief to rule out that possibility. However, such agreement would complicate Scotus’s univocity theory. Additionally, the concerns that motivate his theory seem like common sense: whether an assertion is true is a matter of whether its structure corresponds to the structure of some entity or state of affairs. With more fluid, flexible conditions for signification, we cannot distinguish between true and false theological assertions or construct valid syllogisms. Does Aquinas render it futile to try understanding our faith contrary to his claim that *sacra doctrina* results in *scientia*?

Burrell is suggestive on this question. The cluster of concepts he associates with truthful speech about God include performance, faithfulness, discipline, and judgment. Speaking and knowing truth about God is as practical as it is theoretical, and he argues it is the province of poets as well as philosophers and musicians as well as farmers.¹³⁹ Correspondingly, he contends that Aquinas is better understood as

¹³⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.1.9ad3.

¹³⁸ Turner 1995, 24-25; quoting from Pseudo-Dionysius *Celestial Hierarchy* 141 A-B.

¹³⁹ Burrell 1979, 22, 55, 67, 71, 73; Burrell 2004, 104.

using practical knowledge as the primary model for divine knowledge.¹⁴⁰ Scotus may be right that Aquinas would hamper some valid syllogistic reasoning. The crucial question is what arguments are thereby debarred? Is the expectation of precision and neatness proper to the nature of what we investigate?¹⁴¹ Aquinas thinks reasoning from naturally knowable truths about Creator and creatures shoulders only part of the theological burden. Unlike some philosopher theologians, Aquinas “needs the specific revelation of the scriptures to fulfill those aspirations which the austere prescriptions of grammar can only disappoint.”¹⁴² Authority has its place.

6. Scotus versus Aquinas on Divine Infinity

6.1 Aquinas on Relative and Unqualified Infinity

Richard Cross claims that Scotus aims his account of infinity at Aquinas. The Vatican edition of Scotus’s *Ordinatio* 1.2.1.1-2 (on God’s being and his unity) indicates as much.¹⁴³ Scotus’s argument there considers reasoning like that of Aquinas on matter and form as well as on angelic essence and existence. He alleges that Thomas commits the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent (‘if P then Q, Q, therefore P’) in the following form: ‘if something is infinite *simpliciter* then it is immaterial, *x* is immaterial, therefore *x* is infinite’. However, this allegation is false.

We can read the response of Aquinas’s Commentary on the *Sentences* 1.43.1.1 as claiming that God is infinite because the divine is immaterial.

And prime matter, which concerning itself is indifferent to all forms (whence it is called infinite) is made finite through form; and similarly form, which as far as it is in itself is able to perfect diverse parts of matter, is made finite through the matter in which it is received. And by negation of such a limit the divine essence is called infinite.¹⁴⁴

However, this reading makes sense only if we isolate his comments on prime matter from the remainder of the passage.

¹⁴⁰ Burrell 2004, 34-42.

¹⁴¹ Jordan 1983, 181; Burrell 1979, 3, 10-11.

¹⁴² Burrell 1979, 89; Aquinas *ST* 1.1.8.

¹⁴³ Scotus *Ord.* 1.2.1.1-2, nn.140-43 (Vatican 2:211-212). On infinity as it relates to form limited by matter, the Vatican edition’s critical apparatus references several passages from Aquinas (primarily, *Sent.* 1.43.1.1co., *SCG* 1.43, *ST* 1.7.1co.; secondarily: *Sent.* 2.3.1.1co., *ST* 1.50.2co. & ad2-4, *Quodl.* 2.2.1co. & ad2, *SCG* 2.52, *De Ente* c.5.).

¹⁴⁴ Aquinas *Sent.* 1.43.1.1co. (Parma).

For every form in a particular way if it is considered abstractly, has an infinity; just as in relation to white understood abstractly, the *ratio* of white is not finite with regard to anything; but nevertheless the *ratio* of color and the *ratio* of being is determined in it, and is contracted to the determined species. And therefore that which has absolute *esse* and is in no way received in anything, indeed his own very self is his *esse*, that is unreservedly infinite. Therefore his essence is infinite, as well as his goodness, and whatever else is said concerning him; because nothing of these [attributes] is limited in some degree, as with what is received in something is limited by the capacity of [the thing that receives]. And from this essence that is infinite, it follows that power of it would be infinite; and this is clearly declared in *Liber de causis*, that the first being has infinite excellence without qualification, because his very own self is his excellence.¹⁴⁵

The remaining passage reasons from the contrast between material infinity or limitlessness (*infinitum materialis*) and what we might call formal infinity or limitlessness. The parallel response in *Summa Theologiae* 1.7.1 argues likewise.

However, matter is made perfect by form through which it is made finite, and therefore the infinite, in accordance with what is attributed to matter, has the aspect of imperfection, for it is so to speak matter not having form. However, form is not perfected by matter but rather through matter the amplitude of a form is restricted, hence the infinite, in accordance with what itself holds on the part of form undetermined by matter, has the *ratio* of perfection. But that which is maximally formal of all things is *esse* itself, as it is clear from the preceding. Therefore since the divine *esse* cannot be received in anything, but is self-subsisting *esse*, as has been pointed out above, it is manifest that God himself is infinite and perfect.¹⁴⁶

For a thing to be undetermined or unrestricted by a second thing, whether internal or external, is for the former thing to have a sort of infinity. In this sense, prime matter considered in itself is infinite. Likewise, if a form is not received in matter but able to subsist in itself, as some forms are able, then it is unrestricted and has the *ratio* of perfection. Aquinas then asserts that what is maximally formal of all things is *esse* itself, and God is not received in anything but is self-subsisting or self-individuating *esse*. Thus, God is infinite without qualification.

Aquinas does lapse at least once in a major work and commit the fallacy that Scotus alleges. He inquires whether human minds can know the infinite in *Summa Theologiae* 1.86 his reply to the initial article's first objection states that God is called infinite as his form is not limited by some matter. Nevertheless, his specific

¹⁴⁵ Aquinas *Sent.* 1.43.1.1co (Parma).

¹⁴⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.7.1co (Leonine 4:72).

treatment of divine infinity in 1.7 should govern our reading given its relative location in the *Summa* and the internal references to it in other passages that discuss infinity. Moreover, Aquinas explicitly criticizes the inference of unqualified infinity from mere immateriality. In 1.50.2 and 1.75.5, he asks whether angels and the human soul are composed of matter and form. The fourth objection in each article argues that angels and souls must be enmattered because otherwise they would be infinite which is absurd; for we know creatures are necessarily finite and only God is infinite. Both objections assume that we should commit the fallacy attributed to Aquinas. He replies in both cases that immaterial created things can only be relatively infinite (*infinitum secundum quid*) because they are unlimited by matter but are limited insofar as their *esse* participates in God's self-subsistent *esse*. Immaterial creations are not infinite in the minimal sense that they are metaphysically composite.

In distinguishing material infinity from formal infinity, Aquinas indicates (i) the word 'infinity' is properly used in differing and sometimes incompatible senses and (ii) which sense is appropriate depends on the subject. *Summa Theologiae* 1.7.2 argues that when we apply the term infinite to some subject we must judge whether we are talking about relative or unqualified infinity (*infinitum secundum quid* or *infinitum simpliciter*).¹⁴⁷ If a person's usage corresponds to the first disjunct, then the meaning of infinity shifts depending on the usage's subject and context and is thus analogical. Different uses are related but not uniform insofar as they are relative to different things like whiteness, enjoyment, or motion. Even given a numerical standard, Aquinas argues that humans cannot comprehend things that have an infinite number of parts because unlike angels our minds can only consider things one piece at a time.¹⁴⁸ *A fortiori*, statements about unqualified infinity are also analogical because it is contextless (it would lack even numerical magnitude for comparison) and we cannot articulate this positively given the mannered, contextual nature of language. Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* 1.7.2 develops the relative-unqualified distinction that 1.50.2 and 1.75.5 use. The former article also outlines the latter two

¹⁴⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.7.2co.

¹⁴⁸ Aquinas *ST* 1.58.2, 1.86.2.

articles' reasoning: created beings cannot be unqualifiedly infinite because their *esse* is not self-subsistent like God but contracted and limited.¹⁴⁹

The passages that Cross examines from Scotus's *Ordinatio* reference neither Aquinas's lapse nor his ameliorative statements. However, Scotus's *Reportatio Parisiensis* 1A, the portion of his student's Parisian lectures notes that Scotus examined, allows Aquinas a reply to the initial objection: it distinguishes infinity with respect to what is above and what is below (*infinitum ad superius vel ad inferius*).¹⁵⁰ This paraphrase is closer to Aquinas's argument, but it is not as much a vehicle for an effective rebuttal as a display of Scotus's philosophical differences with Aquinas. Scotus repeats his first objection but does not admit that it mischaracterizes Aquinas. Instead, he further objects that Aquinas again affirms the consequent in saying things are finite if their *esse* and *essentia* are composite:

Although it is true that everything caused is finite, nevertheless the reason for its being finite does not lie in this respect or relationship to its cause but rather in something intrinsic to itself considered as such, just as the *per se* and formal reason why something is infinite is not its relationship to its effect. Rather it is something intrinsic to its essence, a measure of being it would possess even if it never had an effect. Therefore, the formal reason for the finitude of an angel does not consist in a relationship to the cause that gives it shared existence.¹⁵¹

Finiteness and infinity are intrinsic modes (*intrinsicus gradus*) rather than relationships to accidents and external things. But Scotus's argument begs several questions. First, as indicated earlier, Aquinas thinks that real relationship obtains from the nature of one or both terms within the relationship.¹⁵² A 'relationship' and 'something intrinsic' are not exclusively disjunctive but rather the former is a subset of the latter according to Aquinas: real relationships are in things.¹⁵³ Secondly, Aquinas thinks that relationships between cause and effect may be asymmetrical. So if an effect has no real relation to or bearing on its cause's nature, it does not follow that a cause has no bearing on its effect's nature. Thirdly, given the understanding of

¹⁴⁹ Aquinas *ST* 1.7.2co.

¹⁵⁰ Wolter and Adams 1982, 248-91. My quotations corresponding to this reference are from its parallel text-translation of Scotus's *Reportatio parisiensis* 1A, 1.2.1-2.1-4 (translated by Wolter and with a basic critical apparatus).

¹⁵¹ Scotus *Rep.* 1A 1.2.1.1-3, n.55 (Wolter and Adams 1982, 284-85).

¹⁵² Aquinas *ST* 1.13.7, 1.28.1-3.

¹⁵³ See the reasoning at fn.128 above. For Scotus's contrasting view see King 2003, 33-38.

causation articulated in the Five Ways, it makes no sense to say with Scotus: “Each absolute essence that is finite in itself is thought of as finite prior to any relation it may have to any other essence and is first finite in itself before it is finite in relationships to anything else.”¹⁵⁴ Aquinas thinks an angel, like all creatures, is by nature a creature. The fundamental way Aquinas marks an angel’s creatureliness is to say the angel is its own *essentia* (does not participate in some common essence as do material things, and thus each angel is a unique species) but is not its own *esse* (does participate in God’s uniquely self-subsistent *esse*).¹⁵⁵ A creature is fundamentally a thing whose *essentia* and *esse* form a composite, i.e., of which it is puzzling to talk about apart from a first cause. By Aquinas’s lights, Scotus would require us to speak of creatures as we do of God for whom there neither is a prior cause to determine the divine nature nor any effect that determines the divine nature. It is to err regarding the creator-creature asymmetry at least as Aquinas articulates it.

6.2 Aquinas on Negation and Transcendence

The accounts of Aquinas and Scotus regarding divine infinity differ both in broad structure and in detail. In *Summa Theologiae* 1.7, Aquinas defines infinity negatively: a thing is called infinite when something about it is not finite or limited.¹⁵⁶ Correspondingly, the structure 1.2-11 reflects the view that divine infinity is a corollary of the divine necessarily lacking composition of any sort: Aquinas immediately follows his Five Ways with inquiry about divine simplicity and only after an interval of three questions examines divine infinity.¹⁵⁷ And likewise, the particulars of 1.7 from the outset contrast infinity as it applies to material things and to immaterial things. Comparison with 1.3-4 and 1.8 indicates that this is part of a sustained effort by Aquinas to disabuse us of material and spatial ways of thinking about the divine. That he judges this work is necessary “shows how little Aquinas thinks the Five Ways have achieved,” remarks Fergus Kerr.¹⁵⁸ But why does this situation arise? I shall suggest two reasons.

¹⁵⁴ Scotus *Rep.* 1A 1.2.1.1-3, n.57 (Wolter and Adams 1982, 286-87).

¹⁵⁵ Aquinas *ST* 1.3.3, 1.7.2, 1.50.2.

¹⁵⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.7.2co.

¹⁵⁷ See Burrell 1979, 26-41.

¹⁵⁸ Kerr 2002, 76.

First, Aquinas holds that material individuals are connatural to our understanding, so we naturally and necessarily think of things in categories that are proper to corporeal beings. And he thinks this is entirely proper as long as we discipline ourselves to acknowledge the limits of these categories. Secondly, Aquinas may have thought that the intellectual power of the Aristotelian categories and broader philosophy would mislead Aristotle's readers to think "even God himself, must be capable of being described in terms of the ten categories."¹⁵⁹

When he puts Aristotelian tools to Christian use, Aquinas builds in a Neoplatonist correction, akin to that of Augustine or Dionysius, that acknowledges the limits of our conceptual resources versus God's transcendence.¹⁶⁰ Thus Aquinas concludes, "By the very fact that the *esse* of God is in itself subsistent and not received in anything, and thus is called infinite, it is distinguished from all things and they are removed from it."¹⁶¹ Aquinas corrects and completes this view of infinity in 1.8 where he reflects on how God as self-subsistent *esse* must cause and sustain the *esse* of creatures.¹⁶² Shifting from the language of creatures participating in God to God being present to creatures as agent is to effect, Aquinas concludes, "Now *esse* is that which is more intimate to anything and more profoundly in all things . . . hence it is necessary that God is in all things, and intimately."¹⁶³ Together, *Summa Theologiae* 1.7 and 1.8 deny God should be conceived pantheistically or deistically (i.e., as 'in everything' or as 'out there'). For both disjuncts perpetuate the error of conceiving the divine on spatial and material terms and doing so literally. Instead, as Rowan Williams characteristically puts the Christian Neoplatonist point, Aquinas thinks the divine is infinite without involving pantheism or deism because the divine does not compete with creatures for space.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Evans 1982, 33.

¹⁶⁰ See Evans 1982, 29-36; Turner 1995, 19-49.

¹⁶¹ Aquinas *ST* 1.7.1ad3 (Leonine 4:72).

¹⁶² Comparison of Aquinas *ST* 1.7.1ad3 with *ST* 1.8.1obj.1 shows that this is the function of question 8 (Leonine 4:82): "It seems that God is not in all things. For what is above all things is not in all things. But God is above all things in accordance with that of psalmist: *God is exalted above all the nations, etc.* Therefore God is not in all things."

¹⁶³ Aquinas 1.8.1co. (Leonine 4:82)

¹⁶⁴ Williams, R. 1996, 145; Williams, R. 2000, 106-110, 120-21. See also Turner 1995, 45.

These details suggest why Aquinas structures other discussions touching on infinity as he does. His *Summa Theologiae* does not focus on divine knowledge or power until 1.14 and 1.25, respectively, wherein two articles ask whether God can know infinite things (1.14.12) and whether the power of God is infinite (1.25.2). Aquinas does not argue from the premises that there are an infinite number of things to be known or to be moved to the conclusion that God is infinite. Rather, only after asking how God is and is not infinite are we ready to ask how divine infinity relates to divine knowledge and power. Aquinas seems to think that if we reversed the order of inference then two problems would occur. We would saddle God with problems that a material creature might have in handling things of infinite magnitude.¹⁶⁵ Or we would think that saying God can know an infinite thing or produce an infinite creaturely effect represents adequately how God is infinite *simpliciter*.¹⁶⁶

6.3 Thomist Objections to Scotus's Intensive Infinity

Scotus's early work defines infinity negatively.¹⁶⁷ However, his later works define infinity positively. His *Ordinatio* states as "that perfection from the thing's nature which cannot be exceeded."¹⁶⁸ His *Reportatio* 1A states, "Now what I call 'infinite' here is what excels any actual or possible finite being to a degree beyond any determinate measure you take or could take."¹⁶⁹ Correspondingly, the logic of Scotus's argument moves from divine infinity to simplicity.¹⁷⁰ Cross comments that "infinity is taken by Scotus as the basic qualifying term distinguishing divine attributes from creaturely ones."¹⁷¹ So Aquinas and Scotus are opposed on how to define infinity and how to structure an account of it.

Earlier I sketched some arguments with which Scotus explains God's intensive infinity. He constructs this non-additive understanding of divine infinity from

¹⁶⁵ Aquinas *ST* 1.14.7, 12; 1.105.2ad1. Cf. Aquinas *ST* 1.58.2-4, *ST* 1.86.2.

¹⁶⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.14.12ad3; 1.25.2ad2-3; 1.105.2ad3.

¹⁶⁷ Cross 1999, 40, 169-70n.39 (translating Scotus *In Metaph.* 2.6, n.2): "The infinite negates finitude with the positing of a contrary, such as: an extended finite thing without boundaries." See also Frank and Wolter 1995, 151.

¹⁶⁸ Scotus *Ord.* 1.3.1.1-2, n.60 (Vatican 3:41).

¹⁶⁹ Scotus *Rep.* 1A 1.2.1.1-3, n.51 (Wolter and Adams 1982, 283).

¹⁷⁰ Cross 1999, 26, 29, 40-45; Frank and Wolter 1995, 92, 151-155.

¹⁷¹ Cross 1999, 41.

excellence hierarchies and an extrapolation to the immeasurable from common numerical series or scales. Here, I shall examine the sets of proofs that Scotus's *Reportatio* 1A advances from efficiency, exemplarity, eminence, and finality. Frank and Wolter outline three common features of most of the arguments from efficiency, and this structure roughly parallels that of the first two arguments from exemplarity:

First of all, they begin with the possibility of an infinite number of effects taken distributively, as it were, one after the other in succession. Second, this succession or sequence is then considered as a whole retaining its infinite measure. Next, Scotus argues that the perfection of the effect indicates a like perfection in the cause, which is either formally the same or possessed in an even more excellent manner. . . . Scotus finds the infinite perfection of the first being signified by the infinite multiplicity of created beings.¹⁷²

Scotus's "clearest and perhaps the best" set of proofs, according to Frank and Wolter, is that from exemplarity.¹⁷³ This includes Scotus's argument from divine knowledge:

Since the number of created effects is, if not actually, then at least potentially, infinite, the exemplar cause has in one act of knowledge the vision of an infinity of diverse, unique entities. The entity of God's knowledge of his creation must be infinitely perfect. What could it lack? If divine knowledge is identical with the divine essence, then the first being is infinite.¹⁷⁴

Frank and Wolter comment that the second step of the proof from exemplarity is the most controversial. However, the best arguments from Aquinas's perspective involve the third step. Consider the following three objections.

Objection One: Scotus's arguments from efficiency and exemplarity represent divine infinity as on par with the world conceived as a whole, and Aquinas contends that this move compromises divine transcendence. The *Reportatio*'s argument from divine knowledge treats infinity in a more eminent or excellent way according to Scotus. It asks us to view the potentially innumerable, individual items of knowledge as an aggregate that God, their formal or exemplar cause, can cognize as a whole. In contrast, Aquinas argues that divine infinity cannot be understood by conceiving of something that could do any and all possible actions (e.g., knowing or moving) to created natures. For whether we think of potential or actual creatures, the necessarily simple, divine cause is greater than its necessarily composite, creaturely effects.

¹⁷² Frank and Wolter 1995, 93.

¹⁷³ Frank and Wolter 1995, 95.

¹⁷⁴ Frank and Wolter 1995, 95. See Scotus *Rep.* 1A 1.2.1.1-3, n.69 (Wolter and Adams 1982, 296-97; Frank and Wolter 1995, 62-63).

God's knowledge is the measure of things, not quantitatively, insofar as infinity certainly lacks a measure; but because divine knowledge measures the essence and truth of things. . . . However, given that the known things would be actually something infinite in accordance with number, a pure infinity of humans; or in accordance with continuous quantity, as if there were an infinity of air, as some ancients said. Nevertheless it is manifest that the known things would have determinate and finite *esse*, because their *esse* would be limited to some determinate nature. Whence they would be measurable in accordance with the scientific knowledge of God.¹⁷⁵

Now it is clear that God is not a univocal agent, for nothing can agree with the divine either in species or in genus, as indicated above. Whence it follows that God's effect always is less than God's power.¹⁷⁶

For it cannot be said that God is called omnipotent, because he can do all things that are possible to creaturely natures, since divine power is more extended than that.¹⁷⁷

No mental operation can make a creaturely mode of limitlessness capable of univocally signifying the transcendence proper to God. It follows that thinkers such as Scotus mislead us when they use creaturely models to represent God's intensive infinity but say nothing about the needs of correction for material and spatial ways of thinking. Rather than being more Augustinian than Aquinas, Scotus is not Augustinian enough. However, this objection has inherent limits. It does not show that Scotus's central theses commit him to the *Reportatio*'s arguments or that he is barred from representing them as heuristic devices rather than proofs. Scotus would also dispute Aquinas's analyses of essence and existence vis-à-vis God and creatures and consequently of composition and simplicity.

Objection Two: Scotus's insistence on univocity compromises divine transcendence. He argues that we can properly employ a concept such as infinity or being in syllogisms only if each word has a meaning that does not shift between application to circles, angels, God, and so forth. Additionally, the concept infinity is properly attributed to something only if it identifies some entity in the subject. So if nothing extraordinary occurs when those terms are compounded into 'infinite being' then arguably we are capable of knowing precisely what this compound term means when it is applied to the divine. This outcome seems contrary to thinking that God is

¹⁷⁵ Aquinas *ST* 1.14.12ad3 (Leonine 4:185).

¹⁷⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.25.2ad2 (Leonine 4:292).

¹⁷⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.25.3co. (Leonine 4:292).

different in kind from creatures. Readers of Scotus such as Richard Cross may accept this outcome as the price one pays for intelligible theological discourse.¹⁷⁸ However, Scotus affirms the medieval scholastic commonplaces about divine transcendence. He says that in this life we cannot know God's unique essence in itself but must argue from effects to knowledge of the first cause.¹⁷⁹ Scotus also says infinite being is the most distant concept from those applicable to creatures:

God and creatures are really primarily diverse, because a single kind of action never pertains to a finite and an infinite being. Nor is an infinite entity capable of any of those perfections by virtue of which a finite entity capable of them is rendered determinate or contracted. Nevertheless, God and creatures agree in one concept in such a way that there can be one concept formed by an imperfect understanding and common to God and creatures. This concept can be caused by the imperfect thing.¹⁸⁰

Scotus provides three rationales: infinite being is the last conclusion we wring from effects-to-cause or *quia* arguments concerning God, and this indicates there is extreme conceptual distance between God and creatures; 'infinite' is primarily diverse from 'finite' and neither, *qua* intrinsic mode, is really separable from what they modify, thus infinite wisdom and finite wisdom are not the same realities; and infinity implies a lack of potentiality, which precludes there being a generic reality that God and creatures can share.¹⁸¹ The first rationale is fairly weak. The remaining rationales state that sharing univocal concepts does not entail sharing univocal realities; hence Scotus's God is different in kind from creatures. Ockham doubted whether intrinsic mode, formal distinction, and infinity, distinguish concept and reality in the sense that Scotus required respecting divine transcendence.¹⁸² Because these criticisms address internal consistency, they are also available to Aquinas and Scotus cannot easily avoid them. Consider Scotus's argument that wisdom and goodness are really distinct in creaturely natures and only some such distinction in

¹⁷⁸ Cross 1999, 45.

¹⁷⁹ Scotus *Ord.* 1.3.1.1-2, nn.39-40, 56-57. Adams 1987c, 2:929-30; Frank and Wolter 1995, 74, 77-78, 115, 174.

¹⁸⁰ Scotus *Lect.* 1.8.1.3, n.84 (Vatican 17:29); translated in Adams 1987c, 2:934.

¹⁸¹ Adams 1987c, 2:931-34; referencing Scotus *Ord.* 1.3.1.1-2, n.58. See also Frank and Wolter 1995, 160-61; King 2003, 57.

¹⁸² Adams 1987c, 2:934-41.

the divine nature can establish that each perfection is proper to God.¹⁸³ Formal distinction involves not only semantics but also metaphysics. If the perfections must remain formally distinct in God because we know them to be distinct in creatures, then this similarity ostensibly involves real commonness between God and creatures.

Objection Three: Scotus's arguments for God's intensive infinity develop a "highly metaphorical" concept, and it is inconsistent with univocity.¹⁸⁴ Frank and Wolter are reliable interpreters of Scotus. They comment that Scotus's arguments for divine infinity assumes "that one can extrapolate from a scale whose measurements represent proportioned numbers a number that is incommensurately greater than any number you could possibly situate on the scale."¹⁸⁵ A few comments are due. First, the terms "extrapolate" and "incommensurate" are incongruous because extrapolate denotes orderliness and predictability whereas incommensurate denotes rupture and discontinuity. One may be able extrapolate what is incommensurate from a concept if that concept ultimately fails, though the failure is not absolute insofar as the original concept remains useful as a pointer. Classical mechanics are incommensurate with quantum mechanics just in that a person cannot extrapolate from Newton's *Principia Mathematica* to Dirac's *Principles of Quantum Mechanics*. Secondly, if some x cannot be fitted on a 'scale of proportioned numbers' and we have no recourse to some other standard, then arguably x stretches the concept of number such that we cannot know much about x from reflection on said scale. It is hard to see how the resultant concept of infinity would have "clear intelligible content" as Frank and Wolter contend.¹⁸⁶ They continue:

The sum of any finite sequence, however indefinitely long, will at any stage be finite. "At any stage" signifies that we are working from within or along the line of created effects unfolding one after another. What if we were to stand outside of the sequence and take it as a finished whole? The measure of the new whole would be incommensurate with that of any part or sum of parts taken within the original collection. In this way, the potential infinity of creatures is transformed into the intensive infinity of divine knowledge.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Adams 1987c, 2:938-39; citing Ockham *Ord.* 1.2.9.

¹⁸⁴ Adams 1987c, 2:937.

¹⁸⁵ Frank and Wolter 1995, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Frank and Wolter 1995, 91.

¹⁸⁷ Frank and Wolter 1995, 96.

Though it exists in fossilized form in some modern cultures, the idea that the world is like a queue outside of which we can stand at some vantage point to view as a whole is thoroughly metaphorical. We have no standard for how the world's component natures are to be summed. Even if the varied aggregate of creatures could be suitably transposed into a whole, as Aquinas suggests God's Word permits, humans cannot think that whole except in negative or metaphorical terms.¹⁸⁸ When we cannot grasp components as an aggregate or a composite whole, but the argument depends upon comparing both perspectives, then the argument uses terms non-univocally. Perhaps Scotus tacitly appeals to the non-equivalence of parts and wholes, which are different kinds of things and in a sense incommensurate. However, grasping at an unthinkably large numbers of things does not enhance their difference as parts and wholes.

The *Reportatio*'s first three proofs of intensive infinity are viable only if they are not subject to the requirements of Scotus's univocity theory. Given the place of infinity in Scotus's thought, this outcome seems to vitiate his philosophical theology. A Thomist may further argue that grounding discourse about divine infinity in such proofs fosters lax discipline about the incongruity of material and spatial language where God is the subject. Rowan Williams reminds us that "transcendence is not distance but difference—i.e., not a problematic gap to be negotiated but the sheer fact of the difference between unconditioned act and acts that are set within a system of cause and chance."¹⁸⁹ The proofs of Scotus that I discuss provide inadequate resources to distinguish excellence from size, distance, and magnitude.

7. Conclusion

There are many commonalities between Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus. They began and ended their scholastic inquiries in Trinitarian worship, the daily office, and the sacramental life of the church. They studied and taught curricula that focused them on similar issues. They respected a common set of authorities including Augustine, Aristotle, Pseudo-Dionysius, John of Damascus, Anselm, and Avicenna. They confess, and not merely assert, that God is infinite, non-composite, and radically different from God's creations. These facts are congenial to a key claim of

¹⁸⁸ See Aquinas's (*ST* 1.14.7, 1.58.2-4, 1.86.2) treatment of divine, angelic, and human knowing.

¹⁸⁹ Williams, R. 1993, 46.

Marilyn Adams's theodicy that there is a philosophically useful "mainstream medieval" position on divine-human ontological incommensuration.

However, Adams's claim is untenable for reasons that her medievalist studies help to explain. This chapter advances three main arguments for this conclusion. First, Aquinas and Scotus advanced incompatible understandings of the fullness and transcendence of God's perfection, and their divergence is representative of the wider scene in medieval metaphysical theology. Secondly, Aquinas's approach is intelligible and viable at least relative to a rival such as Scotus. Thirdly, bringing Aquinas and Scotus to agreement on divine transcendence and the web of related issues is a difficult task. Adams's work on theodicy and the history of philosophy never explains how we may legitimately reconcile the divergent Platonist and Anti-Platonist medieval metaphysical theologies if it is indeed possible.

A more credible claim is that there is a negative medieval consensus on divine transcendence. Medieval Platonists and Anti-Platonists together reject teachings about God that ignore or reject the ideals of Christian Neoplatonist and Aristotelian natural theologies. For these thinkers considered variants of those philosophical ideas to be correct and necessary for securing the Christian theological distinction between Creator and creature. Agreement about what ideas are beyond the pale is possible, even though Aquinas and Scotus would disagree systematically in evaluations of the teachings of each other. This analytical approach limits the anti-essentialist claim that 'Chalcedonian' and 'Augustinian' traditions are primarily socio-historical rather than philosophical categories given that those labels encompass many discontinuous positions.¹⁹⁰ Marilyn Adams responded critically to a prior draft of my interpretation:

I reject the idea that doctrinal formula are merely negative; I think Chalcedon does have positive content, but that it is minimalist and compatible with a variety of metaphysical interpretations. While I of course agree with you that Aquinas and Scotus have different philosophical interpretations of Divine transcendence, I think they are part of the same family of philosophical interpretations—a different family from that to which Hegel and Schleiermacher or Whiteheadians panentheists belong.¹⁹¹

Setting aside the analogy with Chalcedon, Adams's reply is consistent with my criticism. Despite their serious disagreements, Aquinas and Scotus are members of

¹⁹⁰ Stone 2001.

¹⁹¹ Email correspondence, October 5, 2005.

the same family because *inter alia* their interest in Greek metaphysics would result in their shared, general agreement about why Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Whitehead, have unacceptable understandings of God. Aquinas and Scotus agree upon such boundaries to inquiry because they agree upon some positive doctrines (e.g., the universe of natures has unity, that unity corresponds to an order or hierarchy of excellence, God is the Creator of all things seen and unseen, God is triune, etc.). It does not follow that Adams can harmonize the great medieval thinkers on narrower matters such as a philosophical account of divine transcendence.

One might reason that Adams could reverse the last argument: “mainstream medieval” interpretations of divine transcendence can be construed as a placeholder for arguments against distinctively modern theories of divine transcendence. If that denial is all her theodicy requires, then my criticism amounts to a distinction without a difference. However, this rebuttal fails because Adams draws conclusions about value theory and soteriology from the medieval theories of transcendence. She does so in her first DuBose Lecture “The Metaphysical Size Gap” (2004) and earlier, which I document in chapters 1 and 3-5. Moreover, the divergent medieval positions on divine transcendence generate parallel incompatibilities in their consequences. Adams’s theodicy largely brackets such medieval disputes, so it sometimes advances incompatible arguments in value theory and soteriology and overlooks alternatives to her project. This is a problem by the standards Adams recommends in pieces like “Reviving Philosophical Theology: Some Medieval Models” (1998). She writes that we, like the medieval scholastics, ought to avoid “grafting this theological notion onto that piece of philosophical machinery, using this metaphysical structure to interpret that doctrine, without minutely working through the consequences of this ‘marriage’” in order to “weed out the contradictions and nuance formulations.”¹⁹²

Several remedies suggest themselves. First, Adams could replace her project’s appeal to medieval theories of divine transcendence in favor of some alternative. Secondly, she could stipulate that her usage of ontological incommensuration refers to a particular medieval theory of transcendence. Thirdly, she could construct a *via media* among the medieval theories that has adequate philosophical detail to do the heavy lifting her project. I have set aside the first option to keep the present study

¹⁹² Adams 1998d, 64.

manageable and focused on Adams's writings. My outline of the natural theologies of Aquinas and Scotus may contribute to the second option, which is my preference.

The third option is the most difficult. This chapter argues but never establishes that Adams cannot harmonize Aquinas and Scotus and medieval Platonists and Anti-Platonists. I rely on Adams's admissions (see section 2, p.61) for my claim that the divide between Aquinas and Scotus on divine transcendence extends to Christian Platonists such as Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Henry of Ghent, and Anti-Platonists such as Ockham. My discussion of Aquinas and Scotus defers frequently to secondary sources such as Burrell, Cross, and Wolter. Perhaps a close, systematic reading of the primary sources would dispel the incompatibility on which I insist. Perhaps Aquinas or Scotus are a minority report among medieval thinkers and a philosophically useful "mainstream medieval" interpretation obtains if we exclude one or both thinkers. The issues relevant to harmonizing the medievals on divine transcendence are more numerous than this chapter's unsystematic, objection-and-response style presentation conveys. Adams's article "Ockham on Truth" (1989) indicates the key issue is whether the relation of creatures imitating God is metaphysically and epistemologically prior to the creaturely *relata*. I suspect that imitability relations is an element in a web of relevant issues:

- Whether participation is philosophically legitimate.
- Whether truth is an intellect's adequation to things or a property of propositions.
- Whether theology produces *scientia* only if we can have univocal and quidditative concepts of God.
- Whether the possibility of human knowledge of God and the integrity of human nature in the next life require human cognitive faculties to be able to grasp God quidditatively in this life.
- Whether God knows creaturely essences through knowing the divine essence.
- Whether there is a real distinction between *esse* and essence.

A plausible, detailed inquiry about such matters that reworks Adams's "mainstream medieval" interpretation would be philosophically interesting. Though Adams is well equipped to conduct such a study, she has not thus far. So I shall turn now to the metaphysics of her key concept of horrendous evils.

CHAPTER 3

HORRENDOUS EVILS: TWO ACCOUNTS

1. Introduction

The concept of horrendous evils is as vital to Adams's theodicy as is divine-human ontological incommensuration. In an essay published a few years prior to her 1999 book *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, Adams commented on the place about such evils in her thought: "I try everywhere and always to rivet attention on them . . . to draw out some implications of the *incommensurate* goodness of God."¹ More recently, she remarked that horrors are conceptually important because "they disrupt conventional approaches to evil in philosophy and theology alike."²

Adams defines horrendous evils as "evils the participation in (doing or suffering of) which gives one reason *prima facie* to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole."³ Adams's list of paradigmatic horrendous evils includes:

the rape and axing off of a woman's arms, betrayal of one's deepest loyalties, a mother's cannibalism of her own child, child-abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, physical suffering that puts an end to human projects and drives out concentration, participating in the Nazi death camps, [and] the explosion of nuclear bombs over populated areas.⁴

¹ Adams 1996a, 118; emphasis in original.

² Adams 2002a, 468.

³ Adams 1989a, 299. This is the definition Adams uses in her 1989 essay "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" (delivered at the 1989 Aristotelian Society/Mind joint meeting). However, she first refers to horrendous evils in "Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God" (1987a, 499) and "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers" (1988a, 134-36, 140-41, 143n30; delivered at the University of Dayton on April 10, 1987), and she first defines the category in "Theodicy without Blame" (1988c, 222). Adams (1988a, 136) indicates that her definition of horrors inverts the position that Robert Merrihew Adams (1972; 1979) takes on what conditions enable us to say God is blameless and perfectly kind to creatures. It also contributes to a literature on great evils (Adams R. 1995; Bernstein 2002; Card 2002; Hallie 1969; Neiman 2002; Stout 1983) though Adams makes no reference to it.

⁴ Adams 1988c, 222-23. See also Adams 1989a, 300; Adams 1996a, 113; Adams 1997a, 174; Adams 1999c, 26.

The examples of death by starvation and project-ending suffering indicate that horrors may include natural evils or evils of which created agents are not salient causes. “Not all horrors involve injustice.”⁵ The list also underlines for Adams a created agent participates in a horror if she is a salient cause of a horrendous evil or is linked in the causal chain. Perpetrator and sufferer are both participants in horrors.

Horrendous evils critically damage psychological and spiritual goods related to meaning-making. Such goods are often rooted in human bodily nature and are thereby vulnerable to invasion and defilement.⁶ Whether an instance of evil amounts to a horrendous evil is an objective matter, according to Adams, but the matter is also epistemically defeasible and relative to individuals.⁷ ‘Epistemically defeasible’ here means that for a person who believes some evil has made his life ruinous, rational grounds inconsistent with that belief may defeat the belief. ‘Relative to individuals’ here means that “nature and experience” make people differ in their vulnerability to many evils. Adams concludes that whether a person narrates his life as on the whole worthwhile or ruinous is a “major piece of evidence” as to that matter.⁸ Some commentators further indicate that for Adams not only may such self-narrations evidence participation in horrendous evils but the ability to narrate one’s life is itself a necessary condition to participate in horrendous evils. Experiences that *prima facie* defeat an individual’s positive meaning-making arguably presuppose that the sufferer has cognitive capacities that suffice for being a meaning-maker.⁹ This differentiates the suffering that Adams discusses from that which figures in William Rowe’s

⁵ Adams 1999c, 27.

⁶ Adams 1992f, 277-78; Adams 1993b, 168-70, 177-78; Adams 1996a, 119; Adams 1997a, 174-76; Adams 1999c, 125.

⁷ Adams 1988c, 222; Adams 1989a, 299-300; Adams 1996a, 113-14; Adams 1997a, 175; Adams 1999c, 27; Adams 2002a, 476.

⁸ Adams 1996a, 114; Adams 1997a, 175; Adams 1999c, 27. See also Adams 1988c, 223; Adams 1989a, 300; Adams 2002a, 476.

⁹ Adams 1999c, 28. Adams apparently still disagrees with Chignell (1998, 2001) who argues babies are not yet meaning-makers thus not subject to horrendous evils. For she thinks “human children of all ages . . . [are] potential meaning-makers” whose development may well be damaged (Adams 1999c, 28). See also Basinger 1999; Nobis 2001; Nobis 2002.

famous ‘evidential argument’ that a fawn’s gratuitous suffering in a forest fire is sufficient to render the denial of God’s existence rational.¹⁰

Horrendous evils are relevant to theodicy, according to Adams, because horrors are disproportionate to any set of non-transcendent goods. She argues that two rough theses follow from this mismatch.

- (T1) Creaturely goods such as free will cannot, *pace* standard modern theodicies, provide a morally sufficient reason for God to allow the occurrence of horrendous evils.¹¹
- (T2) Only God’s incommensurate goodness is sufficient to redeem horrendous evils.¹²

I shall defer consideration of (T1) to the following chapter on Augustine’s moral theory. In the present chapter, I shall argue that (T2) does not strictly follow from Adams’s treatment of horrendous evils. For we can distinguish two accounts of horrors in her work. One is a psychological account and the other is a structural, parts-whole account. I shall argue that (T2) rests on her psychological account of horrors, but her psychological account is unsatisfactory in comparison with her parts-whole account. Indeed, the difficulties with Adams’s psychological account of horrors suggest that creaturely goods can repair horrors regardless of whether this supplies a morally sufficient reason for evil.

This chapter has the following structure. Section 2 presents how Adams develops Roderick Chisholm’s distinction between overbalance and defeat of good and evil. Section 3 treats her psychological, introspective analysis of why creaturely goods are insufficient to overcome horrors. Section 4 examines her metaphysical, parts-whole analysis of horrors. Section 5 outlines objections to her account. Section 6 reworks the concept of horrendous evils in light of the preceding objections.

2. Initial Distinctions: Overbalance/Defeat, Global/Individual

Adams articulates the disproportionate nature of horrors with the aid of four distinctions. She appropriates Chisholm’s distinction between *overbalance* and

¹⁰ Rowe 1986.

¹¹ Adams 1988a, 135; Adams 1988c, 222-228; Adams 1989a, 300-304; Adams 1996a, 113.

¹² Adams 1988c, 235; Adams 1989a, 309; Adams 1996a, 113; Adams 1999c, 155.

defeat which he develops in the context of talking about good and evil.¹³

Overbalance means one component of a whole offsets another component of a whole in a piecemeal or additive sense. Defeat means a component is incorporated into and transforms the whole organically or non-additively. For example, the hardship of writing an academic conference paper would be overbalanced, that is offset, if my friends bought me a pint of beer afterwards or if my university were to reward me financially for my trouble. The hardship would be defeated, that is organically transformed, were it to perfect habits such as tenacity or humility. However, overbalance or defeat may not occur between a given good and a given evil. For goods and evils vary in their effectiveness against each other, and the overbalance-defeat distinction provides a framework for sketching the many possibilities (e.g., good **A** cannot defeat evil **C**; evil **D** cannot defeat good **F**, but evil **D** can overbalance good **G**; good **A** in conjunction with good **B** can defeat evil **C**).

Adams adds two more distinctions. She distinguishes God's goodness *as producer of global goods* from God's goodness *to and love of individual created persons*; she also distinguishes overbalance/defeat of evil *by good on a global scale* from the overbalance/defeat of evil *by good within the context of an individual person's life*.¹⁴ Implicit in this pair of distinctions is a fourth and more basic distinction between *global, generic goods* and *goods specific to an individual person's life*. Global, generic goods are "some feature of the world as a whole" that can overbalance/defeat "all sorts of evil" and they include the following examples: a world exhibiting a perfect balance of retributive justice (Augustine), the best of all possible worlds (Leibniz), or a world with as a favorable balance of creaturely moral good over moral evil as God can weakly actualize (Plantinga).¹⁵ Adams's major treatments of horrors do not identify examples of individual goods. However, her 1993 essay "Aesthetic Goodness as a Solution to the Problem of Evil" remedies this

¹³ Chisholm 1990. See Adams 1988c, 217; Adams 1989a, 299; Adams 1993a, 46-47; Adams 1993b, 173-74; Adams 1996a, 114, 130n.44; Adams 1999c, 21. Both Chisholm and Adams's comments on his writing use the terms 'parts' and 'wholes' loosely where parts can have both additive and non-additive senses.

¹⁴ Adams 1989a, 302.

¹⁵ Adams 1989a, 301.

problem in part, and her 1999 monograph *Horrendous Evils* incorporates its argument. A passage appearing in both texts merits being quoted at length:

Sometimes, a quite temporary but satisfying relationship to some great enough good (as in doing a dramatic heroic act or composing a great symphony) will be enough to make a person feel (and others agree) that his/her otherwise miserable, unproductive, and shapeless life was worth living. But usually it makes a difference how the bitter and the sweet are distributed and balanced over the whole course of a life. This fact reflects the interaction of two common human instincts. First, our generalized psychological drive to impose a simplifying order on data has an instance in the urge to find some simplifying generalizations or patterns structuring the experiences of our own or other persons' lives. In addition, we human beings commonly exhibit a drive to self-transcendence, to relate ourselves to something larger or in some sense more valuable or more permanent. Our lives can become organically related, our lives as wholes organized around *some goal or ideal at which we ourselves aim*. This may be conscious (as when one offers one's life in service of one's country, or bends one's energies to the cause of social justice or the ideal of world peace, or devotes oneself to the conquest of disease, to advancing the frontiers of science, to art, to the family, or even to solving the Liar's Paradox). Or it may be unconscious (as when one repeatedly contrives to become just like or exactly opposite to daddy). Alternatively, our lives may be molded and expended by *the individual or collective schemes of others*, once again, consciously (as with the soldier in the dictator's army, or the salesman of a large company) or unconsciously (as when we come to exemplify a certain culture). When all else fails, many find comfort in relating themselves to nature, in recognizing themselves as instances of a natural kind of longstanding, their disease and death as causal products of natural regularities.¹⁶

I italicize two portions of the text to distinguish two sorts of creaturely, meaning-related goods. Adams does not mention her global/individual distinction here. She does not say if ends "at which we ourselves aim" or "the individual or collective schemes of others" belong under the rubric of 'goods within the context of an individual's life'. Her theodicy's solution suggests that individual goods are those which people can narrate as goods-for-us. So whether something is an individual good is to some extent subject to personal interpretation: Adams writes, "There is a difference between meanings being recognized and appropriated *by others* and their being recognized and appropriated *by the individual him/herself*."¹⁷ For example, a parent may grieve the loss of her soldier son as the honorable price of achieving a

¹⁶ Adams 1993a, 53-54. See also Adams 1999c, 144-45; emphasis added.

¹⁷ Adams 1999c, 81; *ibid.*, 156. See also Adams 1989a, 307-309; Adams 1993a; Adams 1993b, 177-78.

just good for their homeland; another parent in a similar situation may reject such grand narratives and construe his child's early death as unmitigatedly pointless and personally crushing. The lengthy passage and these remarks illustrate her main idea. They also raise challenges to Adams's claims about the tractability of horrendous evils to which I shall return later.

Adams provides us with distinctions between overbalance and defeat and the global and individual goods. The latter distinction is worked out in terms of God's action and of individual humans. These distinctions together with the concept of horrendous evils provide the basic structure of (T1) and (T2), which I shall now state more precisely.

- (T1.1) A horrendous evil is sufficient to defeat the goodness of the lives of human individual participants.
- (T1.2) All non-transcendent goods, including global goods such as human free will, are insufficient to overbalance or defeat horrendous evils in the lives of individual participants.
- (T2') Only God's incommensurate goodness is sufficient to defeat horrendous evils in the lives of individual participants.

From these theses we can draw the following more general corollaries.

- (T3) Horrors are incommensurately worse than non-transcendent goods.
- (T4) God's goodness is incommensurably better than any non-transcendent good.

I discuss the reasoning that accompanies (T2') and (T3) in the sections that follow.

3. Psychological Account of Horrendous Evils

Horrendous evils ruin goods specific to the lives of individual persons. Hence, horrors put in question what Adams calls God's "agent-centered goodness."¹⁸ She argues that global goods are insufficient to overbalance/defeat horrendous evils because "generic and global positive meaning[s]" are somehow separate from positive meanings specific to individual persons.¹⁹ I examine two arguments where the first establish this insufficiency and the second helps defend it.

¹⁸ Adams 1986a, 25; Adams 1987a, 487; Adams 1988a, 134-35, 140; Adams 1989a, 302; Adams 1993b, 180; Adams 1993c, 304.

¹⁹ Adams 1989a, 302.

3.1 Third-Person Perplexity

Adams's early treatments of horrors rely on rhetorical questions and introspection rather than analysis. She asks us to consider the following situations.²⁰ Suppose there is a mother who knows that this is the best of all possible worlds (initially bracketing whether horrendous evils preclude such a world) and that this world exhibits a favorable balance of moral good over evil. Now suppose the mother cannibalized her own infant. Would knowledge of global goods, in whatever form or combination, defeat the *prima facie* reason her act constitutes for wishing she had never been born? Horrendous evils such as Rwandan rape-mutilations and the common, dehumanizing neglect and abuse of elderly parents pose the same problem. Adams asserts that once such evils have occurred that they "look *prima facie* undefeatable to the human eye" and that "we cannot even *conceive* of any plausible candidate reason" God could have for permitting them that is consistent with a worthwhile life for the participant.²¹ She approvingly cites Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov who rejects on face, without analysis, that infant suffering could be justified even if it was sufficient to obtain universal peace and fulfillment.²² Adams also rejects on face Augustine's metaphysical claim that the gift of existence "clearly" overbalances such evils.²³

While Adams's conclusions may be true, her introspective mode of argument is not compelling philosophically. Perplexity and intuition are useful means for opening up inquiry, but they are not reliable means for ascertaining what is true or rational respecting theodicy. (i) Assuming that (T1.2) frames Adams's argument correctly, it is relevant that (T1.2) extends beyond global goods to all non-transcendent goods. Introspection about global goods alone is insufficient to establish (T2') unless the category 'global goods' comprehends all creaturely goods (e.g., social justice activism, art, military service). (ii) Ideas that appear counterintuitive may still be

²⁰ Adams 1989a, 302.

²¹ Adams 1988c, 235; emphasis in original. See also Adams 1988a, 140; Adams 1989a, 304; Adams 1993b, 179, 181; Adams 1996a, 113; Adams 1997a, 174; Adams 1999c, 25, 26, 54, 189; Adams 2002a, 470-71, 479.

²² Adams 1986a, 265; Adams 1987a, 487; Adams 1988a, 134-35; Adams 1988c, 222, 235; Adams 1989a, 300, 304, 306; referencing chapter 35, "Rebellion," in *Brothers Karamazov*.

²³ Adams 1988c, 223.

true. A person, who holds a spinning bicycle wheel with the spindle perpendicular to the ground and stands on an unpowered but rotating turntable, can reverse the turntable's rotation by flipping the bicycle wheel over. This demonstration about angular momentum contravenes folk physics but is standard in classical physics lectures. Adams provides no reason to believe that our spontaneous opinions about horrendous evils are any more trustworthy than those about angular momentum. (iii) The intuitions of philosophers and theologians regularly conflict, and the term often obscures failures and gaps in arguments or indebtedness to a wider culture and intellectual tradition. It puts a veneer of trustworthiness on what is mere opinion.²⁴ (iv) The program of *fides quaerens intellectum*, with which Adams identifies, requires an analysis of how Augustine errs about terrible suffering and transcendental goods. Her assertion of intuition against Augustine begs the question.

3.2 First-Person Privilege

Readers may understandably interpret horrendous evils to be a function of a rough consequentialist or pain-pleasure calculus. In his reply to Adams's paper 1989 paper "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", Stewart Sutherland states:

My suspicion is that when Professor Adams refers to 'horrendous evil' she is implicitly translating that as 'immense or disproportionate harm' which befalls an individual. In that case it is a matter for the individual to be satisfied or not, in his or her *own* case, as to whether that harm is outweighed by immense or disproportionate (=transcendent) good.²⁵

Sutherland's suspicion is not without merit. Some of her later writings on horrendous evils do psychologize evil. Consider two statements.

Each person's suffering is unique . . . [C]an childless male soldiers experience anything like enough to the suffering of a mother whose child is murdered before her eyes? . . . [L]ack of experience deprives an agent of the capacity empathetically to enter in to what it would be like to suffer this or that harm, despite more or less detailed abstract descriptive knowledge of such suffering. Such empathetic capacity is especially important for assessing just what is so bad about that suffering and hence how bad it would be to produce it.²⁶

²⁴ MacIntyre 1984, 69, 266-67. See also Hintikka 1999.

²⁵ Sutherland 1989, 322; emphasis in original.

²⁶ Adams 1993c, 327; Adams 1997a, 176; Adams 1999c, 36.

No single finite consciousness can experience each and every type of horror, and yet—among humans—no suffering can be adequately known and appreciated by those who have not undergone it themselves.²⁷

The evil in question or its most important aspect apparently is the private feeling involved. It is a ‘given’ and not further analyzable like the remark that a description of coffee falls short of conveying its aroma, which Wittgenstein considers (and criticizes) in *Philosophical Investigations* §610.²⁸ Adams concludes that theoretical knowledge is importantly and necessarily deficient for teaching people about horrendous evils. This view resonates with her statements about the intuitive, self-evident aspects of horrors. It does not entail (T1.2) that all non-transcendent goods are insufficient where horrors are concerned. However, it provides a defense against the criticism that a sufferer objectively either lacks grounds for despairing or has goods that should prevent or overcome any despair.

The difficulties with privileging first-person testimony include issues of Adams’s consistency and so I shall defer them until section 5.

4. Parts-Whole Account of Horrendous Evils

I contend that Christian understandings of the unity and dissolution of composite entities and of the failure of such language where divinity is concerned are both relevant to Adams’s work on theodicy. (T1)-(T4) are best understood using a parts-whole analysis. However, Adams’s writings on evil present this idea scatteredly. There are also many ways to analyze parts and wholes depending on what we deem ontologically paradigmatic (e.g., sub-atomic particles, human beings, the Trinity) and the scope of our ontology. So in this section I shall construct a structural account of horrors from her work on the history of philosophy and on evil.

4.1 Medieval Hylomorphism and Human Vulnerability to Horrors

In chapter 2, I discussed some features of composites entities that motivate medieval teachings on divine simplicity. One feature concerned degrees of composite unity: a composite substance has paradigmatic or *per se* one unity when a constituent of it has a potency that another constituent actualizes; an aggregate lacks *per se* one unity insofar as its parts are not in potency with respect to each other. In this framework,

²⁷ Adams 1999c, 174.

²⁸ See Kerr 1997, 162-67.

the component natures of humans are united in a profoundly different way than the component natures in a cord of firewood. Humans are composite substances. Another feature concerned dissolubility. Medieval thinkers, including Aquinas and Scotus, commonly held that a human's constituents are potentially dissoluble and some prior efficient cause must explain their *per se* one unity. A dissoluble entity cannot fully account for itself because that would require its constituents to be in potentiality and actuality at the same time or it would involve an infinite regress.

These Aristotelian ideas are relevant because Adams's theodicy openly uses medieval scholastic ideas about human nature. In *Horrendous Evils*, Adams states the following anthropological thesis:

(T5) Humans are vulnerable to horrors due to the incongruous union of spirit and matter, personality and animality, together in the same nature.²⁹

Adams references the book's fifth chapter, which supports (T5) using resources from "the great scholastics", "[t]raditional anthropologies", and "[c]ontemporary psychologies".³⁰ Each is treated as on par, complementary, and adequate for her project's purposes. Adams writes:

Quite apart from comparison with the Divine, human nature seems unclean in itself, because . . . it is not simply of one kind or the other. Within the tradition, this heterogeneity of human nature has been variously conceptualized—human being involves soul and body, spirit as well as matter, is personal as well as animal; likewise, soul and body are sometimes two substances united only as, or more closely than, a pilot to its ship, but sometimes they make a hylomorphic compound. However much the great scholastics celebrated the human position at the metaphysical borderline, they also acknowledged the risk that each element could compromise the integrity of the other.³¹

The first sentence states (T5) in part, and the subsequent sentences present its philosophical and theological grounds. Adams discusses medieval hylomorphism without caveats or apologies just as she discusses the other two families of theories. Her appeal to medieval ideas about human nature reappears in her reply essay to Katherin Rogers's critical review of *Horrendous Evils*:

According to Rogers, it seemed *prima facie* to her that my picture of human being as a hybrid of matter and spirit, by itself dysfunctional . . . skated too close to the edge of that "Platonism and Manicheanism that Augustine defeated

²⁹ Adams 1999c, 132.

³⁰ Adams 1999c, 95

³¹ Adams 1999c, 94-95.

a millennium and a half ago.” . . . Her worries give me the opportunity to recall how Julian of Norwich analyzes human being into a higher (intellectual) nature and lower (sensory, bodily) nature. She insisted that bodily nature is good . . . [and] [s]in is “nothing” but the privation of appropriate coordination resulting from the incompetence of our immaturity. In effect, she sees the goodness of the whole eschatologically.³²

Rather than deflecting Rogers’s complaint by declaring Augustine’s anthropological ideas obsolete, Adams turns to medieval thinkers such as Julian of Norwich and in other passages Anselm. Augustine concedes that the human nature we commonly experience is disordered, and Adams and Julian concur with much of this. Their dissent applies foremostly to the Augustinian prelapsarian plotline.

I shall defer an examination of the solutions to the problem of horrendous evils that Adams entertains until the final chapter. However, it is worth noting that her most distinctive proposal resolves horrors in terms that reflect the problematic that she formulates. As I noted in this dissertation’s first chapter, Adams states in *Horrendous Evils*, “My Christological approach appeals to substance-ontology,” while comparing her Chalcedonian solution to suffering to those of process theologians.³³ Adams develops these ideas further in her DuBose Lectures and her recent volume *Christ and Horrors* wherein she states: “The conception of horrendous evils and their anthropological consequences, which I worked out in the earlier book [*Horrendous Evils*], have been appropriated and reasserted here.”³⁴

4.2 Horrors and the Disintegration of Human Nature

Horrendous evils shatter or inexorably unravel the unity of spirit and matter in horror participants.³⁵ Adams writes, “Human agency is easily *broken beyond any non-miraculous possibility of repair*—whether by child abuse, the horrendous evils of war, or brain chemistry—setting up psycho-spiritual dynamics that destroy and pervert relations with other human beings, and distort and obscure any awareness of

³² Adams 2002b, 226; cf. *ibid.*, 216-17.

³³ Adams 1999c, 179.

³⁴ Adams 2006, xi.

³⁵ Adams 1998b, 332: “unravel the personality”; Adams 1999c, 45: “habituated disintegration”; Adams 1999c, 47: “dismantling of personality”; Adams 1999c, 84: “psychologically too wrecked”; Adams 2002a, 476: “*prima facie* soul destroying power.”

God.”³⁶ Humans have the natural capacity to maintain enough unity of substance to witness at least one generation of offspring. Adams’s point is a human lacks the power to restore the balance of his antagonistic constituent natures once he participates in a horrendous evil.³⁷ Adams likens such participants to Humpty Dumpty who could not be put back together again—by others or himself.³⁸ Horrendous evils “overwhelm human meaning-making capacities, *prima facie* stumping us, furnishing strong reason to believe that lives marred by horrendous evils can never again be *unified and integrated into wholes* with positive meaning.”³⁹

Adams relates horrific pain to a more general account of human nature, its vulnerabilities, a teleological ordering, etc. This is why she says that horrors disturb “relations with other human beings” and “any awareness of God” in the quotation with which this subsection begins. She states that pain is a “natural sign” that signifies things are out of sorts in ways which tend towards the degradation of personality and death.⁴⁰ In several passages, Adams’s repeated reflection on “what is so bad” about horrendous evils links them with their personality-degrading, life-ruining, integrity-destroying power.⁴¹

There are two structural reasons that (T3) horrors are incommensurately worse than non-transcendent goods.

(T1.1’) Horrendous evils unravel and break the unity of their human participant’s substance.

(T1.2’) Non-transcendent goods cannot overbalance or defeat horrendous evils insofar as those goods cannot restore such unity.

The Aristotelian ideas about composite substances that I referenced earlier help account for (T1.1’) and (T1.2’). The ideas explain what it is that horrors unravel (substances). The idea that substances and aggregates differ in kind helps explain

³⁶ Adams 1996a, 119; emphasis added.

³⁷ Adams 1996a, 119; Adams 1999c, 100; Adams 2002a, 472-75, 476; Adams 2002b, 223, 226.

³⁸ Adams 1999c, 205; Adams 2002a, 476; Adams 2002b, 219.

³⁹ Adams 1999c, 148-49; emphasis added. See also Adams 1993, 174; Adams 1999c, 27-28, 103 159; Adams 2002a, 471.

⁴⁰ Adams 1999c, 124-25. See also Adams 1993b, 174.

⁴¹ Adams 1993b, 174; Adams 1993c, 327; Adams 1997a, 176; Adams 1999c, 27-28, 36, 61, 124-25, 159; Adams 2002a, 470.

why Adams says horrors are incommensurate to creaturely goods. Neither the potentiality for nor the actuality of the unity of an individual human's constituent natures follows from non-transcendent goods such as free will or money. A human's constituent natures require an external efficient cause to become a unity. However, a human's constituents have potentiality for dissolution, if the individual sustains sufficient physical or psychological damage. Therein lies our vulnerability to horrors.

That leaves Adams's thesis (T2') that only God's incommensurate goodness is sufficient to defeat horrendous evils in the lives of individual participants. A part-whole analysis is illuminating here also. First, Adams thinks only God can defeat horrors because that is how humans are built. The composite, material-cum-spiritual metaphysical biology of humans makes them "easily broken beyond any non-miraculous possibility of repair," as noted earlier. God is necessary to repair us in the weak sense that no other non-divine remedy is available. Secondly, Adams sometimes states that participation in horrendous evil and being related to God are "equally" or "alike" disproportionate with respect to non-transcendent goods.⁴² Horrendous evils are incommensurate to such goods, which mirrors her statements that God is an incommensurate good.⁴³ Adams could pull these thoughts together and relate them to Scotus's discussions of divine infinity.

The great medieval thinkers took it as axiomatic that a composite substance is a whole that is different from and superior to the sum of its constituent parts. Scotus capitalizes on this premise in some of his proofs for divine infinity. Those arguments distinguish extensive and intensive infinity, i.e., additive and non-additive senses of infinity. Several arguments consider an infinite series of created effects, and they contrast interpreting this series as an aggregate and as a unified whole. So Scotus posits an analogy between the unity of human substance and divine intensive infinity. This supports Adams's parallelisms and may support an argument, which I shall not try to construct further here, for why God is necessary to defeat horrors.

⁴² Adams 1988c, 235; Adams 1989a, 309.

⁴³ Horrendous evils are incommensurate with creaturely goods (Adams 1988c, 239-40; Adams 1989a, 306; Adams 1993b, 181); divine goodness is incommensurate with creaturely goods (Adams 1986a, 263; Adams 1988c, 235-37; Adams 1989a, 306-9; Adams 1993a, 50, 58; Adams 1993b, 175, 179, 182; Adams 1997a, 185).

5. Criticisms of Adams's Two Accounts

5.1 *The Priority of God's Goodness*

It is reasonable to read Adams as claiming that horrendous evils are the worst kind of evil. However, a respectable if not dominant tradition in Christian theology holds that the worst and primordial kind of evil is to fail to love God. Consider Deuteronomic theology which instructs its hearers to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and might; a life of obedience to the Lord's command is likewise essential to this love (Dt. 6:4-9). Consider also Johannine theology in which eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ who God has sent, and this necessarily involves loving obedience to the command of Jesus (Jn. 17:3; cf. 1 Jn. 3:23-24, 5:1-5). Those who do not see life are those who do not believe in but reject God's Son (Jn. 3:36). So when Adams writes that horrendous evils set up psycho-spiritual dynamics that disrupt relationships with other humans and any awareness of God, she arguably has matters reversed, even if participation in horrendous evils in fact has such results. The root evil is a failure to love God, which results in a failure to order properly the love of other creatures and of oneself. Pride and unbelief are absent from Adams's list of paradigmatic horrors. This suggests that her concept of horrors does not subsume the biblical teaching that we should love God above all.

Augustine's critique of Manichaeism is relevant here. G. R. Evans writes: "[Augustine] sees now that the very attempt to search for the cause of evil in the way he did [as a Manichean] was itself an evil thing. . . . [H]e followed a distorted route. He should have sought God first and then looked about him to see where evil was. . . . [I]n the *Confessions*, he is able to write of his search for evil in a good and proper way, because he is beginning from the right place, from God himself."⁴⁴ Moving from Manichaeism to Neoplatonism to Christianity, Augustine came to understand the world hierarchically where what is above excels what is below. In the case of God and of measure, order, and number, they also explain what is below. From this perspective, treating horrors as a function of meaning-making and suffering is secondary and thus importantly incomplete. Adams's concept may also distort theodicy insofar as the concept distracts us from the cosmic order that Augustine finds the Christian scriptures and the books of the Platonists to assert.

⁴⁴ Evans 1982, 5; referencing Augustine *Conf.* 7.5.7.

Adams employs the resources of a top-down understanding of God, such as that which Anselm and Scotus articulate, to solve a bottom-up understanding of evil. The consequent challenge is for Adams to explain: (i) how she avoids the argument that her agreement with medieval top-down, metaphysical theologies requires her to rethink evil from a top-down perspective as well; or (ii) why she can rethink evil top-down without prioritizing spiritual aversion to God; or (iii) why her rethinking of evil subsumes the prioritization of aversion to God.

5.2 Evils that Interrupt Meaning-Making

Adams's definition of horrendous evils cannot accommodate each part of her list of paradigmatic horrors. Certain evils either intentionally suppress meaning-making or *de facto* end meaning-making immediately. Humans at ground-zero of a nuclear detonation would not find their lives ruined, in Adams's sense, as much as cut short. Symbolically, vaporization from a nuclear blast is different than being involved in a vehicular accident which results in instant death, but the experience of it is only marginally different because both 'experiences' are so radically truncated. Thus they do not meet Adams's definition of horrendous evils.

Adams could limit her definition and say that only conscious survivors of horrendous evils are participants, but this move would be artificial. It would also be unnecessary because subordinating the psychological aspects of horrendous evils to the structural, metaphysical aspects would suffice. For nuclear weapons prematurely dismantle a person's unity of substance, and prioritizing Adams's structural account enables her to include her entire list of paradigmatic horrors among genuine horrors.

5.3 First-Person Assessments of Pain: Privileged or Defeasible

Adams's ambivalent position on whether horrendous evils are defeasible renders her concept as a whole unclear. On one hand, she asserts the primacy of private pain experience. I earlier quoted Adams as stating, "No single finite consciousness can experience each and every type of horror, and yet—among humans—no suffering can be adequately known and appreciated by those who have not undergone it themselves."⁴⁵ This statement takes on added significance given the disjunction that Adams posits between what is the case according to sufferers and according to God

⁴⁵ Adams 1999c, 174.

or objectivity. Adams writes, “I assume that for an individual’s life to be a great good to him/her on the whole, *it is not enough for good to balance off or defeat evil objectively speaking*. The individual involved must him/herself also recognize and appropriate at least some of those positive meanings.”⁴⁶ She likewise states: “My notion is that for a person’s life to be a great good to him/her on the whole, *the external point of view (even if it is God’s) is not sufficient*. Rather the person him/herself must value and actually enjoy his/her relations to enough and great enough goods.”⁴⁷ It explains the disjunction if pain is fundamentally private and objective or divine knowledge is correspondingly limited. The argument supports her position on universal salvation. For if anyone who was permanently separated from God would find such separation unbearable, then that state would be a horrendous evil regardless of any offsetting goods. However, God is good and omnipotent, etc.

On the other hand, Adams acknowledges the limits of a person’s perceptions of pain. Her definition states that horrendous evils give people only a reason *prima facie* rather than *ultima facie* to doubt the value of their lives. She acknowledges that people err about their sorrows: “Subjective first-person horror-assessments are not infallible.”⁴⁸ Some persons are even reliably unreliable: “The example of habitual complainers . . . shows individuals not to be incorrigible experts on what ills would defeat the positive value of their lives. Nor, as evidenced by the curmudgeon, is a person’s explicit testimony an unfailingly reliable guide.”⁴⁹ More generally, Adams thinks every person has an unavoidably limited grasp of her own life’s meaning: “Presumably, no human person will ever recognize, much less consciously value, all of the overarching patterns under which his/her life experiences are subsumed.”⁵⁰ She reiterates this when outlining her Christological solution to horrors: “Christian theologians could consistently claim that the facts of identification and/or intimacy [with God], whether or not they are recognized by the created participants in horrendous evils, constitute an immeasurable honour and endow the worst that

⁴⁶ Adams 1999c, 82; emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Adams 1993a, 54; Adams 1999c, 145; emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Adams 2002a, 469.

⁴⁹ Adams 1997a, 175; Adams 1999c, 27. See also Adams 1999c, 82; Adams 2002a, 469.

⁵⁰ Adams 1993a, 55; Adams 1999c, 146.

creatures can suffer, be, or do with great positive meaning, and defeat both the concrete and symbolic negative value of such conditions.”⁵¹

Reconciling these sets of contrary, categorical statements is difficult. (1) The first set involves a confusion. Adams elsewhere consistently asserts that God is ontologically supreme and different from any and all created goods. It then makes little sense to say God has a “point of view” that is somehow “external” or God’s view can fail to reflect what is the case. (2) Where *Horrendous Evils* addresses the apparent impasse between first-person and third-person claims (between what she calls “objective and recognized meaning”), Adams indicates that the impasse is false.⁵² One possible interpretation is that the fulfillment of a meaningful life’s necessary conditions *n* is insufficient for a meaningful life to obtain for person *p* if *p* fails to recognize and appropriate *n*. That is how views that are divine and objective can be correct but incorrect. The difficulty is that the privacy of horrors undermines the grounds of Adams *qua* external observer to say: (i) certain people are curmudgeons, (ii) certain evils can be compared and categorized as belonging to one and the same kind, (iii) no non-transcendent good can remedy a genuine horror. (3) Adams’s response to Sutherland’s objection (see section 3.2) complicates matters further. She amends her definition of horrendous evils as follows:

Stewart Sutherland . . . takes my criterion to be somehow ‘first-person’. This was not my intention. My definition may be made more explicit as follows: an evil *e* is horrendous if and only if participation in *e* by person *p* gives everyone prima-facie reason to doubt whether *p*’s life can, given *p*’s participation in *e*, be a great good to *p* on the whole.⁵³

A sensible reading is that Adams’s clarification contemplates a *prima facie* reason that will be adequate for properly functioning and educated persons absent some defeater (e.g., person *p* is a habitual complainer). This is consistent with the first sentence of the block quotation in section 2 from Adams’s 1999 book *Horrendous Evils*. She affirms that sometimes “(. . . doing a dramatic heroic act or composing a

⁵¹ Adams 1996a, 116.

⁵² Adams 1999c, 81-82. See also *ibid.*, 145-46. Adams (*ibid.*, 82) once excludes curmudgeons from being horror participants because they “take satisfactions” from life even though “they do not readily admit” their lives are worthwhile. Focus on insincerity seems to sidestep the more difficult objection that there are persons who despair but do so from mistakes or self-deception about the human good and their life story.

⁵³ Adams 1990a, 211fn.5. See also Adams 1993a, 49; Adams 1993c, 304.

great symphony) will be enough to make a person feel (and others agree) that his/her otherwise miserable, unproductive, and shapeless life was worth living.”⁵⁴ These scenarios may defeat Adams’s definition’s *prima facie* reason, although they thereby undermine her claim that (T1.2’) non-transcendent goods cannot restore a critically damaged substance’s *per se* one unity or protect its unity.

These difficulties largely dissolve if we abandon Adams’s claims that privilege first-person reports about whether a person is a horror participant. Doing so does not entail that third-person perspectives supplant first-person perspectives. The impasse can be bridged while maintaining the integrity of both her psychological and metaphysical accounts. Consider an analogical situation regarding language acquisition and use. In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes as if language acquisition by infants is primarily an individual accomplishment that works through pointing at objects. Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations* §§1-3, 32) criticizes this view on language. He argues that communities rather than individuals are key and community members teach children in blocks of language that serve many purposes of which ostension is only one. Language is contextual, negotiated, and has many functions. Some elements of the wider Augustinian corpus agree. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine is sensitive to different functions of language. In book 1, he argues that communities play an essential role in training language users. What bridges the first- and third-person gap is that people learn language because they are addressable and they are addressed by those who already have some language.

Consider potty training or training children about the experience of pain. Parents and teachers help children to recognize, organize, and otherwise regulate their lives in these respects. In the process, potentially-self-regulating-persons or speakers-to-be are put in question and held accountable. This does not mean parents or teachers systematically dispute what their children say. However, when a child mildly knocks his head against a railing and wails, a wise parent comforts but does not indulge her child. It probably did not hurt that much or do much damage. The parent wants her child to be able to make such discriminations and not to conflate physical pain and the natural desire for affection. Assertion and accountability to a

⁵⁴ Adams 1999c, 144. See also *ibid.*, 181-83.

community have an analogous, legitimate place where horrendous suffering is in question regardless of whether it supports Adams's views on universal salvation.

5.4 Equivocal Uses of 'Incommensurate'

Adams's description of horrendous evils as "incommensurate" is equivocal. It shifts between 'no standard of comparison between two or more subjects' and 'unsurpassable magnitude'. The problem is apparent from her earliest writings on horrendous evils. In her 1988 essay "Theodicy without Blame," Adams states that "horrendous evils . . . can be balanced only by some *equally disproportionate good*, which Christians identify as God Himself."⁵⁵ However, her 1989 essay "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" qualifies her prior suggestion that God and horrors are on par. Adams writes: "Relative to human nature, participation in horrendous evils and loving intimacy with God are *alike disproportionate* for the former threatens to engulf the good in an individual human life with evil, while the latter guarantees the reverse engulfment of evil by good. Relative to one another, there is also disproportion, because the good that *God is*, and intimate relationship with him is *incommensurate with created goods and evils alike*."⁵⁶

The preceding statements, taken together, suggest that the disproportion and incommensuration do not refer to a property or a magnitude. Three senses of incommensurability between God, created goods, and horrors, are operative. However, only the terms "disproportionate" and "incommensurate" distinguish the various differences from each other and the various similarities from each other. (The term "the metaphysical size-gap" that Adams uses in subsequent writings does not clarify matters.) Her overburdened technical language results in a circumlocution at best: God and horrors are "equally" and "alike" disproportionate to created goods, yet God and horrors are "incommensurate" or unequal and unlike. It would then seem that 'God is incommensurate' or 'horrendous evils are incommensurate' are not meaningful statements apart from specifying some further item of comparison.

However, Adams's solutions to the problem of horrendous evils suggest that the term incommensurate specifies magnitude. The quotation from her 1989 essay is immediately followed by the sentence: "Because intimacy with God so *outscales*

⁵⁵ Adams 1988c, 235; emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Adams 1989a, 309; emphasis added.

relations (good or bad) with any creatures, integration into the human person's relationship with God confers significant meaning and positive value even on horrendous suffering."⁵⁷ Consider two more emphatic statements from 1995 and 1999 respectively: "I maintain, God Himself is *the only good great enough to balance off horrendous evils*, and yet as the incommensurate good not only 'balances off' but engulfs them"; "if Divine Goodness is infinite, if infinite relation to It is thus incommensurately good for created persons, then we have identified *a good big enough to defeat horrors* in every case."⁵⁸ These three statements suggest that created goods are insufficient respecting theodicy because they do not meet some threshold of goodness. Incommensuration is a measure or property.

Besides the prominent conflict about whether incommensuration refers to a property, Adams's statements raise two problems. First, if incommensuration amounts to being "big enough", then it appears false that (T1.2) non-transcendent goods are insufficient to overbalance or defeat horrendous evils and (T2') only the goodness of God is sufficient to defeat horrors. Does Adams have any principled reason for thinking there are no 'incommensurate' non-transcendent goods that can overbalance or defeat horrendous evils? The psychological account of horrors is intended to provide such a reason. Insofar as we cannot think of any created goods that can resolve horrors there just are no 'incommensurate' created goods. However, Adams undermines her psychological arguments (see section 5.3) by acknowledging that there are creaturely goods (e.g., art, military service, farming, raising a family) that can defeat the *prima facie* reason that horrific suffering gives for despair. The parts-whole account holds that horrors occur because a composite substance is more than the sum of its constituents but neither the composite itself nor the addition of created goods can repair critical damage to the unity of a composite. But nothing in her account precludes the existence of incommensurate goods that create or restore a substance's unity. The actuality of new baby is a good that is incommensurate to its constituents or many aggregates of non-human goods. Whether having children can defeat horrendous evils may seem like an odd question, though Adams prompts it when she argues that it is the incommensurate nature of the divine that accounts for

⁵⁷ Adams 1989a, 309; emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Adams 1995d, 58; Adams 1999c, 83; emphasis added.

the defeat of horrors. Children and families are arguably the more primordial means of achieving unity and transcendence in a person's life than composing symphonies and national service. This argument undermines both (T1.2') and (T2').

Secondly, if Aquinas and my account of him are correct, then divine transcendence makes some theological circumlocution necessary. That Adams uses incommensuration in several contrary senses has precedent in classical Christianity. Nevertheless, Aquinas offers a clearer technical language than Adams does for articulating divine transcendence: God alone is altogether metaphysically non-composite and infinite without qualification; creatures are simple and limitless only with respect to some property. The top-down metaphysic and the consequent analysis of evil as *privatio boni* also can accommodate and extend Adams's ideas. Her statement that God is "incommensurate with created goods and evils alike" would be unproblematic to Augustine and his successors. For he contends that evil is the corruption of a good or nature: evil is parasitic on the good. However, it then makes little sense to say God is more like a highly corrupted creaturely nature than highly perfected creaturely nature because both are created natures. Moreover, the more perfect a creature is, in comparison to those within and without its natural kind, the more it participates in God's being. Reintroducing the terminology of Augustine and Aquinas clarifies the top-down medieval natural theology and metaphysics that Adams retrieves. Nevertheless, their top-down metaphysics naturally exerts a force to align her bottom-up account of horrendous evils with a theory of value where it is incorrect to say horrific suffering is more transcendent and closer to the divine than mundane, unblemished goods.

6. Conclusion

Adams improves upon the efforts of previous modern philosophers by concentrating on concrete, particular evils. If the biblical faith is to be rejected on the basis of this world's evils, then it should be rejected on the basis of how such evils challenge Christian faith and practice. Additionally, Adams's use of a basic parts-whole analysis sharpens our understanding of what makes certain evils so riveting and intractable and what makes us vulnerable to them. It may also shed light on what God must do to redeem creation—it is relevant that the 'best of all possible worlds' offers little comfort to the persons who suffer horrifically.

However, this chapter raises problems that warrant some conceptual changes regarding horrendous evils. First, Adams needs to abandon her claims that privilege first-person reports about whether a person is a horror participant. Such claims are inconsistent with other claims of Adams that are important to her project and more reasonable. Secondly, her 1990 definition of horrendous evils does not make her 1989 definition more explicit but properly supersedes it. As I argue, a favorable definition may need further revision to reflect how horror participation involves the untimely disruption of a person's physical and/or psychological unity regardless of whether the process is nearly instantaneous or grindingly slow. Thirdly, creaturely goods can resolve some horrors. States-of-affairs that may be horrendous evils are subject to defeaters, and Adams both admits and suggests that some of these defeaters are non-transcendent goods. Though she never concedes these goods can repair horrendous evils after the fact, her writings never present a valid argument to the contrary. Fourthly, Adams's account of horrors has no place for evil with respect to God alone. However, her appeal to incommensurate divine goodness puts her in a top-down, metaphysical neighborhood where improper relation to God should be the most compelling evil. The next chapter discusses many of these same issues respecting Adams's criticism of Augustine's moral theory.

PART II.
VALUE THEORY

CHAPTER 4

AUGUSTINE AND MORALIST VALUE THEORIES

1. Introduction

Defeating the “value-theory imperialism of morals” in analytic and modern philosophy of religion is a central task of Marilyn Adams’s theodicy.¹ Horrendous evils and divine-human ontological incommensuration are the main tools her project employs. As this study’s introduction explains, commentators on the problem of evil from Mill to Plantinga stipulate that the divine nature involves necessary obligations to creatures. Skeptics argue that the existence of evil entails those obligations are unfulfilled; thus no such divinity exists. Defenders and theodacists argue that there are morally sufficient reasons for God to create a world with evil; thus the skeptic’s argument fails. For instance, Plantinga’s Free Will Defense holds that it is possible that God cannot create a world with moral good without creating a world with moral evil. Moral goodness requires significantly free creatures, and God cannot prevent their evildoing without eliminating their freedom and moral good. God does not transgress any obligations in creating a world with evil because a world with moral good is desirable and free creatures who do evil bear primary responsibility for their evil. This scheme constitutes a morally sufficient reason for evil (albeit, a reason that is possible reason but not necessarily actual, says Plantinga). Some other candidate reasons are Leibniz’s best possible world and Hick’s vale of soul making.

Adams argues that the entrenchment of moral frameworks flattens our understandings of both evil and God. Her project advances the following critical theses in *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* and earlier.

(M1) Moral value theories are adequate only when intention and action are commensurable or action and just deserts are commensurable.²

(M2) Moral value theories and the concepts of rights and obligations in particular only relate persons who are metaphysically commensurate.³

¹ Adams 1999c, 4; cf. *ibid.*, 203-205.

² Adams 1999c, 60-61, 188, 204.

(M3) Moral value theories compartmentalize and exclude goods (e.g., aesthetic and metaphysical goodness) and value systems (e.g., codes of honor and shame and of purity and defilement) that are more adequate to divine transcendence and horrific individual suffering.⁴

These theses are a helpful way to segment her theodicy's reflections on morality.

(M1) concerns a first-order criticism that uses bottom-up premises. It asks questions posterior to morality's internal consistency and objective validity. Its key premise is horrendous evils which Adams says is indebted to post-Humean empiricist thought.

(M2) concerns a second-order criticism that uses both bottom-up and top-down premises. It addresses morality's objective validity respecting the naturally flawed, developmental nature of humans and the transcendent nature of God. (M3) integrates first-order and second-order questions and uses both bottom-up and top-down premises. While morality is allegedly inadequate for understanding God and horrors, other goods and value theories are more adequate. Given its constraints, my study will largely bracket (M3). I shall treat (M1) in this chapter and (M2) in the next.

In the 1970s, Adams published three essays in favor of universal salvation that criticize classic arguments of Anselm and Aquinas for retributive justice.⁵ From the late 1980s onward, she broadened her argument. Using her concept of horrendous evils, Adams rejected the relevance of moral value theories to theodicy and used Augustine to illustrate her objections. Section 2 of this chapter sketches Augustine's classic account of God and evil in *De Libero Arbitrio*. Section 3 outlines Adams's critique of Augustine's moral theory in "Theodicy without Blame" (1988), which reappears in *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (1999). She argues that horrors are disproportionate to what people can intend and to that for which they can be fully responsible. This conclusion applies even to a primeval fall, and retributing horrors cannot restore cosmic order but makes matters worse. Section 4 argues that Adams overlooks how Augustine disagrees with her and with other analytic and modern philosophers of religion. Sections 5-7 examine her criticisms of Augustine on moral responsibility, evil's origin, and just deserts, respectively. I shall argue that

³ Adams 1999c, 12, 49, 103, 158, 188, 191-92, 204.

⁴ Adams 1999c, 4, 60-61, 106-107, 127-31, 206-207.

⁵ Adams 1975; Adams 1976a. See Adams 1993c, 309, which compares her earlier and later arguments against justice as desert.

her first-order criticisms of Augustine's moral theory are problematic because he would disagree with her criticism's bottom-up premises. A close reading of Augustine's *De Libero* and *De Civitate Dei* shows that his moral theory is top-down. It insists that God and an excellence hierarchy are philosophically prior to morality. From Augustine's perspective, the modern, bottom-up aspects of Adams's value theory such as her emphasis on moral sympathy exaggerate the intellectual problem of horrors. It also diverts attention from medieval Christian Platonist remedies. Section 8 concludes that Augustine may be mistaken, but Adams is unpersuasive.

2. Augustine's Free Will Approach to Evil

Augustine of Hippo wrote book 1 of *De Libero* in 385 and completed books 2-3 between 391 and 395. It begins as a philosophical dialogue between Augustine and his friend Evodius (later bishop of Uzalis) and ends more as a theological treatise. As Augustine summarizes in his *Retractiones*, *De Libero*'s "discussion was taken up to answer those who deny the origin of evil is from the free choice of the will but contend that evil is to be blamed on the ruler, God, the Creator of all natures."⁶ It is part of his argument against the Manicheans, who claim material nature pollutes the good, spiritual nature of humans and is evil's ultimate cause.

Though *De Libero* is not Augustine's most mature discussion of evil, Adams still focuses on the treatise. She thinks that free will approaches to evil bring blame assignment to the foreground and consequently capture the Christian imagination; *De Libero* is relevant because it is a *locus classicus* for free will approaches to evil.⁷ Christian writings on evil often invoke free will in ways that "resemble Augustine's in making appeal to Double Effect and the Doing-Allowing distinction to distance Divine agency and responsibility from the existence of evil."⁸ Adams defines those distinctions as follows:

⁶ Augustine *Retr.* 1.9.2 (CCSL 54:23).

⁷ Adams 1988c, 240n.2; Adams 1993b, 184n.18.

⁸ Adams 1993b, 184n.18. Adams (1988a, 130-33, 142-43n.30; 1988c, 240-41n.2; 1993b, 184n.18) notes that Plantinga's Free Will Defense (1979) does not appeal to Double Effect and Doing-Allowing. She argues that Plantinga uses both principles implicitly. She also argues that Mackie (1955) would likely reply that our world is unlikely to be "good enough for God to make" given its evils. Indeed, Mackie (1982, 155, 159, 163-64, 176) makes the latter criticism. However, if the goal of Plantinga (1986, 122-27) remains the modest one of

Double Effect. An agent is responsible for the end and chosen means thereto in a way that s/he is not responsible for the known but unintended side effects of the action.

Doing/Allowing. An agent is responsible for his/her actions in a way s/he is not responsible for those s/he merely permits or allows or does not prevent when s/he could.⁹

Augustine argues that God's aim in creation is that all things be perfectly ordered (*omnia sint ordinatissima*).¹⁰ At least two principles are essential to this end. First, a well ordered rational being loves things that are unchanging and eternal (divine and common goods) and does not turn away from them to things that are changeable and temporal (inferior and private goods).¹¹ Secondly, any defection from what creatures owe God—a disordered act or sin—is regulated in a divinely ordered whole where well-doing is repaid (whether by agents or natural consequence) with advantage and reward and evil-doing with hardship and punishment.¹² God endows rational creatures like humans and angels with free choice of the will or the capacity to be self-moving causes.¹³ ('Self-moving' certainly means no other creature is a sufficient efficient cause of a will's movement.¹⁴ How Augustine thinks a free creaturely action relates to divine action is more complicated.) Such beings are thereby able to elect or decline specific courses of action and pursue or reject specific goods. So free choice makes its possessors able to do and live rightly (*recte facere et vivere*), which is a higher goodness than that available to unfree creatures.¹⁵ Hence, free creatures

showing that Mackie's logical objection fails by its own standards, then neither Adams nor Mackie shows Plantinga's argument is deficient *qua* defense.

⁹ Adams 1999c, 34-35; cf. Adams 1988c, 219. Adams (1996a, 112; 1999c, 35) sometimes also includes the *novus actus interveniens* (new intervening agent) principle.

¹⁰ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.6.51 (CCSL 29:220). The universe is beautiful insofar as the natures that constitute it are well ordered (*De Lib. Arb.* 3.15.152, 3.14.142). This presumably is the way composite beings image "*illa summa et sublimi et ineffabili unitate creatoris*" (*De Lib. Arb.* 3.23.236 [CCSL 29:316]).

¹¹ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.6.48-51, 1.8.61-64, 1.15.103-1.16.116, 2.19.196-200.

¹² Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.6.48, 1.14.101, 1.15.108-113, 2.19.200, 3.9.93-94, 3.10.104-112, 3.12.122, 3.15.151.

¹³ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.1.3, 2.19.194-95, 2.20.204-205, 3.3.32-33, 3.18.164-69.

¹⁴ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.10.20-11.23, 3.10.

¹⁵ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 2.1.5-7. See also *ibid.*, 1.7.52-1.9.70, 1.12.83-1.13.98, 2.18.178-2.19.200, 3.10.113-3.11.116.

are “necessary (as constitutive means) to the perfection of the universe.”¹⁶ Augustine considers whether the first human possessed these capacities in a state of original perfection before the Fall or whether the first human was initially ignorant and like an infant.¹⁷ He concludes that whether wise or not yet wise, the first human could still receive a command and culpably choose to disobey God.¹⁸

This framework enables Augustine to position evil differently than what Manichaean conceptual schemes allow and more in keeping with Christian faith. Sin is not an uncreated first principle. Rather, “Sin is a foreseen but unintended side-effect of which the created will is the first (efficient cause) [sic], an evil deed which God does not *do* but allows.”¹⁹ Sin and its unhappy effects are not necessary to creation’s perfection, but it is necessary for retributive justice to order sin into congruency with the universe’s ordered beauty.²⁰ For creatures and their free choices, but not God’s creative action, are responsible for sin; and God deserves only praise for his creative act, while disordered creaturely acts, to the extent that they are responsibly chosen, deserve blame.²¹ Double Effect and Doing-Allowing help us articulate the logic of these central claims of Augustine.

Augustine recognizes that some people will object to how individuals fare in his account and that such objections implicitly challenge whether God’s end in creation, and therefore God, is good. However, he is unsympathetic to the complaints that the miserable, whether evildoers or just, have little reason to praise God and that some people even prefer death. He argues that all creatures owe God gratitude regardless of their state. For God cannot be a debtor to anyone, but every good a creature has comes from God.²² Blaming God involves a category mistake.

¹⁶ Adams 1988c, 219; referencing Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.11.113-116.

¹⁷ Original perfection or wise (*De Lib. Arb.* 1.11; 3.5, 18); original innocence or rational but not yet wise (*ibid.*, 3.22, 24).

¹⁸ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.24-25.

¹⁹ Adams 1988c, 219; emphasis in original; referencing Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 2.20.201-204, 3.4.40.

²⁰ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.9.93-95, 3.15.152.

²¹ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 2.18.183-85, 2.19.192, 2.20.201-204, 3.5.42-43, 3.6.63, 3.15.153-3.16.160.

²² Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 2.2.9-10, 2.20.204-205, 3.16.154-155.

Nevertheless, Adams identifies “two ways in which Augustine thinks God conquers evil with good even in the framework of each sinner’s life.”²³ First, “Augustine reasons metaphysically that because evils are privations parasitic on the beings thus deprived, being or existence overcomes evil simply by virtue of being ontologically more fundamental.”²⁴ Existence itself is a profound gift. Secondly, he “suggests that no individual’s suffering is meaningless, because it had the meaning of ‘just retribution’ for the *individual’s* sinful choices.”²⁵ Indeed, Augustine thinks God may justly repay the sin of ingratitude itself with suffering.²⁶ These two goods either independently or together offset any evils in which individual creatures participate. Adams overlooks Augustine’s third and fourth responses. Thirdly, God may reserve goods of compensation in the secrets of his judgment for innocent sufferers such as infants.²⁷ Fourthly, there is Christ, the human victor over error and desire, who is willing to heal creation: he calls the hostile, teaches the believing, consoles the hopeful, encourages the diligent, helps the striving, and gives heed to the unvalued.²⁸

3. Adams’s Criticisms of Augustine

The concept of horrendous evils is the foundation for Adams’s criticism of free will approaches to evil.²⁹ Her argument against *De Libero Arbitrio* and other free will approaches is that human freedom cannot do the work they need it to do. The work it needs to do, says Adams, is provide meaning for any evil, including horrendous evils, without leaving some surd remainder.³⁰ To review, in Augustine’s *De Libero*, evil is made meaningful via the following scheme: human agents are responsible for evils they cause or commit; they receive corresponding blame; and the retribution of just deserts follows (as a natural consequence or as human or divine authority

²³ Adams 1988c, 221.

²⁴ Adams 1988c, 221.

²⁵ Adams 1988c, 222; emphasis in original.

²⁶ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.6.64.

²⁷ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.23.231.

²⁸ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.19.181.

²⁹ Adams 1988c, 224, 244n.29.

³⁰ Adams 1997a, 180.

imposes it) and folds a sin's disorder into a higher ordering.³¹ This scheme applies whether a given evil is the direct result of and properly attributed to disordered creaturely volitions or the indirect result of prior, disordered creaturely volitions. According to Augustine and other traditional Christian thinkers, this scheme accounts for any evil, including natural evils, because all are consequences of an original and cataclysmic disordered creaturely volition.

Adams argues that Augustine's account of evil fails by his own standards on three grounds.³² (1) Horrors are disproportionate to any direct or indirect responsibility that an individual may bear for their contribution to the evil. (2) Created agents who do not control the dangerous conditions into which they are placed cannot hold primary responsibility for evil's origin. (3) Retributive justice cannot perfectly order this world given its evils. If anyone tried giving perpetrators of horrendous evils their personal deserts, then this would necessarily exacerbate the surd nature of evil and horrors. Where horrors are concerned, free will approaches to evil fail to restore the created order at the individual or cosmological level.³³

She concludes that "moral responsibility and blame are the wrong issues with which to approach the triangulation among God, rational creatures, and evil."³⁴ While Augustine acknowledges that God is transcendent and so has no natural obligations to creatures and there is no basis to blame God for anything, Adams suggests that *De Libero* confuses matters. It blames created agents for this world's evils principally because as Augustine's conversation partner Evodius insists some person must be responsible and God would be blameworthy otherwise.³⁵

3.1 Objection: Horrors Are Disproportionate to Our Responsibility

Adams argues that humans cannot bear primary responsibility and therefore blame for many horrors to which they contribute. Two theses and eight steps comprise her

³¹ Adams 1988c, 222; Adams 1999c, 34.

³² Adams 1988c, 224, 242n.18.

³³ Adams 1988c, 224; Adams 1999c, 38.

³⁴ Adams 1988c, 229.

³⁵ Adams 1988c, 221, 228-29.

criticism of Augustine on personal desert.³⁶ Primary moral responsibility for this world's evils cannot be attributed to free creatures given the following theses.

- (T1) It is comparatively easy for human beings to cause (or at least be salient members of causal chains leading to) horrendous evils.
- (T2) An individual human being's capacity to produce (or be a salient member in a causal chain leading to) suffering (horrendous or otherwise) exceeds his/her ability to experience it.

From (T2) and some additional premises, Adams reasons that there is a “*necessary* disproportion between human agency and certain sorts of evil” that shows moralist approaches to evil cannot but fail.³⁷

- (1) Where suffering is concerned, conceivability follows capacity to experience, in such a way that we cannot adequately conceive of what we cannot experience.
- (2) Therefore, our ability to cause suffering exceeds our ability to conceive of it. (T2, 1)
- (3) Moral responsibility is diminished by and in proportion to the agent's unavoidable inability to conceive of morally relevant dimensions of the action and its consequences.
- (4) Therefore, we are not (fully) (morally) responsible for the dimensions and consequences of our actions that are unavoidably inconceivable by us. (2, 3)
- (5) Some horrendous dimensions of evil are unavoidably not adequately conceivable by us. (2)
- (6) Therefore, we are not (fully) (morally) responsible for those horrendous dimensions of the evils we cause. (4, 5)
- (7) Culpability/blameworthiness is directly proportional to (moral) responsibility.
- (8) Therefore, we are not fully culpable/blameworthy for those horrendous dimensions of the evil we cause. (6, 7)

The key steps in the argument are (1) and (3). Regarding (1), Adams reasons that the gap between the empathetic capacities of those who have suffered harm and those lacking such experience is analogous to the gap between the blind and color concepts. Regarding (3), she claims that a “lack of empathetic capacity is especially relevant in assessing the degree of the agent's moral responsibility because this

³⁶ Adams 1988c, 223-26; my (T1) and (T2) correspond to her (T3) and (T4). Later versions (Adams 1993c, 309-10; Adams 1997a, 175-76; Adams 1999c, 36) simplify the argument to three or four steps.

³⁷ Adams 1988c, 224; emphasis in original.

empathetic entering in exposes for the agent what is *so* bad about [suffering some harm] and thus *how* bad it would be to produce it.”³⁸ Ignorance or lack of intention to harm diminishes responsibility. In cases where an agent “*lacks* concepts for some morally relevant aspects of the act and/or its consequences” and the “conceptual incapacity” is inevitable, “‘ignorance’ is excusable” and moral responsibility is “proportionately diminished.”³⁹ Adams underscores this part of her argument in a later essay with the claim that the “cure” for a horror perpetrator such as Hitler may require him “to undergo terrible suffering” in the afterlife with the purpose of “developing an empathetic capacity to suffer with those whom he tortured.”⁴⁰

Adams’s account of horrendous evils both illuminates and sits in tension with her account of responsibility. The horrors we cause are disproportionate to any human experiential knowledge of them. “No single finite consciousness can experience each and every type of horror, and yet—among humans—no suffering can be adequately known and appreciated by those who have not undergone it themselves.”⁴¹ Only the direct experience of a horror or its type is epistemologically adequate. If we do not know the nature of the evils that we cause, then our action is less intentional and we are less culpable strictly speaking. That “conceivability follows capacity to experience” is not a general epistemological principle. It applies only “[w]here suffering is concerned” because some suffering is incommensurate.

Empathetic under-capacity and the incommensurate nature of horrors prevent people from adequately grasping their horrendous acts, according to Adams, though priority of explanation belongs to the nature of horrors. Our inexperience limits our empathetic capacity. So the colorblindness and other failures of proper function have limited analogical value. A corollary of this adjustment is an argument for purgatory. If understanding horrors requires experience in kind, and comprehensive empathetic capacity is a genuine human end, then postmortem suffering would be useful. Adams

³⁸ Adams 1988c, 225.

³⁹ Adams 1988c, 225.

⁴⁰ Adams 2002a, 476.

⁴¹ Adams 1999c, 174

states that Hitler's tuition would be grim, though she once suggests that sympathetic role-playing would be sufficient for our moral education.⁴²

Adams candidly admits that it follows from her argument that human moral responsibility is diminished respecting both evils for which we are culpable and goods for which we are praiseworthy.⁴³ She does not deny that perpetrators of horrendous evils bear substantial responsibility as the adverb "fully" in (4), (6), and (8), indicates. She argues instead that her analysis of any horror shows that there are "immense dimensions to that horror" that will not fit under the moral rubric.⁴⁴ According to Adams, this conclusion applies whether we consider everyday acts of evil or some esoteric, original act of evil. This section examines criticism of the first disjunct. The next section examines criticism of the second disjunct.

3.2 Objection: Humans Are Not Responsible for Evil's Origin

Classical theologies often proceed as if humans are ideal agents. However, pre-modern Christian tradition also accounts for human weakness and diminished responsibility: full responsibility resides in prior actors alone, and the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve is paradigmatic. If diminished responsibility always traces back to full responsibility, even in another agent, then a moralist value theory remains universally applicable. Adams is well aware of this argument. As one of her studies of medieval ethics note, "Invincible ignorance excuses, but culpable ignorance doubles the offense."⁴⁵ Augustine's *De Libero*, book 3, takes a similar view. Against the possibility that horrendous evils trace back to the culpable actions of some prior agent or prime human couple, Adams makes two kinds of arguments. One is from moral philosophy and the other is from history and psychology.

3.2.1. Moral analogies

Adams's philosophical argument against a primeval, fully culpable misdeed employs two analogies: the stove analogy and the terrorist analogy.⁴⁶ In the first case, suppose

⁴² Adams 1993c, 326-27; see the block quotation at fn.114 in this chapter.

⁴³ Adams 1988c, 225; Adams 1999c, 38.

⁴⁴ Adams 1988c, 226.

⁴⁵ Adams 1987d, 238.

⁴⁶ Adams 1988c, 226-27; Adams 1993c, 313-14; Adams 1996a, 112-13; Adams 1999c, 38-39.

an adult places a two year old in a room full of breathable but explosively flammable gas. Suppose further that the adult instructs the toddler not to touch a functional gas stove that is in the room and has brightly-colored ignition knobs that are in reach of the child's hands. The adult leaves the room, and the child destroys herself playing with the knobs. In the second case, suppose a terrorist credibly threatens to kill 100 villagers if any villager wears a red shirt on a Tuesday, and every villager is well-informed of this threat. Suppose some adult villager forgets the threat and wears his favorite red shirt on Tuesday. The terrorist strikes the village. Who, if anyone, is to blame? Adams argues that while the child and adult are informed, and both can be legitimately expected to comply, they are not those who are most responsible. Instead, the adult and terrorist are "both primarily responsible and highly culpable."⁴⁷

Regardless of whether the primeval couple consists of immature or ideal choosers, Adams thinks her stove and terrorist analogies apply, respectively. She concludes, "Neither model allows the created choosers to bear the full or even the primary responsibility or culpability for the evils consequent upon their choices."⁴⁸ Here is a more explicit version of her reasoning. Augustine correctly admits that either the will itself is the first cause of sinning or no sin is the prior cause of sinning (if the will itself is not the first cause then by definition no sin occurs and no causal chain of sin-begetting-sin ensues).⁴⁹ Adams's analogies highlight features of the Eden narrative that are inconsistent with a human will being the first cause of sin. First, it is accidental and artificial that the initial action would result in the harmful consequence. In these dramas of death, the colored knob and red shirt are arbitrary props. Color is a genuine good, even if it is a secondary good; and an infant or adult who utilizes a colored thing, all things being equal, acts rationally. Secondly, the actor is ignorant of or inexperienced respecting the harmful causal chain that his action will initiate. Thirdly, the parent or terrorist alone creates or sets the actor in the potentially hostile environment: primary responsibility is in their hands. Each feature of the analogies diminishes the actors' intentionality, responsibility, and culpability.

⁴⁷ Adams 1988c, 226.

⁴⁸ Adams 1988c, 227.

⁴⁹ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.17.168 (CCSL 29:304).

Adams makes more direct statements that correspond to her analogy and its characters. The protagonists in the Edenic narrative are “bound to slip up” regardless of their act’s intentionality; she cites *Evil and the God of Love* in which John Hick claims Augustine also sometimes admits “the corruptibility of human nature makes failure virtually inevitable.”⁵⁰ In a recent reply to a critic, Adams qualifies the latter statements saying that “horror participation is inevitable” but the individual instances are not “metaphysically necessary.”⁵¹ She is equally forthright that the analogies’ antagonists, the parent and terrorist, are stand-ins for God who is the responsible party: “If the consequences of our erring choices sometimes run to horrendous proportions far beyond our power to conceive, the primary responsibility rests with . . . the Creator who designed the system and placed us within it—the more so given my rejection of the Augustinian doctrine of the fall in favor of a more Irenaean approach.”⁵² This implication does not render her theodicy a non-starter because blaming God for evil presupposes a category mistake. God has no obligations to creatures as Augustine points out and Adams concurs.⁵³

An original, cataclysmic sin would also be a horrendous evil according to Adams’s definition. This provides additional grounds, which her eight-step criticism articulates, for why no first human could be fully responsible for his or her misdeed. It follows that Augustine’s position collapses because its solution to evil cannot obtain: a complete retribution of personal desert could not perfectly order sin’s disorder into a beautiful, cosmic whole. Adams remarks, “Since God is necessarily blameless, and created agents could not bear moral responsibility or blame for the horrendous dimensions of many evils even if they were the causal originators, I conclude that moral responsibility and blame are the wrong issues with which to approach the triangulation among God, rational creatures, and evil.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Adams 1993c, 311.

⁵¹ Adams 2002b, 222.

⁵² Adams 1993b, 181. See also Adams 1993c, 314; Adams 1996a, 112-13; Adams 1999c, 39, 191.

⁵³ Adams 1988c, 228-30; Adams 1993c, 314; Adams 1996a, 113.

⁵⁴ Adams 1988c, 229.

3.2.2. Historical and psychological arguments

Eden narrative is false as a record of historical events.⁵⁵ Additionally, inquiry in developmental psychological renders the Eden narrative implausible as a historical record.⁵⁶ Adams cites the conclusion for the historical criticism without rehearsing any particulars, whereas she provides some detail about the psychological of human nature. The subject of her criticism is Augustine's account of evil in *De Libero*. He divides evils acts between humans who have ideal free agency but misuse it to do evil and historical, ideal human agents whose first sin explains the discrepancy between the human ideal and common life. The understanding of ideal agency that Adams attributes to Augustine and rejects is as follows:

(T3) Humans are (once were/should be but for their own individual or collective moral fault) ideal choosers, (a) cognitively and emotionally fully mature, (b) fully informed concerning the relevant oughts and values, and (c) fully skilled in applying them to concrete situations.⁵⁷

Adams thinks the Eden narrative is “altogether false” when understood as historical fact, and instead it should be read in “the Irenaean way, as about the childhood of the human race.”⁵⁸ Cosmopolitan western cultures group the Augustinian account of evil's origin with geocentric cosmologies. Accordingly, Adams never examines her position's warrants in detail. Her writings' several denials of the Augustinian doctrine would then seem superfluous except that many of her colleagues in the Society of Christian Philosophers—many who are conservative evangelicals and traditionalist Catholics—still espouse that doctrine and others that Adams denies such as the infallibility of scripture and of the great ecumenical councils.⁵⁹

Adams articulates a more interesting argument from empirical psychology. Modern psychology teaches that humans develop from childhood to adulthood gradually and with difficulty. Adams notes that Augustine would accept that this story applies to the descendants of Adam and Eve but would dispute that it is natural.

He . . . seems to believe that had Adam been created immature, he could have passed through childhood in perfect obedience and arrived at adulthood

⁵⁵ Adams 1988c, 231; Adams 1993c, 312; Adams 1996a, 112; Adams 2002a, 472-73.

⁵⁶ Adams 1988c, 243n.27, 244n.29; Adams 1996a, 130-31n.51.

⁵⁷ Adams 1988c, 231.

⁵⁸ Adams 1988c, 231; Adams 1993c, 312.

⁵⁹ Adams 1992a, 425-26; Adams 2002a, 472-73.

without attendant ‘hang-ups’. From the viewpoint of psychological theory, this is difficult to conceive, given the role alienation plays in the child’s conceiving of itself as a distinct self. The psychology of the ‘unfallen’ would have to deny that actually [sic] conflict of wills is metaphysically necessary to the child’s differentiation.⁶⁰

Now though she says Augustine would have to deny the metaphysical necessity of what developmental psychology teaches, Adams does not, at least initially, confuse empirical regularity with metaphysical necessity. She continues:

I find more attractive (although I would not know how to prove) the notion that development is metaphysically necessary to the existence of human beings, and that the ‘cognitive distance’ between us and the way God really is, is a result of our natural cognitive, emotional, and spiritual immaturity. . . . Perhaps it would be logically/metaphysically possible for God to obstruct the natural processes and create a human mature *ab initio*; perhaps not. If so, one would need to make the additional assumption (made plausible by the Incarnation) that God so loved humanity as to want to allow it full and natural expression.⁶¹

Some of Adams’s later writings assert that the necessity of such a philosophical anthropology.

Not even God could place human beings in a world like this without their being radically vulnerable to horrors. It seems to me that the metaphysically necessary constitution of created natures is something God has to work with and around in deciding whether and which sorts of things to produce in what circumstances. . . . [Divine] omnipotence is stuck with metaphysical necessities about the constitution of created persons and their (mis-)fits with one another. . . . [H]orrors are metaphysically inevitable where humans are left to function without major miraculous interventions in a world like this.⁶²

Adams presents no arguments in such passages that overcome her prior concession. In any case, if she thought Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis, chapters 2-3, was historically respectable, then her anthropological claim would likely be part of the cumulative case she would advance against Augustinian original sin.

Having criticized the claim that humans can be fully morally responsible for this world’s evils, Adams scrutinizes Augustine’s theory of retributive justice.

3.3 Objection: Retributive Justice Cannot Defeat Horrors

Augustine thinks the retribution of just deserts can perfectly order the creaturely good and evil in this world. Adams contends that this claim founders when we

⁶⁰ Adams 1988c, 243n.27; Adams 1996a, 130-31n.51.

⁶¹ Adams 1988c, 244n.29.

⁶² Adams 1999c, 171, 173.

consider horrendous evils. I shall review three of her argument: against *lex talionis*, from Ivan Karamazov, and from John Rawls. Each argument is not only a criticism of retributive justice but also a rationale for universal salvation or the eschatological beatitude of every created person.

3.3.1. *Lex talionis* and disproportionate evils

Adams's early articles on universalism present her argument limiting *lex talionis*.⁶³ She reprises the argument briefly in her later essay "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians" and her book *Horrendous Evils*.⁶⁴ The idea is simple. "Retribution is a matter of proportion, whereas the notion of proportionate return demanded by the *lex talionis* already breaks down in ordinary cases where numbers are large. . . . Harms are not atomistic, their cumulative effect [is] not simply additive."⁶⁵ Suppose I destroy your automobile. You may demand from me, in accordance with the *lex talionis*, a replacement automobile of the same make and model. Suppose I catch the common cold, decide the next day to go to work knowing I may infect my colleagues, and infect 20 workers who take an average of 9 days to recover. Although it may be a straightforward application of *lex talionis*, it would seem inordinately severe to incapacitate me in kind for a cumulative 180 days. Now suppose that I perpetrate a horrendous evil, an evil that Adams would describe as incommensurate with any package of finite goods—my snide remark causes my geometry teacher, who I know to be depressed, to commit suicide and this destroys her family. My act has no corresponding punishment because the evil to which I contribute causally is awful due to its nature and not to some quantity of discrete evils. The retribution of horrendous evils is not so much unjust as it is a non-starter.

⁶³ Adams 1975; Adams 1976a.

⁶⁴ Adams 1993c, 309; Adams 1999c, 40.

⁶⁵ Adams 1999c, 40. Her complaint is familiar territory in legal and social philosophy. For example, see Shafer-Landau 1996, 299-304.

3.3.2. Ivan's rebellion and retributive horrors

Adams deepens her criticism. She brackets whether a horror's cause always has a precise, corresponding horrendous desert, and assesses the value of a "retributive horror."⁶⁶ Her criticism uses a premise that she attributes to Augustine:

(T4) God is able and intends to defeat completely all evils with good.

Without intervening argument, Adams interprets (T4) as requiring:

(T5) God will act to guarantee the defeat of horrendous evils within the context of every individual rational creature's life.

Adams reasons that the divine purpose of (T5) would be defeated, if God repays perpetrators of horrors with horrors such as everlasting damnation. From the standpoint of the victim's meaning-making:

To return horror for horror does not erase but doubles the individual's participation in horrors—first as victim, then as the one whose injury occasions another's prima facie ruin. . . . [Even if retributive horrors were not] surd but could be given meaning as punishment . . . its significance would be overwhelmingly negative, multiplying reasons to doubt whether [perpetrator's life] could have any positive meaning on the whole and in the end.⁶⁷

Adams applies this to the paradigmatic villain in recent western history Hitler:

Hitler committed and his victims suffered horrors that called the positive meaning of their lives into question; putting Hitler into a medieval hell of eternal torture would only guarantee the defeat of good by evil in his life. Judas and Peter betrayed, [and] the religious leaders of their society arranged the execution of God's Messiah. Taking horrendous vengeance for these crimes would only multiply Evil's victories.⁶⁸

Given divine competence and the purpose (T5), it would be theologically absurd for God to defeat or to allow the defeat of (T5).

Adams credits Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* with the substance of these ideas. Ivan challenges his brother Alyosha, a Russian orthodox monk, about the providential ordering of the world by focusing on infant suffering. Ivan argues that the world is full of 'artistic cruelty' practiced against all sort of people including children. No higher harmony, like that which Leibniz contemplates, can satisfactorily explain or compensate for this reality. Punishing child torturers in hell is worse than useless. It cannot undo the victim's suffering, and

⁶⁶ Adams 1988c, 227; Adams 1999c, 40-43.

⁶⁷ Adams 1999c, 40-41.

⁶⁸ Adams 1988c, 227; Adams 1999c, 43.

it subverts the reconciliation and the end of suffering that constitutes any true cosmic harmony. The hypothetical cosmic harmony's price is unacceptable. Ivan then asks Alyosha, suppose you are the cosmic architect. Would torture just one little girl to achieve paradise for all other persons? Alyosha replies with a chastened, "No."

Ivan noticeably inverts Anselm's reasoning in his dialogue *Cur Deus Homo* (1.21). Anselm asks Boso whether anything could justify disobeying God even if the command was about a trivial matter such as not to look at something. Boso answers that nothing could justify any disobedience to God including the destruction of the entire creation and that he possesses nothing that could make satisfaction for transgressing God's will. Torturing infants or disobeying God even once would outweigh the good of all creation. In Adams's idiom, Ivan and Anselm think those evil acts are incommensurate to any created goods.

3.3.3. Rawls's original position and retributive horrors

Adams concedes that "many Christians do not believe" (T5) "that God will insure an overwhelmingly good life to each and every person."⁶⁹ Traditionally Christians have understood that the number who are saved may well be less than all persons (Mt. 7:13-14). There are several possible explanations: humans freely decline divine generosity, they are not among those who God elects to salvation, or some harmonization of these ideas. Adams considers as an alternative to (T5) the claim:

(T6) Some created persons will be consigned to hell forever.

On Adams's view (T6) entails:

(T7) The good in the lives of created persons consigned to hell will be decisively defeated by evil.⁷⁰

Adams appropriates the ideas of John Rawls to argue that (T6) and (T7) are inadvisable theoretically and practically.

Imagine (adapting Rawls' device) persons in a pre-original position, considering possible worlds containing managers of differing power, wisdom, and character, and subjects of varying fates. The question they are to answer about each world is whether they would willingly enter it as a human being, from behind a veil of ignorance as to what position they would occupy. Reason would, I submit, dictate a negative verdict for worlds whose omniscient and

⁶⁹ Adams 1989a, 303. See also Adams 2002b, 229-30.

⁷⁰ Adams 1993c, 302, 304. (T3) is a direct quotation and (T4) is derived from Adams's statements.

omnipotent manager permits pre-mortem horrors that remain undefeated within the context of the human participant's life; *a fortiori*, for worlds in which some or most humans suffer eternal torment.⁷¹

A brief sketch of Rawls's theory of justice as fairness would help us understand Adams's use of the original position/veil of ignorance.

Justice as fairness is a theory of social contract that Rawls develops with constitutional democracies in mind.⁷² The original position and veil of ignorance are heuristic devices that Rawls uses to explain what "principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality . . . [to] defin[e] the fundamental terms of their association."⁷³ The original position is a "contractual situation" concerning principles to which a person would agree with other persons in the same position.⁷⁴ It involves several assumptions: individuals desire to advance their interests, those interests are inevitably in competition, and people normally are in different positions by nature and position to achieve their interests. Rawls argues that if people are to live together in a just constitutional regime, then it makes sense to consider what free, rational persons "would consent to as equals when none are known to be advantaged or disadvantaged by social and natural contingencies," persons do not know their "particular inclinations, aspirations, and . . . conceptions of their good," but they know "whatever general facts affect the choice of principles of justice."⁷⁵ What the original position purportedly delivers is a neutral vantage point.

Rawls argues that agreement on two general principles would follow in serial order of importance: (1) "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others"; (2) "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and

⁷¹ Adams 1989a, 304; Adams 1993c, 305.

⁷² Rawls 1999, xi-xii, xvii, 214.

⁷³ Rawls 1999, 10. See *ibid.*, 15-19, 118-23.

⁷⁴ Rawls 1999, 16.

⁷⁵ Rawls 1999, 16-17, 119. In the same passage, Rawls says that if theorizing from the original position shores up our considered moral views, then this also lends credibility to his heuristic.

offices open to all.”⁷⁶ Importantly, justice as fairness is anti-teleological. Rawls is clear that rights are defined before goods. It follows that goods are only intelligible in terms of rights and there is no unified, complex common good but only communities and individuals whose preferred personal goods are incompatible.⁷⁷ He presses the point against utilitarianism though it sets him against the value theories of Aristotle, Aquinas, and others as well.⁷⁸ Rawls’s theory is also anti-desert. Things for which people are not responsible are too determinative of what people have or do for the latter to be legitimate bases for desert.⁷⁹ So entitlement—what a person is due per the rules of institutions and contracting persons—replaces desert in Rawls’s scheme.⁸⁰

While Adams appeals to Rawls against (T6) and (T7) in writings from 1988 and 1993, she does not repeat it in her book *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. There are good reasons for her to abandon the argument that I shall discuss in this chapter. However, she does not abandon her advocacy of (T5) and her criticism of (T6) and (T7). In the final chapter, I shall examine arguments that replace her argument from Rawls’s original position of ignorance.

4. Augustinian and Modern Moralities

Marilyn Adams aims to render moralist value theories a peripheral issue in theodicy. Standard treatments of the problem of evil in analytic and modern philosophy assume that morality subsumes the relevant aspects of divine and human agency. The central debate is whether there is a morally sufficient reason for God to create a world with evil in it. Horrendous evils disrupt this framework. For horrors are disproportionate to what persons can knowingly do and to what good retribution can achieve. Free will approaches to the problem of evil are relevant because they are concise accounts of divine and human moral responsibility.⁸¹ They answer the question of what justifies the creation of a world with evil (freedom and moral good) and who offsets God’s responsibility for evil (created agents). Adams focuses on

⁷⁶ Rawls 1999, 53.

⁷⁷ Rawls 1999, 19-24, 189-90, 480-86, 494-96.

⁷⁸ Rawls 1999, 22, 189-90, 485-86.

⁷⁹ Rawls 1999, 88-89, 273-77.

⁸⁰ Rawls 1999, 89, 276. See also Pojman 1997.

⁸¹ Adams 1993b, 173.

Augustine because his *De Libero Arbitrio* is a “*locus classicus*” of free will approaches and a “Moralistic Paradigm” as well.⁸² While Augustine and to a lesser extent Plantinga are her main examples, she applies her critical conclusions to a range of descriptions: modern moral theory, ordinary moral theory, virtue ethics, systems of rights and obligations, and Kantian morality, are all inadequate vis-à-vis the incommensurate natures of God and horrors.⁸³ I shall argue here that Adams’s criticisms of Augustine’s moral theory cannot be applied more broadly. This frames my three subsequent sections, which scrutinize Adams’s objections to Augustine’s moralist theodicy respecting moral responsibility, evil’s origins, and just deserts.

4.1 Essentialism about Moral Theories

Adams’s anti-moralist criticism of Augustine’s *De Libero* is essentialist but unclear. She argues that deeds, agent knowledge, intention, capacity to do or be otherwise, human dignity, a right to autonomy, and moral guilt and innocence, are all wrong tools for understanding the problem of horrors.⁸⁴ Most frequently, she identifies the terms “rights and obligations” as troublesome.⁸⁵ Adams claims in “Theodicy without Blame” that her criticisms “expos[e] the inadequacy of the Moralistic approach” through their analyses of Augustine and show that “moral responsibility and blame are the wrong issues with which to approach the triangulation among God, rational creatures, and evil.”⁸⁶ She claims that her criticisms of Augustine are generalizable and they sever viable theodicies from such concepts.

However, the moralist terms that Adams faults are not universally present in moral philosophy, and moral theories that use the same terms are not thereby compatible theories. John Cottingham and the late Joel Feinberg note how many

⁸² Adams 1993b, 172, 184n.18; Adams 1988c, 218.

⁸³ Adams labels the following as inadequate: modern moral theory (Adams 1996a, 121), modern morality (Adams 1999c, 125), ordinary moral theory (Adams et al. 2003), virtue ethics (Adams 1999c, 193; Adams 2002b, 225), systems of rights and obligations (Adams 1988a, 128-29, 133-34; Adams 1988c, 215; Adams 1991c, 2-3; Adams 1993c, 308; Adams 1996a, 121-22; Adams 1999c, 12, 64, 188, 204), Kantian moral terms (Adams 2002b, 224).

⁸⁴ Adams 1999c, 103, 107; Adams 2002b, 224.

⁸⁵ Adams 1987a, 498; Adams 1988a, 128-29, 133-34; Adams 1988c, 215, 229, 238-39; Adams 1991c, 2-3; Adams 1993b, 169; Adams 1993c, 304, 308, 311, 314, 324; Adams 1996a, 121-22; Adams 1999b, 103, 104; Adams 1999c, 12, 64, 69, 110, 112, 125-26; Adams 2002a, 472; Adams 2002b, 225.

⁸⁶ Adams 1988c, 217, 229.

philosophers use moral language in ways that overlook how plain persons and moral theorists use moral terms such as retribution and just deserts in widely divergent ways.⁸⁷ Adams's approach to moral philosophy in "Theodicy without Blame" is all the more problematic given her contrasting advice to analytic philosophers of religion in "Problems of Evil" and *Horrendous Evils*. There she chides Plantinga, Mackie, and others, for ignoring how value theory varies with metaphysical theory and how these fields of philosophy are rife with fundamental and seemingly intractable disputes.⁸⁸ It is *prima facie* inconsistent for Adams to criticize philosophers of religion for their naïve essentialism about morals while she suggests that the failures of Augustine's moral theory are generalizable to all moral theories. It is more sensible to hold that Adams is correct in "Problems of Evil" that "value-theory pluralism complicates discussions of the problem of evil" because it yields "different problems of evil" and to infer that this limits the lessons she can draw from Augustine.⁸⁹ His errors affect other 'moralist' theodicies only if there is overlap between their relevant assumptions. Likewise, contemporary moralist approaches to evil do not necessarily affect the cogency of Augustine's arguments.

4.2 Augustine's Conflict with Adams's Moral Theses

Augustine is ill suited to illustrating what I have characterized as Adams's three main theses about morals and theodicy. He is subject to her first-order, non-theological criticism (M1) that morality is an adequate framework only when intention and action are commensurable or action and just desert are commensurable. For Augustine thinks it is proper to understand human failures to choose the common good within a moral framework regardless of whether those failures result in horrific suffering. However, he would dispute Adams's premise that horrors are incommensurate to normal creaturely goods on the grounds of his *privatio boni* theory. As I shall later argue, Augustine would also dispute her assumption that what

⁸⁷ Cottingham 1979, 238; Feinberg 1970, 55-56. The essay of Basil Mitchell (1984, 165), with which Adams's "Sin as Uncleaness" (1991c) interacts, talk about "the plain moralist" unhesitatingly. Mitchell (ibid.) even opines that "the character and content of morality" and how "conclusions in morality are to be arrived at . . . are disputes within the confines of moral theory and moral philosophy, and theology as such has no concern with them."

⁸⁸ Adams 1988a, 128-29; Adams 1999c, 11-12.

⁸⁹ Adams 1988a, 132-33; Adams 1999c, 12-13.

is most morally relevant about an action is its consequence. Adams's tries to understand evil and moral action primarily using a bottom-up understanding of pain. Augustine can maintain his claims in *De Libero* and grant (M1) as long as he disputes this move.

Adams's "Theodicy without Blame" touches on her top-down criticism (M2) that morality and the concepts of rights and obligations only relate persons that are metaphysically commensurate. Augustine's *De Libero* explicitly denies that God has any natural obligations to creatures because God is the transcendent creator.⁹⁰ Adams acknowledges this textual feature but argues that when Augustine frames theodicy in moral terms he implies that God and created agents are ontologically on par. (i) She says that Augustine attempts "to shift full responsibility for the origin of evils" and consequent suffering from God to created agents; creatures are the "only agents left" to blame given the impiety of the alternative.⁹¹ This process of elimination implies that for Augustine there is a zero-sum game where God and creatures are the only possible culprits and creatures had better be the culpable agents. (ii) Adams describes "Augustinian and Irenaean free will approaches to theodicy" as "attempts to give morally sufficient reasons why God permits evils."⁹² As Nelson Pike's article on Hume's *Dialogues* defines it, a "morally sufficient reason" is "a circumstance or condition which, when known, renders blame (though, of course, not responsibility) for the action inappropriate."⁹³

I contend that this reading of Augustine and *De Libero* is incorrect even though other senior scholars such as John Hick, G. R. Evans, and Alvin Plantinga, affirm it.⁹⁴ (i) *De Libero*'s inquiry proceeds retrospectively rather than on the basis of a process of elimination. The treatise's introduction and the corresponding passage of *Retractiones* state that Augustine and Evodius are investigating what they have

⁹⁰ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 2.2.9-10, 2.20.204-205, 3.16.154-155.

⁹¹ Adams 1988c, 226, 228-29; Adams 1999c, 38.

⁹² Adams 1996a, 110. Adams (1999c, 54; 2002a, 470) says free will approaches more generally articulate morally sufficient reasons for evil.

⁹³ Pike 1963, 183.

⁹⁴ Hick 1985, 38, 62, 236; Evans 1982, 113-14; Plantinga 1974, 27 (referencing Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.5.51-56, 3.9.93).

believed on faith and received from scripture.⁹⁵ This orientation reflects what he learned from his early speculative mistakes.⁹⁶ Approaching evil bottom-up as a Manichean, Augustine once worried about sullyng God’s reputation. His top-down approach as a Platonist and then a Christian dissolved that worry as a category mistake and left a new puzzle. He now tried to explain philosophically how creatures are justly punished for evil as scripture teaches. The former starts with an axiom about evil and inquires about the nature of higher principles. The latter starts with an axiom about God and inquires about the natures of evil and its remedy. (ii) Augustine recognized alternatives to blaming evil on God or humans. Perhaps there is a principle of evil that is coeternal with God.⁹⁷ Perhaps sin is natural to humans and therefore not culpable.⁹⁸ The latter possibility entails that God cannot be blamed for sin aside from having no natural obligations to creatures, according to Augustine. For if God is the author of ‘sin’, then ‘sin’ is lawful and there is nothing unlawful for which to blame God.⁹⁹ Both (i) and (ii) explain why Augustine is not concerned with a zero-sum game of culpability or with morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil. Where *De Libero* entertains the possibility that God can be blamed, the text usually attributes the concern to the Manicheans and to Evodius.¹⁰⁰ Augustine’s *De Libero Arbitrio* is more grammatical rather than it is apologetic, and if anything it seeks a scripturally sufficient reason for evil’s origin.¹⁰¹

Augustine can say, without inconsistency, that Adams is correct that (M2) moral value theories and the concepts of rights and obligations in particular only relate persons who are metaphysically commensurate. For (M2) is ambiguous about whether the relationship is *mutual*, and he like Adams thinks God lacks any natural obligations to creatures. Both thinkers differ in this respect from the most influential modern and analytic philosophers who address the problem of evil. Where Augustine

⁹⁵ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.2.11-13; Augustine *Retr.* 1.9.1, 1.9.6.

⁹⁶ Evans 1982, xi, 5-6, 33-34, 60-61.

⁹⁷ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.1-2; Augustine *Retr.* 1.9.2.

⁹⁸ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.1, 3.16, 3.17.

⁹⁹ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.16.159.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.2.11, 1.16.117, 3.5.42; Augustine *Retr.* 1.9.2.

¹⁰¹ Williams, R. 2000, 121.

and Adams diverge is that he thinks human moral rectitude involves an indispensable hierarchy of human obligations to God and to creatures and that God's transcendent nature grounds this. Adams sketches a contrary position in "Theodicy without Blame" which she articulates more fully in "Sin as Uncleaness" and essays on the moral theories of Scotus and Ockham: divine transcendence entails that humans have dispensable obligations to other creatures (see chapter 5).¹⁰² So Augustine and Adams still disagree about (M2), but his *De Libero* is not a moralistic paradigm that exemplifies the problems of modern discussions of God and evil.

Adams's last major thesis about morality is (M3) that there are goods and value systems that are more adequate to divine transcendence and horrific individual suffering that morality compartmentalizes and excludes. Modern value theories divide aesthetic and metaphysical goodness from each other and from morality and emphasize morality so as to neglect other, older value systems such as purity calculi and honor codes. Adams advances this constructive position in writings including "Symbolic Value and the Problem of Evil: Honor and Shame" (1992), "Aesthetic Goodness as a Solution to the Problem of Evil" (1993), and "Courtesy, Human and Divine" (2004). However, Augustine is a Christian Platonist and his *De Libero* emphasizes beauty, order, and createdness in its account of evil's origin.¹⁰³ His moral theory does not compartmentalize value but understands all such goods to derive from the One God. Augustine's *De Libero* overlooks systems of purity or honor. Nevertheless, Adams's essay "Romancing the Good: God and the Self According to St. Anselm of Canterbury" (1998) notes that Anselm "developed the Christian Platonism received at Augustine's hand" and reflects Augustine's compatibility with (M3) respecting the honor code and aesthetic and metaphysical goodness.¹⁰⁴

4.3 Augustine against Adams and Modern Moralists

I have insisted on an anti-essentialist approach to grouping moral theories and treatments of God and evil. I have also argued that a comparison of Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio* with (M1)-(M3) shows he does not exemplify what Adams deems

¹⁰² Adams 1988c, 238-40; Adams 1991c.

¹⁰³ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 2.14-17, 3.15-16.

¹⁰⁴ Adams 1998, 91.

problematic in modern and analytic philosophy of religion. His top-down approach to God and evil prevents *De Libero* from being a moralistic paradigm in Adams's sense. While these arguments undermine Adams's use of Augustine, they reinforce her complaint that analytic philosophers of religion too often ignore value theory pluralism and oversimplify theodicy.

These arguments are significant on two further grounds. First, Adams uses a highly leveraged approach to deconstructing modern and analytic treatments of God and evil. Augustine's *De Libero* is the only text favorable to the scheme of freedom, moral responsibility, and just deserts, which her writings on evil criticize in detail. She examines it in just one article whose main criticisms she incorporates in the third chapter of *Horrendous Evils*.¹⁰⁵ Her treatments of (M2) and (M3) makes scant reference to *De Libero* or to any of his other writings that bear on evil. Adams thereby overlooks the need to weigh alternatives to her project and to the modernist projects that she criticizes. Modern thinkers with more nuanced theories of morals and of divine transcendence may also have an easier time refusing her criticism.

Secondly, these arguments frame the analysis that will follow of Adams's specific objections to Augustine's *De Libero*. Her compressed treatment of Augustine and the more piecemeal scrutiny that I shall apply both serve their purposes. However, their compressed and piecemeal forms hinder our ability to separate and monitor the overarching issues: (i) whether her objections succeed; (ii) whether his argument succeeds on its own terms (if her objections fail); and (iii) the implications of (i) and (ii) for the wider debate on God and evil.

With this overview in place, I now turn to her three objections to Augustine regarding moral responsibility, evil's origin, and retribution of just desert.

5. Moral Responsibility

Adams's first-order criticism of moralist theodicies asserts that (M1) moral value theories are adequate only when intention and action are commensurable or action and just deserts are commensurable. This section examines Adams's first objection

¹⁰⁵ The following writings on evil prior to 1999 reference Augustine: Adams 1988c, 217-29, 231, 234, 240n.2, 241n.3, n.8, 242nn.11, 242nn.14-18, 242nn.22-23, 243n.27, 243-44n.29; Adams 1989a, 301fn.9; Adams 1993b, 171, 172, 183n.14, 184n.18; Adams 1993c, 311-12; Adams 1996a, 110, 112-113, 120-21, 123, 130-31n.51.

(section 3.1 above) that compares intention and action. Her objection concludes that a human is not fully culpable or blameworthy for the horrendous dimensions of the evil she causes. For a person cannot fully intend a horror to which she contributes without an adequate concept of the horror. However, horrors are incommensurable with any goods a person knows and one horror is incommensurable with another horror. So only experience in kind or of the same type provides an adequate concept of why the horror is so bad. Given the limits of human experience, a person cannot be fully responsible for horrors to which she contributes.

Adams directs this criticism against Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*. Though that text is an early work, my reply will center it for two reasons. First, I agree with the holist/contextualist thesis that it is not just those with whom a thinker agrees but also those with whom she disagrees who shape her ideas. Adams treats *De Libero* as a foil in her early essay "Theodicy without Blame" and reprises those criticisms in *Horrendous Evils*. She represents her theodicy as superior to all moralist theodicies. However, it is particularly *De Libero* (a "Moralistic Paradigm") and its failures that illustrate the need for her project. Secondly, Augustine never concedes the claims of *De Libero* but continues to champion its merits throughout the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian controversies. The viability of harmony between *De Libero* and his Anti-Pelagian writings is highly contentious, but harmony is a respectable interpretation and the standard study today on Augustine and free will advocates it.¹⁰⁶

In her criticism, Adams never clarifies what besides her conclusion is contrary to Augustine's *De Libero*. She does not say whether Augustine's alleged errors are in his premises or his reasoning or both. She does not say how he would understand her criticism's crucial steps (1) and (3) that include the ambiguous phrases "we cannot adequately conceive of what we cannot experience" and "unavoidable inability to conceive of morally relevant dimensions". I shall argue that Augustine and Adams differ on what these phrases mean and on what follows from top-down metaphysical theologies such that Adams's objection begs the question. Additionally, Augustine's top-down understanding of metaphysical theology and moral philosophy provides good reasons to deny her criticisms and even to challenge her positive ideas. I shall

¹⁰⁶ Stump 2001.

treat these matters under four headings: Augustine and Hume on sympathy, suffering and natural law, action and *privatio boni*, and evil suffered and its remedies.

5.1 Moral Sympathy: Augustine and Hume

I contend that it is anachronistic to assume that Augustine would accept the terms of Adams's first objection. Its particulars put Adams in serious conflict with him. As Adams's notes in the introduction to her book *Horrendous Evils*:

If ancient and medieval attention was trained on sin and disordered human agency, on the metaphysical fact of death, and on material resistance to order, writers from Hume onwards have shifted the spotlight back onto personal pain and suffering, to its apparent arbitrariness, to the frequency of its occurrence, often—whether through wars or natural disasters—on a grand scale.¹⁰⁷

For Augustine and his medieval students, as well as for many of their Greek and Roman predecessors, in a properly educated, properly functioning human being, pain is a physical sign of disorder respecting human nature and pleasure a physical sign of order.¹⁰⁸ Augustine's life and the culture of late-antiquity made him familiar with pain and pleasure. However, Augustine and later medieval theologians were secular and religious priests and educated into a tradition wherein treating pain and pleasure as fundamental goods is a mistake.¹⁰⁹ For human senses of pain and pleasure are mutable and can be educated. Some higher human goods—for instance, birthing children or composing essays or cultivating fields—only become pleasurable after a period of pain or disciplined apprenticeship and toil. Lesser goods such as eating and drinking or acquiring wealth are more immediately pleasurable to human appetites. The immoderate pursuit of the latter goods regularly thwarts that of the former goods. Hence, pain and pleasure are genuine but subordinate goods in a scheme where lesser goods are pursued only for the sake of higher goods. Indeed, Augustine and Christian medievals take as authorities Jesus, the apostles, and early church figures, who prescribed taking up one's cross and willingly embraced martyrdom for the sake of the divine order. This way of life would seem *prima facie* irrational if personal pain and suffering are fundamental.

¹⁰⁷ Adams 1999c, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.23; Augustine *De Doct. Chr.* 1.1, 2.1-2.

¹⁰⁹ Kent 2001, 206-209, 216; Markus 1967, 380-94.

Modern thinkers such as Hume and Mill also discussed the philosophical problem of higher and lower goods. Why pain and pleasure *qua* fundamental goods supplanted the natural and theological ordering of life is a complex, controversial debate. Many histories of philosophy account for the change in mostly intellectual terms: Christian Platonist and Christian Aristotelian philosophies collapsed under the weight of their insoluble problems and absurdities and the successes of skeptical rationalism and empiricism and breakthroughs in mathematical physics. These changes undermined belief in excellence hierarchies, immaterial substances, and teleologies that render pain and pleasure secondary moral concepts. Bottom-up perspectives about fundamental goods make more sense because there is no more basic level of reality to which we have access. Some recent histories of philosophy emphasize the relevance of changes—social, political, economic, theological, etc.—following the Protestant and Catholic reformations in Europe that made consensus on a complex, unified common good unattainable and moved philosophical attention in the direction of the individual abstracted from social and theological relationships.¹¹⁰ In situations where disagreement about metaphysics and theology cannot be mediated adequately, metaphysical theologies becomes less able to contribute to societal conversation. Where God is the ultimate end who orders all proximate ends, the decreasing value of theological currency requires people to find non-theological alternatives to do the job of ordering goods. Calculi of pain and pleasure present one family of alternatives. The genealogy of pain and pleasure in western thought is important but beyond the scope of my study. So I shall just stipulate with Adams that there is a disjunction on this matter between pre-modern and modern thought.

Adams's first objection addresses Augustine in a largely modern idiom. (i) The individual plays a crucial role in the objection. The principal problems are the under capacity of the individual's own faculties and the nature of horrors. On one hand, Adams's objection asserts as that an individual human being's capacity to produce suffering exceeds her ability to experience it and we cannot adequately conceive of what we cannot experience. On the other hand, Adams asserts that, "No single finite consciousness can experience each and every type of horror, and yet—among humans—no suffering can be adequately known and appreciated by those who have

¹¹⁰ See Wolterstorff 1996; MacIntyre 1988, ch.12-16.

not undergone it themselves.”¹¹¹ (ii) Suffering as such makes its cause evil. (iii) Empathetic capacity is vital to the problem and solutions that Adams formulates, and this feature contrasts strikingly with Augustine. On my reading of *De Libero*, he does not discuss anything like Adams’s empathy. The classic discussions of moral empathy and sympathy are products of the British sentimentalists. A prominent example is Hume’s discussion of “fellow-feeling” and “sympathy” in his *Treatise of Human Nature* and *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.

Adams spends little time examining philosophical theories of moral sympathy and their development. She once identifies Augustinian Platonism as her inspiration in her essay “The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians” (1993):

Other than experiencing such suffering in our own persons, . . . sympathetic entering into the position of another is the best way we have to tell what it would be like to be that person and suffer as they do, the best data we can get on how bad it would be to suffer that way. . . . [This thesis of mine] is but an extension of the Augustinian-Platonist point, that where values are concerned, what and how well you see depends not simply on how well you think, but on what and how well you love.¹¹²

Augustine does have a moral epistemology. However, he would not grant that our “sympathetic entering into” is the “best way . . . to tell” whether it is fitting that for God to punish unrepentant sinners or deny them beatitude. For he thinks we love things too often in wrong proportion to their actual goodness.¹¹³ The love that enables us to see, to love things proportionately, is our love of God.¹¹⁴ And we owe all things to God including the fact that we love Him.¹¹⁵ Christian brotherhood and neighborliness consist of loving others things, including persons, not on their own account but on account of God whom they love or ought to love together.¹¹⁶ Insofar

¹¹¹ Adams 1999c, 174 Six pages after stating her objection in “Theodicy without Blame”, Adams (1988c, 231-32) writes that pre-existing non-ideal choosers and an inhospitable environment also contribute to an individual’s development as a non-optimal agent. However, these are secondary problems in that they are inessential to her objection. This is why her objection applies even if we entertain a flawless, primeval agent.

¹¹² Adams 1993c, 326-27. Adams (1992a, 412) may have in mind the Augustinian-Platonist views of Anselm as much as of Augustine himself.

¹¹³ Augustine *De Doct. Chr.* 1.3-4.

¹¹⁴ Augustine *De Doct. Chr.* 1.22, 27.

¹¹⁵ Augustine *De Doct. Chr.* 1.29.

¹¹⁶ Augustine *De Doct. Chr.* 1.29.

as sympathy aligns our loves and hates with those of other creatures, it uses creatures to order our loves. Sympathy is then vis-à-vis Augustine's theoretical and practical arguments a simulacrum of Christian brotherhood. Adams's thesis is sensible as an "extension" of Augustinian Platonism only if *pace* Augustine we lack access to a transcendental standard, humanity is not subject to *ignorantia et difficultas*, and there is not significant disorder in creation. R. A. Markus concurs in his treatment of Augustine's theory of will and virtue: "The contrast is not between love of God and love of creatures, but between a rightly ordered love which embraces God and creatures, and a perverse or disordered love by which creatures are loved inordinately, for their own sakes, without reference to God."¹¹⁷

Hume offers a closer analogy to Adams's empathetic capacity and sympathetic presence than Augustine does. In his *Treatise*, Hume states:

Now we have no extensive concern for society but from sympathy; and consequently 'tis that principle, which takes us so far out of ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in characters which are so useful or pernicious to society, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage or loss.¹¹⁸

This passage outlines a mental power and its functionality. Both items parallel Adams's concepts. Hume uses the term sympathy to designate a principle or power of our imagination: a person or object can cause in us the idea of a passion, and sympathy converts that idea into the occurrence of a passion in us.¹¹⁹ He classifies compassion and pity as passions and not as synonyms for the power that causes them.¹²⁰ Adams uses such terms more freely. She speaks of empathetic capacity just as Hume speaks of a principle of sympathy, but her implicit definition of sympathy seems to include feelings such as compassion and pity as well.

Hume states more forthrightly than Adams that an individual shows love to her community only because proximity permits sympathy to move the individual. A longer passage from his *Treatise* reinforces the analogy with Adams:

¹¹⁷ Markus 1967, 391.

¹¹⁸ Hume *Treatise* 3.3.1.11 (Norton and Norton 2000, 370); cf. *ibid.*, 3.3.6.1. The quotation is from the Oxford Philosophical Texts edition, which uses the text prepared for volumes 1 and 2 of the forthcoming Clarendon critical edition of Hume's works (Tom Beauchamp, David Norton, and M.A. Stewart, eds.).

¹¹⁹ Hume *Treatise* 2.1.11.1-8, 2.2.7.2, 2.2.12.6, 2.3.6.1-10, 3.3.2.2.

¹²⁰ Hume *Treatise* 2.2.9, 2.2.11.

Since then those principles of sympathy and comparison with ourselves, are directly contrary, it may be worth while to consider, what general rules can be form'd, besides the particular temper of the person, for the prevalence of the one or the other. Suppose I am now in safety at land, and wou'd willingly reap some pleasure from this consideration: I must think on the miserable condition of those who are at sea in a storm, and must endeavour to render this idea as strong and lively as possible, in order to make me more sensible of my happiness. But whatever pains I may take, the comparison will never have an equal efficacy, as if I were really on the shore, and saw a ship at a distance, tost by a tempest, and did in danger every moment of perishing on a rock or sand-bank. But suppose this idea to become still more lively. Suppose the ship to be driven so near me, that I can perceive distinctly the horror, painted on the countenance of the seamen and passengers, hear their lamentable cries, see the dear friends give their last adieu, or embrace with a resolution to perish in each other's arms: No man has so savage a heart as to reap any pleasure from such a spectacle, or withstand the motions of the tenderest compassion and sympathy. 'Tis evident, therefore, there is a medium in this case; and that if the idea be too faint, it has no influence by comparison; and on the other hand, if it be too strong, it operates on us entirely by sympathy, which is the contrary to comparison. Sympathy being the conversion of an idea into an impression, demands a greater force and vivacity in the idea than is requisite to comparison.¹²¹

Hume thinks that we treat persons like objects or like ourselves, in third-person or first-person, with comparison or sympathy. What distinguishes these approaches is our proximity to the joy or suffering of others. However, Hume thinks reason plays *no essential role* in sympathy. He claims that “reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will” and “can never oppose passion in the direction of the will” but rather “the chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain.”¹²² Our desires, or passions in Hume's idiom, and our feelings of pain and pleasure do not admit of further analysis.¹²³ These elements of experience are givens. Hume assumes some regularity respecting pleasures and pains obtains between humans.¹²⁴ So reason plays *an instrumental role* in connecting cause and effect and telling us how we might obtain that which we already desire. The instrumentality of moral reason appears most fully in Humean moral education which aims to develop

¹²¹ Hume *Treatise* 3.3.2.5 (Norton and Norton 2000, 379).

¹²² Hume *Treatise* 2.3.3.1, 3.3.1.2 (Norton and Norton 2000, 265, 367).

¹²³ Hume *Treatise* 2.3.3, 3.1.2; Hume *Enquiry* 5.2.17fn.19.

¹²⁴ Hume *Treatise* 2.1.11.5, 2.2.5.4, 2.2.7.2, 2.3.1.10.

the power of sympathy to whatever level possible.¹²⁵ Hume is a sufficiently consistent thinker that on this scheme of pains and pleasure and of reason that there is no need to construct a law-like ‘ought’ from the ‘is’ of pain and pleasure. Adams resembles Hume in several ways. Her comments about Hitler’s re-education and Augustinian sympathy commend moral education through suffering and proximity to sufferers (see pp. 141, 161). She also affirms, somewhat ambivalently, that suffering is radically private and private experience trumps external signs of health or distress.

On my interpretation, Humean sentimentalism is a more natural context for Adams’s first objection than is Augustinian Platonism. To be valid or otherwise useful, the analogy that I posit between Hume and Adams need not exclude notable disanalogies. For instance, Hume would have nothing to do with the top-down metaphysical theology that Adams espouses. Noting such differences is important to debates not only about whether other thinkers present superior analogies but also about the transformation of ideas and matters of internal consistency. Additionally, the analogy does not require Adams to appropriate Hume’s ideas directly or systematically. Hume is far more prominent than Augustine in several channels that are sufficient to explain the resemblance with Adams: modern western culture, Anglo-American analytic philosophy, and developmental psychological inquiry.¹²⁶

Her statements support this story. Her study of Hume in graduate school was confined primarily to his epistemology. She read his *Treatise*, book 1, more than fifty times and “[a] full third of [her] output was on David Hume.”¹²⁷ However, her ethics coursework focused on the utilitarians rather than on Hume and the sentimentalists. As I said earlier, Adams acknowledges that Hume was prominent in the modern shift from top-down to bottom-up conceptions of evil where sin and disorder among created agents and creatures gave way to personal pain and suffering. She concurs

¹²⁵ See MacIntyre 1999, 125-28.

¹²⁶ Richard Rorty and Richard Swinburne also display Hume’s influence on value theory. Rorty’s discussion of ‘solidarity’ is closer to Hume than is Adams’s ‘empathy’. For Rorty (1989, xvi, 189-98) rejects any need for metaphysical justification for feelings of solidarity, albeit on quite different grounds than Hume. Rorty (1999, 87) later acknowledges his debt to Hume. Swinburne (1979, 202-14) uses Hume’s empiricist idiom when discussing natural and moral evil. Like Adams, he thinks culpability for causing serious suffering depends on the extent of her personal experience with suffering.

¹²⁷ Adams 1994, 147-48; email correspondence, October 5, 2005.

insofar as her theodicy emphasizes horrors. Adams's 'empirical' view of morality, which she brings up when discussing developmental psychology and theodicy, also indicates that Hume is a closer analogue than Augustine. She writes:

If we begin with experience and do our action and moral theory from the ground up instead of top down, morality might more plausibly strike us as a scheme devised among and for, *not ideal agents*, but *adults with impaired freedom*. Its modest goal is to regulate behaviour and attitudes, to produce and encourage habits that make possible social cohabitation and collaboration in the battle for survival against the hostile forces of nature. . . . On this 'empirical' view (which I favour), morality is robbed of its metaphysical and value-theory pretensions to network all and only ideal agents . . . and to trump all other evaluative considerations where persons are concerned.¹²⁸

My surmise is that Adams inadequately distinguishes her own view of morality's nature from Augustine's view. This occurs in her first objection against Augustine about moral responsibility and horrors. It also occurs in her "extension of the Augustinian Platonist point" about moral sympathy. The crucial terms of her first objection (i.e., "conceivability follows capacity to experience" and "morally relevant dimensions" in steps (1) and (3)) assume or Adams interprets them as assuming that bottom-up value theory notions are correct. However, this is precisely what is in question where Augustine's top-down view is concerned. The dispute cannot be adjudicated without examining the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions of two broad families of value theories. So Adams's objection, as she states it, is ineffectual against Augustine. Moreover, I shall argue that Augustine is in a more consistent and therefore stronger theoretical position than is Adams.

5.2 Suffering and Natural Law

Systematic scrutiny of Adams's first objection raises the question of whether Adams's top-down metaphysics conflicts with her value theory. Indeed, my treatment of the conflict between her psychological and parts-whole accounts of horrendous evils in chapter 3 can now be recast as part of just such an argument. I argued that pain and psychology should neither be treated eliminatively nor be made basic: neither third-person nor first-person accounts should be privileged. Both require and arguably should be understood as abstractions from second-person,

¹²⁸ Adams 1996a, 120; emphasis in original.

conversational accounts of pain. In saying that, I am paraphrasing Fergus Kerr's reading of Wittgenstein on private language.¹²⁹

Kerr argues that to talk about pain as if there is an ineffable aspect to which the sufferer has special access is a twofold mistake. The first is how this implicitly denies human dependence on a pre-existing community of speakers as I argued in chapter 3. The second relates to the natural expressiveness of our bodies. As Kerr points out, our language of pain is rooted in our immediate animal behaviors: grimacing, crying, moaning, screaming, doubling over, fainting, listlessness, losing our appetites, vomiting, limping, etc. All this is natural and none of it is private, though we are socialized to hide such behavior in public. People may even recognize my pain before I do. (I consider only cases of proper human function here because Adams claims that in all cases of horrific suffering there is a core experience that is incommunicable to all other persons.) Take the evil of rape mutilation which Adams lists as a paradigmatic horror. Victims of such attacks are due respect, but that does not include feigned ignorance about their resultant pain. Even a child may recognize something is wrong with a woman missing her arms above her elbows and naturally relate it to her tears or blankness. Are Shakespeare's *Andronici* really ignorant of Lavinia's pain though she cannot speak or gesticulate? Fencing off an area of experience or personal narrative to which victims have privileged access is an erroneous remedy to theological projects that mistakenly privilege a third-person perspective on pain.¹³⁰ All human suffering, conscious or sub-conscious, necessarily involves mediation. So steps (1) and (3) of the first objection are not only question-begging but their focus on personal experience is intrinsically problematic.

Regarding Humean sympathy, MacIntyre states that it "is at best a secondary moral concept. For unless we already understand wherein the good for human beings consists and correspondingly what the range of evils is that human beings can suffer, we shall not know how and where to direct our sympathies. Moral sympathy cannot

¹²⁹ Kerr 1997, 77-100.

¹³⁰ Rowan Williams (1996) rejects Adams's project because of her views on divine action and because her account of evil still privileges third-person access to suffering.

provide but, presupposes, established standards of good and evil.”¹³¹ His argument assumes that Hume errs about the regularity of human pain and pleasure and about how such feelings correspond with what in Hume’s idiom has utility for humans. An account of how we can and often do know what is good for humans, apart from experiences in kind, would be philosophically useful. It would explain what Adams’s empathy cannot: why people avoid perpetrating a given horror without ever participating in such acts as perpetrator or victim (including horrors like vaporization at ground-zero of a nuclear detonation, which as I point out in chapter 3 we cannot ‘experience’); and how perpetrators of horrors can deliberately inflict their evils without prior experience in kind. When Lavinia, the daughter of Titus Andronicus, is raped and her hands and tongue are severed, the act’s possibility is understandable only if Demetrius and Chiron (and Aaron) adequately understand why the resultant state is so bad. If their aim was merely to silence Lavinia, then they could kill her as she requests, before or after they gang rape her. Lavinia’s mutilation effectively works to scorn and torment her and the Andronici.

Consider the following two explanations of how the characters can know what humans ought not to do without prior experience in kind being necessary. On one hand, when we learn by doing activities, those activities gradually make our minds adequate to their subjects in such a way that we can do many things we would not have precisely done before. We can apply this adequation theory of truth (*veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*) to cooking, unseen translations, basketball, single-variable trigonometric integral calculus, chess, etc.¹³² As we tackle a subject practically or theoretically, our minds achieve identity with the subject’s form or nature. We come to know, without prior experience in kind, that using certain ingredients in cooking or substituting certain derivatives in calculus will lead to

¹³¹ MacIntyre 1980, 41. *Pace* MacIntyre (1988, 290-94), what bridges the third and first-person for Hume is not just the passions but the principle of sympathy, which enables those first-person passions to be communicated.

¹³² The adequation theory is not native to Augustine. He (*De Lib. Arb.* 1.6, 2.9-12) says that we access the eternal law directly through reason rather than through sense experience of the changing world. However, he also says (*De Doct. Chr.* pr. & book 1) that we need other people and texts to teach us how to form good habits and how to read scripture which is central to realigning our loves with the divine order. My position is that these understandings are reconcilable if not in Augustine’s account of the human ascent from sense to imagination to intellect then in a thinker such as Aquinas. See also Markus 1967, 362-79.

wrong results. We also come to know that certain actions are barred without prior direct experience of performing the proposed action. I know not to set a pot of stew on a lit gas burner and leave it for 12 hours partly because I have burned food in less than 30 minutes. If I overcook food, then I cooked poorly. If I decide to leave stew to scorch for 12 hours, then I was not cooking at all. Analogously, we learn daily how we can be good humans and not very good humans and what actions make us inhuman.¹³³ On the other hand, until more recent times, people were not expected to decide what is the human good, or at least their individual good, primarily or solely through personal experience. Each generation did not need to reinvent what it means to be good humans. Instead, their family and community had an evolving stock of stories—often about living or dead family or community members—which taught them what is good and what is corrupt, what is wisdom and what is folly.¹³⁴ The stock evolves because the stories are debated, modified, discarded, and retrieved. What metaphysics explain about why an action ought or ought not to be done may be unclear to hearers. However, the imperatives and their relationships with goods, even when communicated indirectly, are graspable if the storyteller has any skill.

On this view, the disposition to act on such knowledge is not merely a matter of negative reinforcement but of instruction in the virtues by our elders. If the elders discharge their responsibilities properly, then hopefully their apprentices will appreciate why it is foolish to rely primarily or solely on aversion to pain to guide them through life. Adams's objection to Augustine assumes an empiricist view of morality that conflates this disposition with knowledge itself.¹³⁵ A person may have a fine-grained grasp of an action's mechanics and potential consequences from direct experience or abstract physical knowledge. Yet he may lack the disposition to act correctly for a range of reasons: weakness of will, indolence, coddling, etc.

All of these modes of moral education—as an individual and as a community, through theory and through practice—find their natural compliments in natural law. I do not need to supply an account of natural law here to answer the first objection against Augustine. First, it is enough to point out that natural law does the work of

¹³³ McCabe 2002, 187-98.

¹³⁴ Berry 2002, 73, 216-18; MacIntyre 1984, 216.

¹³⁵ Stump 1983, 55.

Adams's sympathy and empathy and does it better because it explains how people can know what is good and bad for humans apart from specific, prior 'experiential' knowledge. We know more than what we can say and what we have done. Secondly, we find support for this rebuttal in Augustine's *De Libero* when he briefly discusses the *lex aeterna*. Augustine never read *Nicomachaen Ethics*, but he makes a distinction like that which Aristotle makes between natural and legal justice.¹³⁶ Theologically, Evodius identifies what eternal justice commands with God's command.¹³⁷ Augustine agrees and elsewhere identifies God's command with ordered love.¹³⁸ Significantly, his *De Libero* states "the notion of eternal law is impressed on us" just as many theories of natural law say we access fundamental aspects through *synderesis*.¹³⁹ His accounts of divine love ordering our loves and of the virtues and vices that follow have some resonance with the Aristotelian idiom.¹⁴⁰

Natural law is a contentious philosophical topic and I shall not try to handle its problems in this rough sketch. Nonetheless, Adams's first objection fails to grapple with natural law as a remedy to the limits of personal experience.¹⁴¹ This is a substantial lacuna. Augustine's top-down approach to morality explains why he would think Adams is wrong about the necessity of empathetic capacity or of personal experience with suffering for moral understanding. His appeal to natural law explains why sympathy is morally secondary. It also explains how she can repair two more lacunae: how one can understand an evil act that stops meaning-making

¹³⁶ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.3-6 distinguishes what human law forbids, what people prefer, and what they desire inordinately. He argues that inordinate desire is what is truly evil. He analyzes it in terms of: *aeterna iustitia* (ibid., 1.5.35 [CCSL 29:218]); *res privata* and *res publica* (ibid., 1.6.45-46 [CCSL 29:219]); and *lex temporalis* and *lex aeterna* (ibid., 1.6.48-51 [CCSL 29:219]). Augustine *De Doct. Chr.* 1.26 (CCSL 32:21) mentions a *lex naturae* that consists of the love of self and what is below us; he distinguishes it from the precept whose end is *dilectio dei et proximi*. See also Bonnie Kent's (2001) exposition of Augustine on the virtues which though it bypasses his ideas about natural law is otherwise excellent.

¹³⁷ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.5.35.

¹³⁸ Augustine *De Doct. Chr.* 1.22.21, 1.26.27, 1.35.39; Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 15.22.

¹³⁹ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.6.51.

¹⁴⁰ See Jordan 2004, 382-83; referencing Aquinas *ST* 1-2.55.

¹⁴¹ Katherin Rogers (2002, 71-72) also rejects step (3) of Adams's argument. Rogers argues that disobedience to God is sufficient for fault apart from the ability to foresee any or all consequent suffering.

and precludes empathy with the victims; and how one can calculatingly inflict unjust suffering where the perpetrator has no prior experience in kind.

5.3 *Action and Privatio Boni*

Adams's first objection assumes that at least beyond some threshold of evil that there is a zero-sum balance between a given action's magnitude and complexity and an agent's intentionality and culpability. The more complex and heinous an action the less culpable the perpetrator can be for it. Augustine would reject this relationship because he would limit the "morally relevant dimensions of an action and its consequences" that step (3) of the objection discusses. He would not include all "horrendous dimensions" of an evil under that rubric of what is morally relevant. This argument rebuts Adams's objection and it provides a better explanation her claim (T1) that it is easy for humans to cause or contribute to horrors.

Knowing what would happen on a sub-atomic basis if I do some action is not morally relevant. An accurate statistical quantum description is possible in principle, and it would provide a more comprehensively accurate description of an action and its consequences. But I do not have the speed or computational capacities to control precisely, say, how a machete interacts with a human limb at a quantum level. Where the action involves exotic weapons we still can only know what will happen statistically. The unavoidable limits on my power to manage an act at the quantum level and on my intentionality are two reasons that these considerations are morally irrelevant. However, Augustine's top-down, privation theory of evil provides a better reason for their moral irrelevance. Those quantum interactions, with their statistical regularity, do not constitute a failure of the good. Those interactions are genuine goods. There is a reason that prayers for healing do not typically petition God to suspend the relevant natural creaturely regularities (e.g., cellular mitosis) everywhere and always.¹⁴² Bottom-up views of evil wherein pain and pleasure are fundamental obscure this level of analysis. Those views conflate the perpetrator's failure to choose the good with the other successful natures the action presupposes or affects.

This argument has two implications. First, we need to recast the analytical tools of double-effect, doing/allowing, and so forth. Adams claims that those principles are

¹⁴² See McCabe 1981, 11.

means for excusing God and blaming humans. That is inaccurate. They are tools for telling stories of agency correctly. They help us to avoid conflating agential action with non-agential background and events or the actions of multiple agents. The use of these tools in legal contexts, which are adversarial and rights-oriented, skews our attention towards exculpatory ends. However, even in legal contexts, exculpation is ideally incidental to telling a story truthfully. Secondly, evil suffered is not as much a problem for Augustine as it is for Adams.¹⁴³ Evil suffered is rooted in evil done which is a profoundly worse privation. Augustine's statements about evil done consistently terminate in an inexplicable and therefore irrational original free choice. It is compared to silence and darkness which are not things but absences of things.¹⁴⁴ His statements about evil suffered do not terminate likewise.¹⁴⁵ This implies evil suffered is always explicable in terms of some good exercising its powers even if to the detriment of another good. Evil suffered is not sheer failure. The order retribution imposes is a remedy for the disorder or irrationality of evil done and not for evil suffered. And this is what we should expect, because Augustine views the involuntary impediments and frustrations of human natures as just punishment that God decrees.¹⁴⁶ He is a consistent enough thinker that his value theory does not obviously require remedies for his remedies.

Augustine's implicit action theory is contrary to the first objection in another respect. Adams's (T2) focuses on "an individual human being's capacity" to cause or contribute to horrors. However, many putatively discrete acts of individuals are only intelligible as constituents of a whole where the whole is an individual's project or a community's activity. In criticizing the interpretation of Augustine in Hick's *Evil and the God of Love*, Rowan Williams draws attention to this point:

A wicked human is an immeasurably greater problem than a wicked hamster (if, indeed, we can give much content to such an idea); and Augustine and the

¹⁴³ This argument uses ideas from Davies (1998, 192-96), McCabe (1981), and Hefling (2001), on Augustine's privation theory especially as articulated by Aquinas. I use McCabe's language of "evil suffered" and "evil done" rather than the medieval idiom of *malum poena et culpae* or the modern idiom of natural and moral evil which is neutral between theological and philosophical articulations of evil. See also Davies 1998, 193, 201n.74; Evans 1982, 97.

¹⁴⁴ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 2.20.202; Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.7.

¹⁴⁵ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 11.22, 12.4.

¹⁴⁶ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 1.11, 3.18-20.

majority of Christian theologians up to the Enlightenment would have added that a corrupted angelic will is an immeasurably greater problem than a corrupted human will, and that a fair number of our difficulties in this world derive from just such a problem. The dispositions and habits of intelligent beings have a wide range of effects, because intelligences exist in conscious and creative interaction and interdependence: that is why they can do more damage; and it is one reason for the disproportion between the experience of evil and the level of moral culpability in any individual's life.¹⁴⁷

This illuminates why (T1) it is “comparatively easy” for humans to cause or contribute to horrors. Consider again Adams's list of paradigmatic evils. Nuclear detonations, death camps, and impaling babies on bayonets, are not intelligible if one agent acts alone. With only his own knowledge and provisions, a subsistence farmer can do neither the evil of assembling and detonating a nuclear weapon nor the good of raising enough crops to sustain his family over their lifetimes. Even rape mutilations, deep betrayals, cannibalism of one's offspring, parental incest, and slow starvation, may well be incomplete stories if narrated with only one perpetrator and one victim. Good stories such as Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* remind us that major moral failures are “symptoms of earlier moral failures” of our informal and formal moral tutors, ourselves, and our communities.¹⁴⁸

A proper theory of action would correct dramatic locutions such as Adams's statement: “In ordinary moral theory you can only be fully responsible for what you can conceive of. . . . Hitler can't really experience all of the evils he caused because he was only one person and he caused the death of millions and he caused it in many different ways, and so his capacity to cause horrendous suffering outruns his ability to experience it and hence his ability to understand it.”¹⁴⁹ Villains such as Hitler and Pol Pot are insufficient explanations for the evil policies they enacted apart from socio-political apparatus and perhaps angelic hosts whose members also exercise agency and bear responsibility. Or so Augustine would argue.

5.4 Evil Suffered and Its Remedies

Augustine thinks that evil suffered differs from evil done because the former is not inexplicable and does not intrinsically separate sufferers from God. It is not just

¹⁴⁷ Williams, R. 2000, 111-12. See also Quinn 1993.

¹⁴⁸ MacIntyre 1980, 40.

¹⁴⁹ Adams et al. 2003. See also Adams 2002a, 469.

modern westerners who consider him callous in concluding that evil done and not evil suffered presents the main challenge to philosophy and theology. In Augustine's time, the laity considered the prospect of the bodily torments (*cruciatu corporis*) of children to be theologically distasteful as well.¹⁵⁰ It does not follow that Augustine scorned prayers for mercy. For he acknowledges theological limits to suffering and proposes remedies where suffering in this world exceeds those limits.

When Augustine discusses suicide in *De Libero*, he argues that the good reasons to avoid suicide do not include the belief that postmortem existence may be even unhappier. For our final state will not involve unhappiness that is unjust.¹⁵¹ To this limit, *De Libero* adds four remedies of which Adams's exposition of Augustine ignores the latter two. (i) The metaphysical good of existence offsets evil. (ii) Retributive justice returns suffering for evil volitions and produces a good order. (iii) God may reserve goods of compensation in the secrets of his judgment for innocent sufferers such as infants and martyrs. (iv) The chief remedy is Christ who is the human victor over error and desire. He is willing to heal creation: he calls the hostile, teaches the believing, consoles the hopeful, encourages the diligent, helps the striving, and recognizes the unvalued. Adams rejects (i)-(iii) as insufficient where horrors are concerned. However, she would accept (iv) because horrors are incommensurate with creaturely goods and it overlaps with her Chalcedonian solution. She reasons that "horrendous evils require defeat by nothing less than the goodness of God," and this requires the happy ending of universal salvation.¹⁵²

If horrors are not incommensurate with other creaturely goods, then Augustine's two remedies are adequate and do not necessitate universal salvation. On one hand, Adams states that human vulnerability to horrors differs with nature and experience. One multiple-limb amputee may succumb to despair, while another rises above the challenge. On the other hand, in the Gospels, Jesus restores the bodies even of sufferers who do not respond with thanks to God (Lk. 17:11-17). Moreover, some demoniacs who Jesus frees are very much like Adams's despairing and fractured persons (Mt. 17:15; Mk. 5:5-7, 15; Lk. 8:27-29, 35). Philosophically, it is

¹⁵⁰ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.23.

¹⁵¹ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.6.65.

¹⁵² Adams 1999c, 155.

no more problematic for God to strengthen a nature postmortem than to resurrect human beings bodily or to preserve immaterial human souls in anticipation of the general resurrection. Healing injured natures does not presuppose deification. Theologically, Augustine needs such an account for the unrepentant to receive the punishment he understands the scriptures to say is their due and for the repentant to receive God's gift to them.¹⁵³ Eleonore Stump coordinates Dante's hell with Thomist philosophical theology and argues for an account where God loves the damned by preserving them in whatever degree of goodness they freely chose.¹⁵⁴ The reading of Augustine that I advance could be integrated as a variation on Stump's argument.

6. Evil's Origin

In *De Libero Arbitrio*, book 3, Augustine remarks that his earlier arguments which assume unimpeded freedom refer to the antelapsarian human nature.¹⁵⁵ He concedes that humans are born into *ignorantia et difficultas*, which limits our ability to pursue our natural and supernatural good.¹⁵⁶ In a strict sense sin is evil we do knowingly and freely; in a broader sense sin includes the limitations that naturally and punitively follow prior sins and especially original sin.¹⁵⁷ So despite the quarrels he would have with her first objection from horrors, Augustine would agree with Adams, on grounds quite different than those she presents, that humans, as we are acquainted with them, are not fully responsible for this world's evils. However, he denies that human ignorance and difficulty remove primary responsibility for our evil failures from humans. For our current limits trace back to evil acts for which some primeval humans are fully responsible. This makes his doctrine of original sin a major target of Adams's first-order criticism of morality from horrendous evils.

Adams uses two analogies to argue that God would be primarily responsible if a primeval couple committed a first sin from which all other sin and misery follows.

¹⁵³ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 21.2-8, 22.4-5, 11-12, 25-28. Augustine speculates that infants may receive mature human bodies and the elderly their youth; those whose bodies are dispersed will be gathered (*ibid.*, 22.14-15, 19-20).

¹⁵⁴ Stump 1986, 196-97. See Adams's (1993c, 320-23; 1999c, 43-55) criticisms of Stump.

¹⁵⁵ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.18.179. See also *ibid.*, 1.11.

¹⁵⁶ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.18.178-3.20.199, 3.22.217-220, 3.23.239.

¹⁵⁷ Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.18.183-85. This corresponds to the distinction between the evils of punishment and of guilt (*malum per culpam et penam*) in Aquinas *De Malo* 1.1.18, 1.4.

She also argues that the Augustinian doctrine of an original evil is discredited on historical and psychological grounds. Adams repeats both sets of arguments in her writings on theodicy from “Theodicy without Blame” (1988) through *Horrendous Evils* (1999). However, the second set seems to make most of this argumentation by Adams unnecessary and my criticism of them somewhat obtuse.

For Adams’s part, she indicates in her reply to Placher that her argumentation is responsive to colleagues of whom many think the Eden narrative and Augustinian doctrine are more than metaphors for human finitude: “I reject—as I imagine Placher also does, but as many of my friends in the Society of Christian Philosophers do not—any idea of a historical fall according to which misuse of freedom explains our present non-optimal condition.”¹⁵⁸ For instance, in her review essay on *Horrendous Evils in Faith and Philosophy*, Katherin Rogers discusses prelapsarian humans straightforwardly: “The traditional view is that man is as he is because of his failure at the pre-dawn of history. Contemporary psychology is not in a position to assess that point.”¹⁵⁹ Peter van Inwagen, a highly-accomplished analytic metaphysician and philosopher of religion and the 2000 Wilde Lecturer and a 2003 Gifford Lecturer, stipulates likewise in his essay “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy” (1995): “All evil is the result of a primordial act of turning away from God”; though Adam and Eve are not historical persons, “the creatures who rebelled were an entire generation of human beings . . . In my view, it was the *first* generation of human beings. . . . Before this rebellion, there was no evil—or at any rate none that affected human beings.”¹⁶⁰ This community of theological opinion has credible scholars among its ranks. Moreover, Adams pays them the respect of not being dismissive and her criticisms invite a reply. Given these considerations, I shall present a limited defense of that community’s general view on humanity’s fall.

My criticism is that Adams’s analogies and Augustine’s reading of the Eden narrative are incongruent on important points such as how action and consequence are related, what kind of knowledge is relevant, who is involved. Her critique applies

¹⁵⁸ Adams 2002a, 472-73.

¹⁵⁹ Rogers 2002, 79; cf. *ibid.*, 70-72.

¹⁶⁰ Van Inwagen 1995, 99, 100. He (*ibid.*, 101) notes that his view “is not popular among theologians just at present” and cites the late Michael Ramsey of those with whom he disagree as an example. The essay first appeared in *Philosophical Topics* vol. 18 (1988).

to bottom-up theories. Moreover, there is no relevant difference between the doctrine of a primeval fall of humanity and doctrines that Adams deems vital to theodicy respecting the objections they incur from modern science and philosophy.

6.1 Adams's Analogies and *De Civitate Dei* (11-14)

Adams's criticism of Augustine on original sin uses two analogies to gauge how responsible the primeval couple may be in principle. Her nursery school and terrorist analogies highlight three items: (i) the relation of the action and consequence is accidental; (ii) the protagonist is inexperienced and ignorant respecting the causal-chain that he or she initiates; and (iii) the dangerous situation is solely created by one person who is not the protagonist. These three considerations underlie Adams's judgment that the Eden narrative's human protagonists cannot bear full or primary culpability for their actions' outcomes.

While "Theodicy without Blame" focuses on Augustine's *De Libero*, I want to test her analogies respecting Augustine's more developed account of original sin in *De Civitate Dei* (ca. 413-27), books 11-14. The account has vulnerabilities, but they are reduced and different relative to Adams's objections. I shall divide his account into five elements. First, Augustine's reading of Genesis 2-3 recognizes three parties: God, the human couple, and the devil who possesses a serpent (the bands of unfallen and fallen angels play a supporting role).¹⁶¹ Adams's analogies neglect the third party. Secondly, Augustine argues that creaturely mutability is necessary but insufficient for the first sin to occur.¹⁶² When treating Trinitarian theology, Augustine argues that God alone is simple and consequently immutable.¹⁶³ A simple thing has no constituents and cannot therefore be reordered or disordered or undergo corruption or generation. In contrast, all good things besides God derive their goodness from God's simple goodness, and on account of being made creatures are composite and mutable.¹⁶⁴ Thus the possibility of change, including corruption, follows from creatures being created *ex nihilo*, i.e., from being metaphysically dependent on but distinct from God who is dependent on no other thing. Adams,

¹⁶¹ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.11.

¹⁶² Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.1, 12.6, 12.8, 14.13

¹⁶³ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 11.10.

¹⁶⁴ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 11.10 (CCSL 48:330).

relying on Hick's critical account, claims that Augustine thinks corruption is inevitable for composite beings.¹⁶⁵ Their reading is incorrect. As I noted, Augustine's metaphysical commitments do not entail that such corruption is inevitable.¹⁶⁶ He also points out theologically that some angels never fell nor shall they fall, although angels *qua* creatures are not metaphysically simple.¹⁶⁷ Thirdly, a distinct, prior evil moment of will, which precedes the first sinful act of eating the forbidden fruit, is the other necessary condition and is alone sufficient for the transgression.¹⁶⁸ (i) No external creaturely cause is sufficient to cause the will's evil movement. Augustine asserts that the devil would have been unable to persuade the primeval couple to disobey openly God's command if the couple has not become proud already.¹⁶⁹ His philosophical rationale is apparently the same as in *De Libero*: a good, uncorrupted will is subject to no evil, corrupt will. Theologically, the narrative excludes any material scarcity or want that could warrant the primeval couple's dissatisfaction.¹⁷⁰ (ii) However, an unsupplemented act of will is sufficient.¹⁷¹ The primeval couple needed God's help to have faith in His help, but they had the power to become self-satisfied and withdraw from God's grace. Augustine uses a simple analogy: it is not in our power to live without food in this bodily life, but it is in our power to die by not eating; the primeval couple was in an analogous relationship to God.¹⁷² Fourthly, the first evil act of will of *superbia* is the

¹⁶⁵ Adams 1993c, 311fn.24; Hick 1985, 13, 46-47, 61, 96-97, 129, 188-91, 194. Hick (1985, 190) asserts such inevitability in some passages, but in others he (*ibid.*, 13, 47, 61) admits there is no such inevitability.

¹⁶⁶ See Williams, R. 2000. Augustine (*De Civ. Dei* 14.13) makes one statement from the surface of which inevitability can be imputed (see Hick 1985, 46).

¹⁶⁷ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 11.13, 12.1, 12.8, 12.10; Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.5.53.

¹⁶⁸ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.8, 14.11, 14.13, 14.27.

¹⁶⁹ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.13, 14.27.

¹⁷⁰ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.10; Augustine *De Lib. Arb.* 3.25.

¹⁷¹ Hick (1985, 62-64, 66, 249) argues that an original defective act of will is unintelligible if there is no prior defect in the environment or agent that is an efficient cause or motivation. See also Babcock 1988. In contrast, Adams (1988c, 244n.29) says such arguments are not obviously true but rather "the nature of human motivation [is] a deep and difficult question."

¹⁷² Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.27.

true first sin.¹⁷³ The perverse love of a material object is not caused by the material object but by the will itself.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, evil acts of will such as pride, envy, or hatred, are possible for the disembodied (unlike fornication and inebriation), which is why the devil was able to sin through *superbia*.¹⁷⁵ Augustine speculates that God forbade the couple from eating the fruit because God knew they had secretly become prideful and their breaking his command would confront them with their secret sin.¹⁷⁶ Fifthly, *superbia* necessarily involves a damaging withdrawal from God. Where *De Civitate Dei* discusses *philosophia moralis*, it states that to love and enjoy God is our *summum bonum* and elsewhere *finis bonorum nostrorum*.¹⁷⁷ Thus, the natures of rational creatures are frustrated if they turn towards themselves and away from God.¹⁷⁸ This frustration is a natural consequence and not a contingent, divine decree.¹⁷⁹ (For Augustine, natural consequence is defeasible, i.e., it does not preclude healing and deification through divine grace.)¹⁸⁰ Augustine ends his account of original sin with a neat summary: “Two loves have made, therefore, two cities, the earthly namely self-love right up to the contempt of God, the heavenly indeed the love of God right up to the contempt of self. In short, the former city prided itself in itself, the latter prided itself in God.”¹⁸¹

With this framework in place, let us return to Adams’s analogies. The first issue her analogies raise is that the consequence is accidental to the action. Augustine

¹⁷³ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.11, 14.13. Whether the first defection constitutes an act or is other than an act is an interesting dispute. For Augustine thinks even a defective act is something good while evil done is sheer failure. See Aquinas *De Malo* 2.2; Hefling 2001.

¹⁷⁴ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.8.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.2-3.

¹⁷⁶ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.13. Augustine also claims that the command was to teach the prime couple their relationship to God is one of servant or usufruct to Lord and the usefulness of obedience (*ibid.*, 14.15). This makes the command more arbitrary and less favorable to my reading of him.

¹⁷⁷ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 8.4 (CCSL 47:220), 8.8 (CCSL 47:224), 19.11 (CCSL 48:674).

¹⁷⁸ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.1., 12.3, 13.15, 14.13.

¹⁷⁹ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.1, 14.1, 14.13.

¹⁸⁰ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.1, 14.11, 14.15.

¹⁸¹ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.28 (CCSL 48: 51). Cf. *ibid.*, 14.13.

admits that the action of eating a forbidden fruit seems trivial.¹⁸² However, he distinction between hidden (*occultum, abditum*) and manifest (*aperta, manifestum, euidens, indubitata*) evils indicates that the Eden narrative's action is not trivial.¹⁸³ A child manipulating a colored knob and a person wearing a red jersey are not intrinsically disastrous. In contrast, the consequence of *superbia* is natural and essential.¹⁸⁴ Open disobedience to God is desertion, but so is the prior, hidden act of *superbia*—Augustine argues that God forsake human souls in the Eden narrative only after they forsake him.¹⁸⁵ Adam's action ranks Eve's word above God's word.

The second issue that Adams raises is the human protagonists' inexperience and ignorance about the disastrous causal-chain that they initiate. (i) In Adams's analogies, the trivial antecedent causes focus us on their consequences; in contrast, Augustine's top-down value theory rules out analogies that prioritize consequences over antecedent acts. He understands evil primarily as a failure to choose the good. Even if turning inwards and away from God would leave a human in a sustainable, self-delusional, but cheerful state, Augustine's naturalism indicates that this would still be a defection from the good for which humans are made or of which grace makes them capable.¹⁸⁶ Separation from God is momentous in itself.¹⁸⁷ (ii) Augustine is forthright about the "series of calamities" and "network of miseries" that followed the primeval rebellion, but that cascade of suffering is not deterministic.¹⁸⁸ Fallen agents still possess some freedom to make foolish or wicked

¹⁸² Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.12-13.

¹⁸³ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.13 (CCSL 48:434-36).

¹⁸⁴ Rogers (2002, 72-75) makes a similar argument about sin's natural consequences, though she focuses on disobedience and does not identify a prior, hidden sin.

¹⁸⁵ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 13.13, 13.15, 14.13. Augustine states that divine grace forsakes the primeval couple after they disobey his command. He does not address whether God forsakes them upon their developing the vice *superbia*. Thus it is not clear if the loss of divine grace from *superbia* is properly speaking punishment. If his analogy of self-starvation applies, then regardless of whether the loss of divine grace occurs immediately with *superbia* or only later with the open disobedience, the loss of grace is necessary.

¹⁸⁶ Quinn 1993, 192; Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.1, 14.10, 14.13.

¹⁸⁷ At least once in *De Civ. Dei* (21.11-12), Augustine argues as if proper punishment is proportional to the harm done to others. If we apply this claim only to the *poena sensus*, we can reconcile this with his other arguments in books 11-14.

¹⁸⁸ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 13.14 (CCSL 48:396).

decisions. The primeval humans are unaware of the wide range of sins that they enable. However, this ignorance is irrelevant to the responsibility for their action. Adams's second analogy especially (a terrorist kills 100 villagers because one villager wears a red shirt) conflates the evils that distinct fallen agents do. (iii) The primeval couple's knowledge was incomplete but not such that they would misunderstand their act's character and have diminished culpability. Augustine takes scripture to teach that the devil deceived Eve whereas Adam knowingly disobeyed; Adam believed that refusing Eve would result in their separation and perhaps, being inexperienced with divine severity, Adam believed their sins were venial.¹⁸⁹ So Augustine could argue that Adam should be able to understand that self-love and disobedience are failures to love God. For Adam grasped that refusing Eve might breach their relationship. Adams's analogies do not illuminate Augustine's interpretation of the Eden narrative. However, the Eden narrative allows for a range of moral psychologies and is unlikely to generate demonstrative proofs for or against his reading.

The third issue is that the adult or the terrorist is the sole creator of the hostile environment in Adams's analogies: she asserts that God bears primary responsibility for original sin. Augustine makes three relevant arguments. (i) The search for a morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil is a non-starter in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. For he says God can create rational creatures who would never sin and fully knows the primeval couple would sin, yet God creates the primeval couple as they are.¹⁹⁰ Thus Augustine does not intend to shift blame. As I argued earlier, he wants to explain why humans are blameworthy as the scriptures teach. (ii) Augustine puts in question the notion of a hostile environment. Whereas the analogies' gas-filled room and targeted village serve no constructive function, Augustine thinks the antelapsarian world is good and could have been wonderful.¹⁹¹ He also is not a Hobbesian about the postlapsarian world. He compares humans unfavorably to beasts in terms of harmony within their kind.¹⁹² Adams's devices of the explosive room and

¹⁸⁹ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.11; referencing 1 Tm. 2:14.

¹⁹⁰ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.23, 14.11, 14.27

¹⁹¹ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 11.22, 12.4, 14.10. Rogers (2002, 72) makes a similar point.

¹⁹² Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.23.

stock-character terrorist underplay human complicity in human misery. (iii) Adams's analogies leave no place for a third character: the devil. The diabolology of *De Civitate Dei* does not bar the fallen angels from being aware of what path history would take and under whose bondage humans would suffer if the primeval couple became proud and disobeyed God. Augustine's commitment to retributive balance could accommodate Adams's objections respecting the intentionality of the first sin by assigning greater responsibility to the devil than to the primeval couple.¹⁹³

6.2 *The Eden Narrative's Historicity and Adams's Eschatology*

On historical and psychological grounds, Adams rejects Augustine's reading of the Eden narrative. My argument is that Adams's soteriological and eschatological claims are inconsistent with this criticism. In her reply to Placher, Adams argues that in the eschaton, living and resurrected persons will be freed from corruption and subjection to the empirical regularities that currently make humans vulnerable to horrendous evils. She writes:

With scholastic theology, I also reckon that happy endings would mean a transformed relationship to our material environment, one that allows us to live in it without being radically vulnerable to horrors. Because many horror participants die unbelievers in a state of *prima facie* ruin, because our *ante mortem* environment remains pregnant with the horrendous, I put definitive plot resolution beyond grave and so make the goodness of finite creation generally and human being especially an eschatological hope realized only after death.¹⁹⁴

Adams's deontic use of a modal auxiliary verb in one such statement ("God will *have* permanently *to re-place* them in an environment where they are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors") indicates that she considers her eschatology to be necessary to her theodicy.¹⁹⁵ This eschatological vision is "largely discontinuous" with those empirical regularities that the natural sciences and modern psychology investigate and about which they teach.¹⁹⁶ Adams acknowledges that many "neo-

¹⁹³ Augustine argues that the primeval couple sinned less than the devil (*De Lib. Arb.*, 3.10.106, 112) because they sinned through persuasion rather than spontaneous thought (*ibid.*, 3.10.104). The two-level theory of sin undercuts this argument except insofar as the open disobedience of the couple but not the devil was through persuasion.

¹⁹⁴ Adams 2002a, 474-75. See also *ibid.*, 476, 478-79.

¹⁹⁵ Adams 2002a, 476; emphasis added.

¹⁹⁶ Adams 2002a, 471.

orthodox theologians . . . [are] fuzzy to negative about our *post mortem* survival.”¹⁹⁷ Presumably their reservation is that the traditional Christian teaching that there will be a bodily resurrection of the dead is contrary to what most modern scientists teach about humans and the world. Adams also acknowledges that such eschatologies raise philosophical problems about the continuity of personal identity and the impassibility of resurrection bodies, though she considers it unnecessary to address these issues.¹⁹⁸ Adams replies to similar skepticism by Maurice Wiles and John Hick in writings where she argues that particular divine action is necessary and Chalcedonian Christology is sufficient for solving the problem of horrors require.¹⁹⁹

Adams argues that the natural and physical sciences should discipline our imaginations regarding the Eden narrative and evil’s origin. Augustine makes a relevant reply to skeptics such as Adams when he concludes his discussion of the creation of Adam and Eve in *De Civitate Dei*: “These works of God therefore are certainly unusual, because they are first. But who does not believe in such things is bound to believe in no wonderous works (*facta prodigia*); for exactly, if they are not generated from the usual course of nature they are called wonderous.”²⁰⁰ It is not just Augustine who thinks selective skepticism of biblical signs and wonders is difficult to justify. The skepticism of Wiles and Hick would extend beyond their criticism of Chalcedonian Christology in *The Myth of God Incarnate* to the primeval fall of humanity and for Wiles to the bodily resurrection of humans.²⁰¹ These traditional beliefs are unacceptable to modern science and philosophy as Russell, Mackie, or Dennett, understand it. Physical explanations for our experiences are more reliable than and obviate many supernatural explanations. Secular naturalists would say that Wiles, Hick, and Adams, short circuit their reflections on science and religion.

¹⁹⁷ Adams 2002a, 475.

¹⁹⁸ Adams 2002a, 478.

¹⁹⁹ Adams 1996a, 124-25; Adams 1997a, 189-96; Adams 2004b, 164.

²⁰⁰ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.28 (CCSL 48:14-18).

²⁰¹ Adams 1996a, 108-111; Hick 1985, 286-87, 373-74. In *Evil and the God of Love*, Hick (1985, 337-41) notes the naturalist objections to an afterlife but he says the requirements of theodicy trump these concerns. Hick explores these ideas further in *Death and Eternal Life* (1976). In *God’s Action in the World*, Wiles is also interested in some transcendental future fulfillment for humans but his quasi-deism bars a general resurrection.

Adams replies that particular divine action can co-exist with modern science because scientific laws are not “universal generalizations and comprehensive” but statistical and qualified.²⁰² The inconsistencies that concern Wiles between science and particular divine action are only apparent. However, Van Inwagen makes the equivalent argument about “the findings of evolutionary biology” and when he asserts the rebellion of primordial humans against God.²⁰³ A thoroughgoing naturalist such as Dennett is unlikely to grant that Adams is in a better position than Van Inwagen to discern a relevant difference between the traditional doctrines and biblical miracles she wants to retain and those she rejects. My conclusion here and in the prior sub-section is not that Augustine is correct but that Adams advances no compelling arguments against his views on original sin. If her project’s goal is to understand what Christians believe on faith, then she needs to explain on what grounds she refuses philosophers such as Van Inwagen and Dennett.

7. Just Deserts

7.1 *The Lex Talionis: Literalism and Consequences*

Adams criticizes a common but crude interpretation of the *lex talionis*. She assumes that the *lex* applies only where the privation of the good is discrete and replacement in kind is possible (e.g., the loss of some mass manufactured and readily available, durable good like a washing machine). Her insistence that “[h]arms are not atomistic, their cumulative effect is not simply additive” suggests that her criticism also assumes a quasi-consequentialist framework.²⁰⁴ Adams argues that if retributive justice cannot perfectly order all goods and evils, then morality fails to do the work Augustine and others assign to it and their scheme collapses. A retributive calculus fails where horrors are concerned because such evils are not discrete and measurable.

²⁰² Adams 1996a, 125.

²⁰³ Van Inwagen 1995, 101n.5.

²⁰⁴ Adams 1999c, 40. See also Adams 1993c, 309. Adams focus on hell and universalism earlier in her career may mislead her. Medieval and contemporary thinkers sometimes argue as if we need to posit an infinite aspect to evil done to justify everlasting punishment (see Adams 1975; Seymour 1998). However, hell is not an infinite, unqualified evil. Hell is the loss of an infinite good with possible gradations of physical suffering which arguably cannot be infinite insofar there are gradations. The distinction between the *poena damni* and *poena sensus* (Aquinas *De Malo* 5.2) is key to avoiding a consequentialist construal.

Adams's literalism when it comes to understanding what 'an eye for an eye' means and her prioritization of consequences rather than the act's character are mistakes

Consider a counterexample. Christian marriage is a relationship into which two persons enter with consent, and it serves to sustain and achieve certain goods in the lives of those persons, their extended family, and their community. At its center, marriage involves belongingness "to their marriage, to each other, and to their children" or a binding of one's good to that of the other so that for a husband to achieve his good is in part for his wife to achieve her good and vice versa.²⁰⁵ Their good becomes a common good. This belongingness involves an exclusivity that in a good marriage will not make the couple less useful to each other or to those outside the marriage but more useful. In this understanding of marriage, certain habits of character are virtues (e.g., thrift, patience, forgivingness) and vices (e.g., indolence, intemperance). Vices are particularly destructive to achieving the proper ends of marriage. The virtues are means to the ends of an excellent marriage, but they are not mere means. For an excellent marriage is unintelligible apart from the presence and cultivation of such virtues and the absence and avoidance of such vices. Exceptionless prohibitions belong with such virtues and goods. In Christian marriage, one prohibition forbids adultery, because adultery strikes at the root of marriage analogously to how plagiarism is destructive of communal learning.

Unrepentant adultery is traditionally a sufficient cause for divorce. To deprive a married person of the goods of marriage is an evil, and it is the just desert for the evil an adulterer perpetrates. Divorce is both punishment and remedy for shameless infidelity. Notice, however, that to return adultery for adultery is never a just desert, although people sometimes misinterpret the *lex* to justify such retaliation. Likewise, political bodies may justly impose exile for a variety of offenses, although the offender need not have unjustly banished another person. Rather, the retribution corresponds to what the offense logically signifies. Some acts place a person outside of interpersonal or communal relationships because the acts are inimical to the achievement of the goods intrinsic to the relationship.²⁰⁶ With divorce as with exile,

²⁰⁵ Berry 2002, 67.

²⁰⁶ MacIntyre 1984, 150-52.

what the offender's malfeasance signifies the judgment of those offended makes explicit.²⁰⁷ Divorce and exile are more natural than conventional punishments.²⁰⁸

Adams is familiar with such lines of reasoning. She notes that in his *De Veritate*, Anselm reasons from his "metaphysical framework of natural kinds with teleological structures" that "every action, by the very fact that it is done, signifies that it ought to be. . . . [So] when rational creatures act in accordance with justice, they do the truth; when they seek advantage at the expense of justice, they lie."²⁰⁹ Anselm's argument resembles Augustine's reasoning in *De Civitate Dei* that: "Thus, not to live, in such a way that one has done as one should have lived, this is falsehood."²¹⁰ A creature's teleological structure determines how it by nature may resemble God, and in this sense "all creatures and their actions are natural signs of the Creator: when angels and humans fail to do what they ought or ought not, they tell as much truth about Him as they naturally can."²¹¹ Adams says Anselm's belief is plausible in her judgment.²¹² She comments that Anselm argues in *Cur Deus Homo* that unjust acts also constitute lies about God's authority and worthiness: "Anselm is confident, no sin is the kind of thing God could just 'let pass'. God must contradict the lie by punishing the sinner unless satisfaction is made."²¹³ As Adams herself states, Anselm's *Proslogion* frames divine justice as a variation of the *lex talionis*: "For what is more just, than that the good should receive good and the evil evil?"²¹⁴ Anselm accounts for God's mercy when he makes the qualification that God punishes evil doers because it agrees with their merits but spares them because

²⁰⁷ See the contemporary discussion on the logical-expressive function of punishment: Feinberg 1965; Margolis 1973; Primoratz 1989; Skillen 1980; Davis 1991.

²⁰⁸ See Rogers 2002, 73.

²⁰⁹ Adams 1999c, 150; referencing Adams 1990c and Anselm *De Ver.*, ch.9.

²¹⁰ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.4 (CCSL 48:418).

²¹¹ Adams 1990c, 367-368

²¹² Adams 1990c, 367. Cf. Adams 2002b, 216-18.

²¹³ Adams 1999c, 120; referencing Anselm *CDH* 1.12, 2.14-15; Anselm *De Casu Diab.* 17. Adams imports the language of lying into *Cur Deus Homo*. Anselm's examples there do not use lying to conceptualize sin. However, her reading is not anachronistic as *De Veritate* is an earlier text. The substitution of 'lies and truth' for 'insult and honor' makes sense.

²¹⁴ Anselm *Pros.* 10 (Schmitt 1: 108); quoted in Adams 1987b, 89. See also *ibid.*, 85-90.

it agrees with divine goodness. So it seems that Adams thinks the reasoning behind the *lex talionis* works even if she may deny its premises.

Now Adams applies the ethical naturalism in Anselm's *De Veritate* to her project on theodicy. In *Horrendous Evils*, she writes, "Anselm . . . reasons, the fact that something is done makes the statement that it ought to be. Thus, when rational creatures act in accordance with justice, they do the truth; when they seek advantage at the expense of justice, they lie. Similarly, he might conclude that occurrent horrors declare that they ought to be and thereby lie."²¹⁵ Given the relationship of Anselm's argument to the *lex talionis*, this passage makes it more difficult for Adams to deny the validity of the *lex*. However, the relevance to horrors is doubtful. Anselm espouses an Augustinian Platonist metaphysic in his *Monologion* and thereafter. Its implications for value theory distinguish the failure to choose the good (not to do the truth or what is just) from deleterious consequences.²¹⁶ That a sword will cut through a human limb is not an unqualified failure of the sword or of the limb. It may be an imperfection of the human limb that allows it to be severed, but that is different than a failure to be what it ought to be. Suffering is only accidentally related to what Anselm labels a kind of lie.

7.2 *Ivan's Rebellion and Its Assumptions*

Adams's claim that (T5) God's intention to guarantee the defeat of horrors in each person's life follows from (T4) God's intention to defeat completely evil with good. She follows Ivan Karamazov and argues that retributing horror for horror would only make matters worse. Placing Hitler and others murderers "into a medieval hell of eternal torture" would only "multiply Evil's victories." These arguments gloss over several assumptions: (i) (T5) follows from (T4); (ii) hell would be eternal torture as some medieval literature depicts it; (iii) "Evil" can have victories.

Adams admits elsewhere that the first assumption depends crucially on the intervening premise that people cannot deserve to be damned.²¹⁷ So her argument against the retribution of just deserts begs the question unless she succeeds in undercutting the *lex talionis* or advancing the Rawlsian argument. The second

²¹⁵ Adams 1999c, 150.

²¹⁶ Anselm *De Conc. Virg* 3-5; Anselm *De Casu Diab.* 8-16.

²¹⁷ Adams 1989a, 303; Adams 1999c, 42.

assumption is misleading because Christian tradition includes understandings of hell other than the unending and unwarranted infliction of physical and mental distress by external agents. Some scriptural and theological traditions describe hell primarily as physical suffering. However, as serious a reformer and exegete as John Calvin commented on hell that “no description can deal adequately with the gravity of God’s vengeance against the wicked, their torments and tortures are figuratively expressed to us by physical things. . . . [W]e ought to fix our thoughts upon this: how wretched it is to be cut off from all fellowship with God.”²¹⁸ The *poena damni* rather than the *poena sensus* is the primary and “worst feature of hell” for Calvin and other traditional Christians.²¹⁹ Even Augustine thinks it is unclear and thus adiaphorous whether the scriptures teach that hell is only spiritual punishment or it also involves the body.²²⁰ Adams finds the *poena damni* itself unacceptable.²²¹ Regardless, few if any important theologians understand the *poena sensus* as unwarranted pain. The third assumption is also misleading. Adams says that hell would “multiply Evil’s victories” but this is theologically ungrammatical. Augustine and his successors think that only a nature can act and ‘win’ whereas evil is not a nature but a privation of a nature. Additionally, God cannot ‘lose’ because the divine life can lack nothing in itself or due to any particular creaturely outcomes. The idea of ‘Evil’s victories’ carries the conceptual cost of admitting God and creatures are metaphysically commensurable.

7.3 Rawlsian Liberalism and the Undemocratic Divine

Adams argues that persons behind a veil of ignorance would not choose a world in which horrors go undefeated in the lives of individuals and where some or most persons suffer everlasting torment. This may be true. My argument is that Rawls’s veil of ignorance is not a useful tool in the context of this discussion.

²¹⁸ Calvin *Inst.* 3.25.12 (McNeill and Battles 1960, 21:1007-1008).

²¹⁹ Yandell 1992, 79. An important divide in modern defenses of the doctrine of hell is whether they endorse only *poena damni* or also *poena sensus* (Seymour 1998, 76). Adams (1999c, 41-9) calls the first position “mild hell” and the latter “grim hell.” See also Adams 1993c.

²²⁰ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 20.16, 21.9.

²²¹ Adams 1993c, 320-23; Adams 1999c, 39-55

Adams provides no argument for why Rawlsian liberalism is the correct value theory. So her appeal to his contractarian theory, which centers on how people would further their own interests and is anti-teleological and anti-desert, begs the question. From the standpoint of Augustine and many other Christian philosopher theologians, a theory that says there is no unified good but only an aggregate of individual goods (hence its emphasis on rational self-interest) is mistaken. Now Adams does claim that Rawlsian liberalism's implications for theology are what "Reason" dictates. But this is inconsistent with her more skeptical stance towards morality which she begins to articulate in "Theodicy without Blame" (see chapter 5 below).²²² Moreover, Rawls denies that his contractarian philosophy should be abstracted from its constitutional democratic context or interpreted as grounded in metaphysics or nature.²²³ If Adams or likeminded persons wanted to pursue the Rawlsian line, they would need to surmount the *prima facie* inconsistencies not only with Adams's reading but also with that of Rawls. As I said earlier, Adams has good reasons for not repeating her appeal to Rawls in writings after 1993.

8. Conclusion

Many philosophers and theologians appeal to theories of creaturely freedom in order to reconcile any and all evils with God's nature and action. Such arguments propose that the fundamental cause of evil is the misuse of creaturely freedom. Adams frames these free will approaches to evil as means of blame assignment: people reason that God is not blameworthy for evil because free creatures are blameworthy. Freedom explains why evil comes about, why evil is an unintended consequence of God's creative act, why God creates the world anyway, and why the existence of evil does not entail that God violates any obligations to creatures. Creaturely freedom and its corollary moral goodness provide a morally sufficient reason for God to create a world with evil. Adams states that the *locus classicus* of such free will approaches to evil is Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*.

Adams uses Augustine's *De Libero* as a foil to her theodicy's thesis that (M1) moral value theories are adequate only when intention and action are commensurable

²²² Adams 1988c, 238-40.

²²³ Rawls 1985; Rawls 1999, 19.

or action and just deserts are commensurable. This is a first-order criticism insofar as it examines moral issues that are posterior to whether moral language penetrates to some normative core. The argument employs the bottom-up understanding of horrific suffering that Adams says is indebted to modern empiricists such as Hume. She argues that moral frameworks founder where God and horrors are concerned. Her criticism has three segments.

- *Humans cannot be fully or primarily morally responsible for horrors*: where suffering is involved, only experience in kind delivers an adequate concept of why horrors are bad; and this diminishes what a person can intend to do.
- *Unfallen humans cannot be fully or primarily morally responsible for the horror that the Eden narrative discusses*: the primeval couple is placed in a hostile environment, they are ignorant of their action's consequences, and scientific and historical inquiry has discredited the Eden narrative.
- *Retributive justice fails when faced with horrors*: horrific suffering overwhelms the *lex talionis*, retributive horrors would create more rather than less disorder, and persons in an original position behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance would not choose a world in which retributive horrors occur.

Whether Adams's criticism of Augustine's moral theory succeeds is an important question because it is the only moral theory that her project scrutinizes. I have argued that all three segments of her criticism fail. The principal difficulty is that Augustine would not concede how Adams frames morality where the primary moral concepts are pain experience, sympathy, etc. He argues for a top-down moral theory in *De Libero* and afterwards where it is morally relevant that God is the transcendent beginning and end of all creatures, creaturely natures form an excellence hierarchy, etc. Pain and sympathy are secondary concepts. This mismatch has implications for how Adams frames her criticism's implications and for her objections' viability.

Augustine's top-down metaphysical theology and moral philosophy distinguish his treatment of God and evil from the standard modern theodicies and defenses that Adams deconstructs. He denies that God has moral obligations to creatures. He is not interested in morally sufficient reasons for God to create a world with evil. He does not compartmentalize areas of value. So the failure of Augustine's argument would have no direct implications for the standard works on evil in analytic philosophy. Augustine's top-down framework also preempts Adams's three criticisms given their bottom-up premises about morality.

Augustine would reject the key assumptions of Adams's first objection about moral responsibility and horrors. Sympathy and personal experience of an act's consequences are morally secondary concepts for Augustine. The primary moral concepts that his theodicy uses include natural law, an act's type, and evil as *privatio boni*. In the latter case, he distinguishes evil done and evil suffered (*De Libero* 1.1.1). The former is evil without qualification where a rational creature refuses to choose the good which is a sheer failure of its nature *qua* agent. Evil suffered is qualified evil where a nature only partly fails to do what is natural to it: cellular mitosis is necessary for an animal's health but can destroy it in the case of cancer; nerve cells are necessary to warn persons of physical danger but can overwhelm a person with chronic migraine headaches; etc. Augustine prioritizes action, which enables him to explain why many evil consequences are disproportionate to the acts a person intends: other agents' actions may magnify the results of what we informally consider to be one person's decision. His privation theory of evil leaves no place for a defective good to be more Godlike than a perfect good except where those goods differ in kind (e.g., a lame horse versus a flawless diamond). Evil suffered is not incommensurate with created goods. It is unsurprising then that most of Augustine's proposed remedies for gross, unjust suffering are creaturely. Adams's objection at most shows that bottom-up theories of moral responsibility founder when applied to horrors, but this is largely irrelevant to Augustinian morality.

This Augustinian framework and the account of original sin in *De Civitate Dei* (11-14) are resistant to Adams's criticisms. Her nursery and terrorist analogies and their implicit moral theory focus on consequences rather than acts. This widens the scope of what a person must contemplate to be fully responsible for what he does. It also renders act and consequence disproportionate. In contrast, Augustine interprets the first sin to be pride, i.e., a failure to choose the good and failure of love that is itself aversion to God and prior to any open disobedience. Exile from God's presence is arguably a natural, fitting punishment for their aversion. The primeval humans' responsibility does not extend to their descendents' actions. Even if unfallen humans cannot shoulder the full responsibility for their sin, Augustine's scheme of responsibility and retribution may be viable because like most pre-modern Christian theologians Augustine thinks demonic agents played a culpable role in the fall of

humanity. For those who deny the historicity of a primordial human rebellion against God, this moral analysis can be mostly retained. However, I argue insofar as Adams posits divine action that is contrary to the observable natural order, she *prima facie* lacks principled reasons to exclude a primeval fall of humanity.

Augustine and his successors explain retributive justice using the distinction *poena damni* and *poena sensus*. This corresponds to the distinction between act and consequence. Adams's main objections are that a person cannot calculate the proper punishment for inflicting horrific suffering and that punishment in kind would be counterproductive. This emphasizes punishment as pain for pain, whereas the Augustinians focus on the loss of certain social goods corresponding to diminished love for those goods. As a person turns from the common good to their individual goods in abstraction from the common goods—from loving creatures for God's sake to loving them for themselves—the share in the common good that the person is due diminishes. Hell's essence is being cut off from enjoying God or losing an infinite good and its subordinate goods. It is unintelligible on the Augustinian theory of evil to say that a person can experience an infinite evil as we are tempted to do when we focus on suffering and consequences. For evil cannot exist without some good on which it is parasitic. Burrell relatedly contrasts "Milton's image of the center of hell as a raging fire" with "Dante's *Inferno* [which] offers a dramatic alternative: a lake of ice cutting off all possibility of responding to any solicitation at all."²²⁴ Grace is God loving us back into being and Christ making his 'body warmth' our warmth.

This chapter argues that Adams's criticisms of moralist theodicies are flawed and they obscure alternatives to her constructive ideas. Augustine's metaphysical theology and moral philosophy constitute one such alternative. For those who reject his arguments, perhaps for reasons that Adams does not consider, my argument suggests that theologies in which God lacks moral obligations and moral theories that focus on acts rather than on consequences may also avoid Adams's criticisms.

²²⁴ Burrell 2004, 172.

CHAPTER 5

THE DEFEASIBILITY OF MORAL LAW: HUME AND THE FRANCISCAN ARISTOTELIANS

1. Introduction

In her essay “Julian of Norwich on the Tender Loving Care of Mother Jesus” (1992), Marilyn Adams writes, “Holy Mother Church teaches us to fear that God will be angry with us, blame us, punish if He does not forgive us. And if sin were a matter of the creature’s autonomous (and hence guilty) rebellion, such a response would seem entirely appropriate.”¹ Adams stipulates that some schemes of responsible agency and personal desert are internally consistent. Her first-order criticism of morality merely narrows the domain of any valid moral theory: responsibility and desert have limited relevance where consequence is disproportionate to action and to intention. However, her second-order criticism goes further and limits morality’s range to pragmatic social conventions. So Adams can argue that morality’s non-objective nature makes it the wrong tool for understanding God and evil, even if moralists such as Augustine articulate internally consistent moral theories that circumvent her first-order criticism. Adams introduces her second-order criticism in the last three pages of “Theodicy without Blame” (1988). She expands the criticism in her essays “Sin as Uncleaness” (1991) and “Evil and the God-Who-Does-Nothing-In-Particular” (1996), and she reprises their ideas in her 1999 monograph and thereafter.

Adams incorporates her second-order criticism of morality into segments of her constructive value theorization where she advocates “ontologizing” sin.² She contends that sin is a “fundamentally theological” concept, which is to say “the fundamental obstacle to Divine-human relations lies in the very incommensuration of Divine and created natures.”³ The constructive part of this contention is that sin is a matter of “incompetence” and “uncleaness” (disorder between the spiritual and

¹ Adams 1992b, 205.

² Adams 2002a, 472

³ Adams 1991c, 2, 3.

bodily constituent natures of humans).⁴ Adams appropriates the work of Rudolf Otto, Mary Douglas, and Julian of Norwich. The argument implies that the biblical notion of sin is not a function of human morality, because it either excludes a moral account or renders it unnecessary. The complement of this constructive, theological argument is a second-order, philosophical criticism: human morality lacks an objective basis in human or divine nature. So morality is the wrong tool for comprehending God, humans, and horrors. Bottom-up, developmental psychology shows that morality is just a pragmatic code that social units have gradually constructed (but not discovered) to regulate naturally flawed agents. Top-down, divine transcendence—at least as Duns Scotus and Ockham understand it—precludes not only natural divine obligations to creatures but also any essential human obligations to God.

Adams's second-order criticism of morality and her constructive value theories are analytically distinct ([M2] and [M3] in the prior chapter), and in this chapter I shall focus on her criticism. Section 2 sets out the bottom-up, "empirical" account of morality that Adams derives from developmental psychology. Section 3 argues that while she represents this moral theory as non-theory laden, it is reasonable to trace her moral pragmatism to Hume and other modern philosophers. Section 4 outlines Adams's argument that top-down, medieval theories of divine transcendence undermine the reality of human obligations to other creatures and to God. Section 5 argues that Adams overlooks conflicts between her approval of the conclusions of Scotus and Ockham about morality and her skepticism of their views on libertarian human freedom. Section 6 argues that Adams also overlooks how medieval Christian Platonists take divine transcendence as a fundamental aspect of morality's objective basis and validity. Section 7 concludes that Adams is unclear on second-order moral questions because she does not reconcile, systematically, the ideas she appropriates from modern empiricist, medieval anti-Platonist, and medieval Platonist sources.

2. Metaphysical Misfits and Moral Pragmatism

On her path to ordination, Adams studied master's level pastoral psychology from 1984 to 1985 at Princeton Theological Seminary. Adams worked through the writings of psychologists including Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, Carl Jung, Jean

⁴ Adams 1991c; Adams 1999c, 86-105.

Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Robert Kegan, and Carol Gilligan.⁵ She identifies those studies in psychology and her experience from 1985 to 1988 as assistant at Trinity Episcopal Church, Los Angeles, as formative influences on her ideas about human nature.⁶ As a result, Adams's essays on theodicy incorporate a composite anthropological sketch from "interactionist" developmental psychologies.⁷

She asserts that we humans begin life as weak, dependent, and ignorant beings, who are incapable of choice. The world impinges on us as a "booming, buzzing confusion."⁸ We develop a self-concept and construct a view of the world only through a lengthy, difficult process and under the influence of non-ideal choosers in non-ideal environments. The human psyche is naturally habit-forming. So given such care-givers and environments, we often develop entrenched, maladaptive behavioral patterns, which we act-out for years until we undergo personal formation with secular and religious caregivers. "Having begun thus immature, we arrive at adulthood in a state of impaired freedom."⁹ Her more recent writings explain further how our environment is non-ideal. The main idea is that we live in a world of "real and apparent scarcity."¹⁰ Real scarcity, as Adams explains it, means that the world is "hostile to our survival" and its resources "apparently" are not enough "that everyone can live comfortably."¹¹ In this world, people have endured "collectively . . . through wit and technology" and "there is a Hobbesian war for the survival of the fittest."¹² Apparent scarcity means that our "animal life-cycle" and "psycho-biological factors make resources seem scarcer than they are."¹³ Both in its tendency towards maladaptation and exaggerated perceptions of scarcity, "human nature dualistically

⁵ Adams 1994, 155.

⁶ Adams 1988c, 243n.26; Adams 1994, 156-61; Adams 1996a, 130n.50.

⁷ See Adams 1988c, 231-33; Adams 1992b, 201-202; Adams 1996a, 120-21; Adams 1997a, 182-83; Adams 1999c, 36-38. Adams (1988c, 243n.26; 1996a, 130n.50) describes her "interactionist" sketch as a composite of Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg.

⁸ Adams 1991c, 13; Adams 1992b, 202; Adams 1996a, 122; Adams 1999c, 104.

⁹ Adams 1988c, 232.

¹⁰ Adams 2002a, 472, 477; Adams 2002b, 221.

¹¹ Adams 1997a, 182-83; Adams 1999c, 37.

¹² Adams 1997a, 182-83; Adams 1999c, 37-38.

¹³ Adams 1997a, 182; Adams 1999c, 37.

conceived as personal animality . . . is dysfunctional (inadequate to its *telos*) and so incomplete.”¹⁴

Humans are “metaphysically unclean” (neither of one kind nor of another) or “metaphysical misfits”.¹⁵ Adams uses these phrases as shorthand for her claim that our bodily nature easily subverts our spiritual nature and that our composite nature is prone to maladaptation in our native environment. As Augustine admits, though they share the same earth, humans compare unfavorably with beasts in terms of harmony within their kind.¹⁶ Adams infers three major conclusions about theodicy from these premises. Her developmental anthropology corrects the idealized models of human agency that moralist theodicies assume. It explains why humans are so vulnerable to horrors. Of most interest here, it implies that morality’s status is wholly conventional and its scope at best accidentally encompasses how humans and God relate.

Adams wants to correct the “top down” or “a priori idealized models” of human nature that are characteristic of moralist theodicies.¹⁷ On her “ground up”, “empirical” action and moral theory, “morality is robbed of its metaphysical and value-theory pretensions to network all and only ideal agents with incompatibilist freedom and to trump all other evaluative considerations.”¹⁸ We can group Adams’s skeptical claims about second-order moral questions under three headings. First, Adams contends that *morality’s natural domain or constituency* is not the ideal agent but the agent who is limited in his or her emotional, cognitive, and evaluative powers and skills.¹⁹ Morality has developed as a means of sustaining large communities, against intra-communal conflict and hostile elements, through the behavior and attitudes it promotes and restricts.²⁰ Secondly, *morality’s range or content* is limited to expediencies. Moral rules, virtues, and “even purity of heart” are not ends-in-themselves but “only skillful *means* to the end of wholesome relationship, beatific

¹⁴ Adams 2002a, 474.

¹⁵ Adams 1991c; Adams 1992f, 204-205; Adams 1996a, 120-24; Adams 1999c, 94-96, 102-105; Adams 2002a, 472-75, 477; Adams 2002b, 218-23, 226.

¹⁶ Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 12.23.

¹⁷ Adams 1996a, 120; Adams 1999c, 103.

¹⁸ Adams 1996a, 121.

¹⁹ Adams 1988c, 232-33; Adams 1996a, 120-21; Adams 1999c, 193.

²⁰ Adams 1988c, 232; Adams 1991c, 2; Adams 1996a, 120.

intimacy, and life together.”²¹ Adams cites as examples John Cassian’s *Conferences* and the example of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.²² On Adams’s account, morality and virtues apparently would cease in the afterlife given her argument that any solution to the problem of horrors will be universal and will require humans to be “no longer radically vulnerable” to hostile environments and scarcity through changes in humans or their surroundings.²³ To obtain beatitude, Adolf Hitler needs to develop “empathetic capacity to suffer with those whom he tortured” through severe postmortem trials.²⁴ Neither a mature person gradually educating an immature person about how to recognize and to give people what they are due nor a miraculous infusion of such a habit enters into Adams’s statements about Hitler. Thirdly, Adams replies to her critics that if she correctly limits *morality’s normative status* it neither excuses properly functioning persons from obligations or from blame nor renders atrocities or injustices to individuals or groups acceptable.²⁵ Morality performs its limited task adequately and “large-scale attempts” to replace “justice” would probably “promote something worse than what we have now.”²⁶ However, Adams warns this does not entail that morality “penetrates” to a “normative core.”²⁷

Adams advances this moral theory in many writings including three where she appends it to her discussion of developmental psychology. Once she states that “the human practices of psychoanalysis and pastoral care show” that “adult morality . . . does not penetrate to the deepest evaluative truths about persons and relationships.”²⁸ Psychoanalysts and pastors apparently adopt stances that are pedagogical and prospective rather than retributive and retrospective. There are some straightforward reasons to dispute this claim. Setting aside how the literature on psychoanalysis treats

²¹ Adams 2002b, 225.

²² Adams 1999c, 192-93; Adams 2002b, 225.

²³ Adams 2002a, 476, 478; Adams 2002b, 223.

²⁴ Adams 2002a, 476.

²⁵ Adams 1988c, 232; Adams 1996a, 121; Adams 1997a, 182; Adams 1999c, 192; Adams 2002b, 221-22.

²⁶ Adams 1999c, 193

²⁷ Adams 1988c, 232; Adams 1999c, 193; Adams 2002b, 216.

²⁸ Adams 1988c, 232. See also Adams 1996a, 120-21; Adams 1999c, 36-38, 102-105, 191-93.

second-order moral questions, the history of pastoral care does not support framing the cure of souls as a rival to moral responsibility and just deserts. First, while the *Regula Benedicti* (23-30) instructs abbots to heal and restore even when they punish, it also contemplates excommunication and then permanent exclusion for serious, persistent faults. Secondly, priests and pontiffs are stewards and not owners or rulers as Bernard of Clairvaux reminded in his *De Consideratione ad Eugenium Papam* (3.1). Pastoral caregivers hold a limited office that does not circumscribe reality. Thirdly, Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of doctrine and pastoral care. It neither brooks skepticism about second-order moral questions nor puts moral realism in competition with the sacraments, prayer, and spiritual direction. Whatever grounds pastoral experience may supply for second-order moral skepticism, the inference from those grounds to the latter conclusion seems neither necessary nor obvious.

In "Theodicy without Blame", Adams anticipates and denies the charge that her second-order moral skepticism is an artifact of modern 'therapeutic' culture.²⁹ Humans have a nature, and it constitutes a norm both in itself and insofar as human nature imitates God's nature. Adams reaffirms this in her reply to Rogers, and she highlights Anselm's contribution to her theodicy's premises:

I meant to take a page from Anselm in endorsing a metaphysical realism about what medievals call *natural goodness*. . . . I have—like Anselm—taken it for granted that God is Goodness Itself, that natures form an excellence hierarchy, that the metaphysical size-gap between Divine and other natures is so vast that created natures are almost nothing although they are yet something insofar as they are somehow Godlike. . . . I was assuming such comparative natural excellences to be facts of the matter, prior in order of explanation to any human thoughts or conventions about it. I also supposed that the goodness of Divine and created natures (unlike the existence of the latter) was not a product of contingent Divine choice. . . . [T]op down, even unfallen human beings would be intrinsically . . . no more compelling for God than a worm is; nor would the virtuous person intrinsically have any more claim to be awarded eternal life than the vicious. Bottom up, . . . I have gone with the Anselmian idea that all creatable natures have a Godward thrust . . . [a]nd there is something intrinsically and naturally appropriate for humans in aiming Godward.³⁰

A crude relativism about value is no part of Adams's project. Her reply to Rogers insists that human nature is a norm, albeit a norm to which rights, obligations,

²⁹ Adams 1988c, 239.

³⁰ Adams 2002b, 216, 219-20. See also Adams 1988c, 239

responsibility, desert, and virtues, are related extrinsically and pragmatically at best. However, Adams does not articulate in detail how her bottom-up argument for second-order moral skepticism follows from or is consistent with her Christian Platonist metaphysics. She only comments to Katherin Rogers that Anselm is interested in natural goodness but not in moral goodness.³¹

This comment alludes to Adams's essay "St. Anselm on the Goodness of God" (1987), where she uses Anselm to undercut some standard assumptions in analytic philosophy on God and evil: her targets are the claims that "morality is the kind of goodness that governs all personal relationships" and that "the categories of moral goodness . . . [are] independent of other departments of Value Theory".³² These two assumptions are variants of what this study's prior chapter formulated as (M2) and (M3). I argued there that Augustine neither posits mutual obligations between humans and God nor compartmentalizes value. I also argued that he still thinks that desert and obligation have objective grounds that relate humans mutually to other humans and non-mutually to God. Adams's 1987 essay indicates that Anselm would agree on all these points. She says that Anselm's theistic metaphysics entails the following, relevant value principles: "dependence is correlative with obligation; independence with freedom from obligation"; and "nothing would be more unfitting than for an offense against a being greater than which cannot be conceived to be passed over uncompensated."³³ It follows that Adams's essay on Anselm does not show that all forms of morality are irrelevant to theodicy just as I argued respecting her essay "Theodicy without Blame" and Augustine. Her natural/moral distinction does not reconcile her empiricist morality with her use of Anselm's metaphysics.

The fundamental premises of Adams's bottom-up account of morality seem weak, if we are considering pastoral care and Anselm's ethical naturalism. However, she also claims that her moral theory is superior to those of moral realists because their ideas require *a priori* assumptions that her empirical account avoids. In the section that follows, I shall argue that Adams's bottom-up skepticism about second-order moral questions is more theory-laden than as she represents the matter.

³¹ Adams 2002b, 217. See also Adams 1987b.

³² Adams 1987b, 75-76.

³³ Adams 1987b, 83, 97.

3. Hume on Justice

Adams's theodicy's centers on horrific individual suffering. In *Horrendous Evils*, she credits Hume for shifting modern views of evil to pain and suffering and away from medieval preoccupations with disordered agency and transgressions of divine law.³⁴ I want to argue that her empiricist moral theory is also indebted to Hume. My point is not that Adams directly appropriates Hume's ideas on morality or that their theories are equivalent. In correspondence and her biographical essay, Adams has indicated that her familiarity with Hume is limited primarily to his epistemology. "A full third" of her papers in graduate school were on Hume, and she read book 1 of his *Treatise* "fifty to one hundred times" but read book 3 "only once."³⁵ I propose instead that the ideas of Hume and related philosophers have filtered down to or anticipate premises and inferences that reappear in contemporary psychology and neuroscience. To make the case that Adams uses Humean ideas, I shall compare what he says about morals and justice in *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* with her account. Afterwards, I shall consider an objection from dissimilarities and some replies that deepen the case for the comparison.

3.1 Hume and Adams on Morality: Analogies and Disanalogies

Hume calls justice an artificial virtue. He distinguishes it from natural virtues such as generosity and humanity. Artificial virtues are the contingent results of an uneven history of human conventions, while natural virtues results from human nature itself.³⁶ We do justice from enlightened self-interest in sustaining advantageous social conventions, which custom and education reinforce with sentiment.³⁷ We are humane from innate compassion for an individual's distress.³⁸

There are two circumstances that render natural virtues inadequate and the artificial virtue of justice expedient for humans. Hume writes:

Justice takes its rise from human conventions; and that these are intended as a remedy to some inconveniences . . . The qualities of the mind are *selfishness* and *limited generosity*: And the situation of external objects is their *easy*

³⁴ Adams 1999c, 2.

³⁵ Adams 2004, 147; email correspondence, October 5, 2005.

³⁶ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.1.1, 17, 19; *ibid.*, 3.2.2.9-12; *ibid.*, 3.3.1.1, 12.

³⁷ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.23-28; *ibid.*, 3.3.1.9, 12.

³⁸ Hume *Treatise* 3.3.1.12-13

change, join'd to their scarcity in comparison of the wants and desires of men. . . . [I]f every man had a tender regard for another, or if nature supply'd abundantly all our wants and desires, that the jealousy of interest, which justice presupposes, cou'd no longer have place. . . . Encrease to a sufficient degree the benevolence of men, or the bounty of nature, and you render justice useless, by supplying its place with much nobler virtues, and more valuable blessings.³⁹

These two flaws of “temper and circumstance”, as Hume puts it, are the premises of his account of justice.⁴⁰ They serve a role in his account that is parallel to the role of human developmental impairment and real and apparent scarcity in Adams’s account of morality. Hume’s remarks about scarcity also resemble those of Adams. He states that among all animals, “man alone” displays “in its greatest perfection” the “unnatural conjunction” of “numberless wants and necessities” and “slender means.”⁴¹ Hume also casts humans as misfits. Respecting Hobbes’s state of nature, Hume declares it to be a “fiction” strictly speaking; however, the possibility of the state of nature, which he says would obtain absent society and its conventions, restrains and channels the human passions.⁴² Another skeptic about second-order moral questions, J. L. Mackie, broadens the importance of how Hume anticipates Adams. Chapter 5 of Mackie’s book *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin 1976) frames the premises of Humean justice as elements of a philosophical tradition. He summarizes: “Protagoras, Hobbes, Hume, and [G.J.] Warnock are all at least broadly in agreement about the problem that morality is needed to solve: limited resources and limited sympathies together generate competition leading to conflict and an absence of what would be mutually beneficial cooperation.”⁴³

The conclusions of Hume’s account of justice and Adams’s empiricist morality also resemble each other. First, the *domain or constituency* of Hume’s theory of justice is imperfect agents and social conventions. Humans gradually invented them as a useful means for counteracting personal deficits that would prevent humans from cooperating to offset our natural vulnerability. One contrast between Hume and Adams is that he does not use an interactionist psychology as a premise. However,

³⁹ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.16.

⁴⁰ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.20-21 (Norton and Norton 2000, 318-19).

⁴¹ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.2 (Norton and Norton 2000, 311-12).

⁴² Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.14-17, 22.

⁴³ Mackie 1976, 111.

many interactionist ideas are compatible with his account. Secondly, as with Adams's empiricist morality, the *range or content of Humean justice* becomes pointless without personal deficits and scarcity.⁴⁴ Accordingly, he conceives of justice as a restraint rather than as an enablement.⁴⁵ Justice involves the impersonal, natural virtue involves the personal, and apparently there is no middle ground.⁴⁶ Natural virtue operates appropriately by itself and does not require moral obligations.⁴⁷ Thus, for Hume a perfect society would dispense with justice in favor of natural virtue, just as Adams suggests in her conjecture about Hitler's post mortem redemption. Thirdly, Hume affirms that justice imposes obligations that are artificial or lack *normative status*. However, like Adams, Hume denies (apparently in response to Francis Hutcheson) that the conventional nature of artificial virtues renders them "arbitrary" or that our nature's needs could "possibly be serv'd by any other invention."⁴⁸ While the need for Humean justice is practical and not metaphysical, humans genuinely need justice. Each of the foregoing headings indicates how Humean justice anticipates Adams's empiricist morality. This underscores the similarities that the prior chapter identifies between Hume and Adams concerning sympathy as a cognitive principle and pain as fundamental to evil.

Now Adams's similarities to Hume and Mackie do not entail she is dependent, directly or indirectly, on their ideas. Correlation is not causation. Moreover, while there are non-trivial similarities, there are notable dissimilarities. (i) Adams does not express the same amount of detailed concern with passions and emotions as Hume. (ii) Property is a central category in Humean justice but is entirely absent from her sketch of an empiricist morality. (iii) Most importantly, Adams asserts a metaphysics and human teleology with robust theological content in which pain is mutable.⁴⁹ In contrast, Hume treats pain and pleasure as 'givens' and uses them to help structure

⁴⁴ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.16-21, 3.2.6.6.

⁴⁵ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.13-14, 21.

⁴⁶ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.2.22, 3.3.1.13.

⁴⁷ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.5.6.

⁴⁸ Hume *Treatise* 3.2.1.19, 3.3.6.4-5

⁴⁹ Adams 1988c, 239; Adams 1999c, 120-21, 149-51; Adams 2002a, 473; Adams 2002b, 216-18.

his account.⁵⁰ He also disdains “ultimate” explanations of human nature.⁵¹ Hume and Mackie are theological skeptics and are not interested in a replacement, e.g., the Idea of the Good. Notwithstanding such complications, it is difficult to sustain Adams’s claim that her empiricist morality is not theory-laden and therefore differs from standard theodicies given their implicit top-down, *a priori* moral views.

3.2 *Reasons to Sustain the Analogy between Hume and Adams*

I shall advance four arguments for why the analogy between Hume and Adams on moral theory is legitimate. First, discontinuities do not necessarily detract from a comparison of Hume with Adams or the developmental psychologists to whom she broadly appeals. Disputes and transformations are important features of intellectual traditions such as the debate, from Hobbes and Shaftesbury to Hutcheson and Smith, to which Hume makes a signal contribution. Additionally, Adams does not identify or scrutinize the specific studies that warrant her second-order skepticism about morality. She also does not show that her account of morality either lacks deep, structural similarities to Hume or stands to Hume as I argued Scotus does to Aquinas. More generally, her theodicy does not show that the scholars to whom she appeals can sustain her moral skepticism without using greater philosophical machinery and controversial premises as Hume and Mackie do. Such matters are worth investigating even if the discontinuities ultimately prevail. For comparative analyses would help us to map Adams’s moral theory just as contrasting Descartes and Locke on knowledge or Aquinas and Scotus on natural theology helps us to map their respective projects.

Secondly, Adams’s “skeptical realism” seems incongruous with her claim that natural and social scientists reach trustworthy and interesting conclusions about moral philosophy but do so without *a priori* premises. From “Problems of Evil” (1988) through *Horrendous Evils* (1999), Adams explains that she is a skeptic insofar as the premises of most interesting arguments cannot be proven to all persons but she is a realist insofar as there are facts of the matter that are prior to any mental operations.⁵² This view supplants “classical foundationalism in epistemology,” says Adams, which holds “there are some premises to which all rational people would

⁵⁰ Hume *Treatise* 2.3.3, 3.1.2.

⁵¹ Hume *Treatise* Intro.8-10, 1.1.5.6, 1.1.7.11.

⁵² Adams 1988a, 138-39; Adams 1999b, 40, 57; Adams 1999c, 180.

agree and from which at least some interesting metaphysical conclusions can be drawn (e.g., the existence and unity of God).”⁵³ If Adams had recounted the history of classical foundationalism’s demise, she might have told how its demise in analytic philosophy was an important consequence of some trenchant criticisms of logical positivism and of the epistemologically privileged nature of scientific inquiry (e.g., those of Quine and Kuhn). So Adams’s skeptical realism and the intellectual history that it presupposes both put in question her claim that her bottom-up moral theory is not theory-laden and thus superior to top-down moral theories.

Thirdly, Adams’s writings “Problems of Evil” and *Horrendous Evils* invite challenges about her similarity to Hume. For in those works she criticizes analytic philosophers of religion such as Mackie and Plantinga for positing a moral theory with naïve, *a priori* premises. However, Mackie advocates her claims about an empiricist morality and second-order moral skepticism a decade before she does, and he contends that those arguments include Hume among their honored progenitors.⁵⁴ It is reasonable to think Mackie would press Adams on the premises of her bottom-up moral skepticism to test them against those of her top-down natural theology. On one hand, he contends that if God exists then an “objective ethical prescriptivity” is defensible but he denies the antecedent; he frames his second-order moral skepticism as “what we can say about morality if, in the end, we dispense with religious belief.”⁵⁵ So her position challenges his opposition of theism and moral skepticism. On the other hand, Mackie as well as Pike and Plantinga assume the God’s goodness is moral in nature. So Adams also undermines his formulation of the problem of evil. Mackie’s scholarship in philosophy of religion and the history of philosophy both provide reasons to scrutinize Adams’s suggestion that her empiricist morality operates free of undemonstrable premises.

Fourthly, at least some prominent psychologists and neuroscientists, whose conclusions resemble those of Adams on moral psychology, use theory-laden, Humean categories. A recent *Washington Post* article relates how researchers (Jorge

⁵³ Adams 1988a, 138.

⁵⁴ Mackie (1976, 48) apparently entertains moral realism in his atheological argument from evil only because he assumes it is a corollary of the theistic beliefs that he means to show are logically inconsistent.

⁵⁵ Mackie 1976, 48.

Moll, Jordan Grafmann, Adrian Raine, Jean Decety, Antonio Damasio, Joshua Greene, and Marc Hauser) interpret their experiments as suggesting several such conclusions: “[a]ltruism . . . [is] not a superior moral faculty that suppresses basic selfish urges but rather was basic to the brain, hard-wired and pleasurable”, the “foundation of morality is empathy”, and the “very idea of morality is . . . just another evolutionary tool that nature uses to help species survive and propagate.”⁵⁶ The article discusses several researchers whose writings refine the comparison on which this section focuses. For instance, Greene, a Harvard psychologist and a former student of David Lewis, frames the debate on moral psychology as between rationalists who are indebted to Plato and Kant and sentimentalists indebted to Hume and Smith.⁵⁷ An article he co-authored with Jonathan Haidt, a University of Virginia psychologist, displays how studies that favor Adams’s conclusions are not neutral in the moral categories they use. He writes:

A handful of recent studies have used functional neuroimaging to study moral psychology. . . . Whereas Moll and colleagues have investigated moral cognition by distinguishing the effects of moral versus non-moral phenomena, Greene and colleagues have drawn a distinction within the moral domain between ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’ moral judgments. Greene and colleagues scanned subjects using fMRI while they responded to a series of personal and impersonal moral dilemmas as well as non-moral dilemmas, all of which involved complex narratives.⁵⁸

The Greene *et al.* study posed two dilemmas to their subjects: should the subject divert a runaway trolley that would kill five people to another set of tracks though it would kill one person; or should the subject push a person in to block the trolley and save the lives of five persons? Despite the dilemmas’ similarities, most subjects affirmed the first proposition but declined the second. Greene *et al.*, relying on double effect, labeled the first dilemma impersonal because killing the person is a consequence of diverting the trolley whereas the second dilemma was personal because killing the person is the act that diverts the trolley. The article continues:

[Greene and colleagues] found that responding to personal moral dilemmas . . . produced increased activity in areas associated with social/emotional processing . . . [I]mpersonal and non-moral dilemmas . . . produced increased

⁵⁶ Vedantam 2007.

⁵⁷ See <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~jgreene/>; internet; accessed 30 May 2007.

⁵⁸ Greene and Haidt, 518-19.

activity in areas associated with working memory. . . . Subjects were slow to approve of personal violations but relatively quick to condemn them. By contrast, approvals and disapprovals took equally long for impersonal moral and non-moral judgments. This pattern is explained by subjects' having to overcome their negative responses when approving of personal moral violations as compared with other, less emotionally charged actions. . . . Neuroimaging studies of moral judgment in normal adults . . . point to the conclusion, embraced by the *social intuitionist model*, that emotion is a significant driving force in moral judgment. The work of Greene *et al.*, however, suggests that reasoning can play an important role in the production of impersonal moral judgments and in personal moral judgments in which reasoned considerations and emotional intuitions conflict.⁵⁹

Agreeing with these conclusions presupposes agreeing that the study asked questions with valid premises and whose responses are generalizable to broader moral life. One challenge is whether there are "individuals-as-such" as the Greene *et al.* experiments presuppose or only "individuals-in-social-relationships" as MacIntyre following Aquinas contends.⁶⁰ If the individual-as-such is an abstraction, as I shall argue later, then it is relevant to moral dilemmas whether the person my action may save or endanger is my wife, my child, my mentor, my brother in arms, etc.⁶¹ The Greene *et al.* study takes as a premise a personal-impersonal distinction that is philosophically controversial and consequential. Additionally, the study's generalizability depends on controversial judgments about the relevance of dilemmas to moral life and the dependence of adult emotional patterns on prior moral education. That emotions are primary moral guides in everyday life does not entail that emotion and empathy are foundational to morality or most moralities as the *Post* article suggests, unless empathy and emotion, themselves, are the primary causes of the cultures and societies that instill and refine those emotional patterns.

Haidt is a key proponent of the social intuitionist model just mentioned. In further writings, he distinguishes three contemporary models of moral psychology: *tabula rasa* empiricism; rationalism; and moral sense theories. While he says Kant is highly influential on the rationalist theories of moral philosophy and "[r]ationalism still rules" in psychological circles, Haidt's social intuitionism favors theories that

⁵⁹ Greene and Haidt 2002, 519, 522; emphasis added.

⁶⁰ MacIntyre 1998b, 242.

⁶¹ MacIntyre 1983; MacIntyre 1990.

like Hume emphasize emotions or passions.⁶² A forthcoming essay of Haidt and his colleague Fredrik Bjorkland quotes Hume's second *Enquiry* (1.3) where Hume frames reason and sentiment as the competing explanations of morality's foundation in eighteenth-century philosophy. Haidt and Bjorkland comment approvingly:

Hume . . . [provides] a succinct answer to [our] Question 1: Where do moral beliefs and motivations come from? They come from sentiments which give us an immediate feeling of right or wrong, and which are built into the fabric of human nature. Hume's answer to Question 1 is our answer too, and much the rest of our essay is an elaboration of this statement, using evidence and theories that Hume did not have available to him. . . . Hume's statement is just as true in 2005 as it was in 1776. There really is a controversy started of late (in the 1980s), a controversy between rationalist approaches (based on Piaget and Kohlberg) and moral sense or intuitionist theories [e.g., J. Kagan, R. Frank, J. Haidt, R. Shweder, J. Q. Wilson].⁶³

Marilyn Adams advances a developmental anthropology that adopts an interactionist moral psychology, which according to Haidt is philosophically rationalist. However, her second-order reflections on morality seems *prima facie* indebted to moral sense theorists and thus to Hume. While correlation does not entail causation, correlation is an important tool for tracking causation. Greene and Haidt make that interpretation more plausible where Adams and Hume are concerned. Even if Adams would divide psychological research on moral psychology differently than Green and Haidt and her ideas differ materially from social intuitionists, it still would be helpful to have Adams on the record about the details and thinkers the support her view of morality.

3.3 Summary of Criticism

The main question is whether Adams can sustain her empiricist argument for second-order moral skepticism without using controversial premises and greater philosophical machinery as Hume and Mackie do. She does not lay out the data and interpretations of the psychologists and nature scientists on whom she broadly rests her moral view. If I am correct that her bottom-up moral view uses controversial but unargued ideas, then her readers seem entitled by parity to refuse her critique of the realist moralities that undergird the standard treatments of evil in analytic philosophy of religion and Christian theology. For as Rogers states, and Adams's reply largely admits, "Most contemporary philosophers of religion probably would find even the

⁶² Haidt 2001, 816.

⁶³ Haidt and Bjorkland 2008.

hint of moral conventionalism a grave objection to Adams's view."⁶⁴ Until Adams confronts the complexities and problems of her view of morality, her ability to persuade her core audience in analytic philosophy would seem impaired.

4. Scotus and Ockham on Morality's Defeasibility

The ideas of Scotus and Ockham on the natural and conventional aspects of morality (i.e., non-positive and positive morality) shape Adams's theodicy. These Franciscan antecedents help account for her argument in "Theodicy without Blame" (1988) through *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (1999) that divine transcendence bars indefeasible, natural obligations of creatures to God or to other creatures. The argument serves two functions. First, moral realism comes in bottom-up and top-down variants, so it is insufficient for Adams to criticize bottom-up accounts of morality's objectivity. Secondly, she advocates a top-down, "mainstream medieval" account of divine transcendence and needs to explain how she parts with Augustine's influential, top-down natural theology, which draws his moral philosophy into a top-down, objective alignment. Medieval analyses of the decalogue illustrate the difference the Franciscan argument makes. Articulating a metaphysics of morality that follows Augustine more closely than one might expect, Aquinas argues that both tables of the decalogue state indefeasible obligations. In contrast, Scotus argues that the second table is defeasible and Ockham argues that both tables are defeasible.

Adams approvingly references the moral theories of Scotus and Ockham throughout her writings on evil.⁶⁵ Her essay "Duns Scotus on the Goodness of God" (1987) is representative. It classifies Scotus's view as belonging to a family of value theories called ethical naturalism. Such theories hold that being and goodness are convertible. So the totality of entities reflects an excellence hierarchy or a ranking of each nature's metaphysical goodness. The applicability and character of concepts such as *telos*, desert, right, and obligation, depend on what relative and absolute position an entity occupies in the excellence hierarchy. Ancient ethical naturalists held that a thing's goodness "imposed a moral obligation on agents to love it . . .

⁶⁴ Rogers 2002, 82.

⁶⁵ Adams 1987a, 488-89; Adams 1988a, 128; Adams 1988c, 229; Adams 1991c, 21; Adams 1993b, 169, 180-81; Adams 1993c, 304, 308; Adams 1996a, 122; Adams 1999c, 64; Adams 2002a, 473; Adams 2002b, 219, 224-25; Adams 2004b, 173-80; Adams 2004c, 137-41. See also her related medievalist writings: Adams 1986b; Adams 1987d; Adams 1999d.

[that is] proportionate to that thing's degree of being, so that one ought to love better beings more than lesser ones—e.g., angels more than humans, dogs more than rocks.”⁶⁶ This framework is common to ancient and medieval thinkers. Scotus advances a version where neither God nor creatures have unconditional obligations to creatures. For the pursuit and achievement of some goods may exclude others. Competition renders moral obligations to any finite good necessarily defeasible: “there can always be a reason against loving any finite good.”⁶⁷ In contrast, God and creatures have “unconditional obligations” only to God who is infinite being and thus has no competition.⁶⁸ Strictly speaking, “God owes nothing to creatures and will not be unjust to any creature no matter what he does.”⁶⁹ While her 1987 essay on Scotus and divine goodness is primarily descriptive (see pp. 29-31 above), her later writings demonstrate constructive interest in his moral theory.

In her later essay “Sin as Uncleaness” (1991), Adams concludes her argument for separating sin and morality with a more radical statement of the Franciscan idea:

Finite creatures are not naturally or intrinsically valuable enough either to command God's love or to be or do anything that could render Him fitting honor. Developing the first point, the great Franciscan theologians, Scotus and Ockham, measure the gap between finite and infinite by their intuition that if it is rational to love valuable things in proportion to their intrinsic worth, yet it is not necessarily irrational not to love finite goods even a little bit, [then it is] not always foolish to love the lesser more than the greater.⁷⁰

Adams leaves aside how the phrase “even a little bit” would puzzle a Platonist such as Augustine. On one hand, he thinks that sustaining a thing in existence is itself an aspect of divine love.⁷¹ On the other hand, if creaturely goodness is participated goodness, then for God not to love creatures in proportion to their particular, intrinsic worth is to do an injustice to God. This points to a key dispute given how Scotus and Ockham reject participation metaphysics as I shall later discuss. In any case, Adams

⁶⁶ Adams 1987a, 488.

⁶⁷ Adams 1987a, 488. See also Adams 1988c, 229-30; Adams 1993b, 169.

⁶⁸ Adams 1987a, 488.

⁶⁹ Adams 1987a, 489.

⁷⁰ Adams 1991c, 21.

⁷¹ Augustine *In Evan. Ioan.* 110.6; commenting on Jn. 17:21-23.

supports the passage from “Sin as Uncleaness” with a footnote to her earlier essay “The Structure of Ockham’s Moral Theory” (1986). There she writes:

Scotus . . . maintained that the second table of the decalogue, having to do with neighbor-love, did not belong to the natural law strictly speaking and hence that God could dispense from its precepts. By contrast, Scotus maintained that the first table with its injunction to a whole-hearted and exclusive love of God above all . . . do[es] pertain to the natural law from which God cannot dispense.⁷²

Though there is a lively current debate about where Scotus falls on the naturalist-voluntarist spectrum, Adams largely concurs with distinguished scholars such as William Frank and Allan Wolter that Scotus is a kind of naturalist.⁷³ They understand Scotus as claiming that while non-positive morality includes both tables of the decalogue, God can (but rarely does) dispense from the second table. Frank comments that, “In Scotus’ philosophy, ‘nature’ underdetermines the content of morality” towards humans.⁷⁴ If a moral law is not derived from the first table, then its obligations are morally neutral in their object and only circumstances determine whether a relevant act is virtuous or vicious.⁷⁵ However, beatitude and damnation are wholly matters of positive morality or divine legislation. Wolter writes, “None of the intrinsic or ideal natural perfections protected by the second table of the law are absolutely or necessarily connected with the attainment of man’s actual supernatural end, which is union with God in the afterlife.”⁷⁶ Ockham intensifies both aspects of Scotus’s argument. Ockham contends that God could also dispense from the first table and command us to hate God; correspondingly, God would not be unjust in assigning beatitude to those who hate God and damnation to those who love God.⁷⁷

⁷² Adams 1986b, 21-22. See also *ibid.*, 23, 30, 34; Adams 1987a, 494-98.

⁷³ Scotus’s naturalist credentials have often been doubted. See Thomas Williams (1995, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2003). Allan Wolter (2003) and his former student Mary Beth Ingham (2000, 2001) make substantial replies to Williams’s radical voluntarist account. Adams (1986b, 1987a, 1987d, 1996b) argues that Ockham espouses a modified right reason theory of ethics. It seems legitimate to extend this label to Scotus as well.

⁷⁴ Wolter and Frank 1997, xii.

⁷⁵ Wolter and Frank 1997, 22. See also Adams 1987d, 236.

⁷⁶ Wolter and Frank 1997, 24.

⁷⁷ Adams 1986b, 22; Adams 2002b, 219.

Among his rationales for intensifying Scotus's moral theory in this manner is that divine freedom ought not to be subservient to nature even to the divine nature.

For all these radical arguments, Scotus and Ockham still think that right reason and the decalogue genuinely coincide. They just argue that one table is or both tables are defeasible. Scotus and Ockham agree that humans have natural and supernatural *telo*i. However, they eliminate the metaphysical connection between these *telo*i that earlier medieval theologies posit. The bases of this change are differences they posit between (i) God and creature as well as (ii) voluntary and natural. So non-positive morality has a natural but defeasible structure. Moreover, while Scotus and Ockham think positive morality has no naturally suitable or indefeasible structure, they agree that God arranges merit and demerit to correspond to what reason holds is moral and immoral. Scotus and Ockham think God ordains that "being morally virtuous is a necessary condition for merit; morally vicious, a sufficient condition for demerit . . . [God also] ties merit and demerit to infused theological virtues (most importantly, charity) dispensed in accordance with the sacramental system, [so] moral virtue is not sufficient for merit."⁷⁸ Wedding such traditional results to a radical elimination of external (and for Ockham, internal) constraints on God accentuates the heart of Franciscan spirituality: worthiness to salvation is sheer divine grace.⁷⁹

The foregoing account explains two ideas that Adams's theodicy borrows from her Franciscan conversation partners.

- (T1) The goodness of what creatures are or do cannot command, compel, or obligate God's love.
- (T2) Merit unto eternal life or demerit unto damnation is a matter "of positive morality, created by free and contingent divine statute."⁸⁰

Adams explains (T1) using the following analogy in her essays "Symbolic Value and the Problem of Evil" and "Evil and the God-Who-Does-Nothing-In-Particular" and her book *Horrendous Evils*.⁸¹ Nothing humans are or do constitutes an intrinsically appropriate response to God or makes humans suitable for union with God: if humans not naturally invested in whether worms (or ladybugs or clams) do this or

⁷⁸ Adams 1986b, 23.

⁷⁹ Adams 1986b, 22, 34-35; Adams 1987d, 246-47.

⁸⁰ Adams 1986b, 19.

⁸¹ Adams 1992f, 280; Adams 1996a, 122; Adams 1999c, 94-95, 127.

that given their metaphysical difference, then God is that much less invested in humans given the relative ontological differences between humans and worms and humans and God. (T2) follows from (T1). Adams clarifies the analogy in “Neglected Values, Shrunken Agents, Happy Endings: A Reply to Rogers” for her critics.⁸²

As to my wiggle-worm analogy . . . I meant to be signing on to the Franciscan appreciation that finite goods cannot command the Divine will, that none is intrinsically worthy of Divine acceptance—a point that Scotus presses and that Ockham dramatizes with his declaration that God would do nothing wrong in damning those who loved and conferring eternal beatitude on those who hated God most! . . . Thus, viewed top down, even unfallen human beings would be intrinsically . . . no more compelling for God than a worm is; nor would the virtuous person intrinsically have any more claim to be awarded eternal life than the vicious.

The analogy aims to show that the ways of living that befit human nature do not determine, strictly speaking, what is proper for God to give humans whether the question concerns just deserts or grace. Adams’s statement also demonstrates that even her recent constructive philosophical theology consciously borrows from medieval theories of morality.

In the context of Adams’s project, it is not immediately clear whether her bottom-up moral pragmatism and the moral theories of Scotus and Ockham are harmonious. Like Scotus and Ockham, Adams limits the theological relevance of natural human teleology. She argues that modern psychology demonstrates that moral conventions do not derive from or aim at a unifying, transcendent ground. Frank and Wolter make similar statements about Scotus. However, it does not follow that Adams and the great Franciscan Aristotelians endorse a divine command moral theory. On one hand, it is unclear whether Adams thinks God genuinely commands anything.⁸³ On the other hand, attributing a divine command theory to Scotus and Ockham confuses their implicit distinction between what defeats the justification of non-positive moral precepts from what justifies those precepts: human teleology grounds moral precepts but at least second table precepts are defeasible.⁸⁴ However,

⁸² Adams 2002b, 219-20. See also Adams 2002a, 472.

⁸³ Adams 1988c, 238-40; Adams 1991c, 21-22.

⁸⁴ The views of Scotus and Ockham differ from divine command theories in four ways (Adams 1986b). (1) Right reason and divine legislation coincide in actuality. (2) The authority of divine legislation in non-positive morality follows from right reason. (3) At least

Adams's moral theory is in a sense more radical than those of Scotus and Ockham. She claims that empirical psychology shows non-positive morality only involves instrumental uses of reason whereas the two medieval Franciscans think morality has roots in human nature but not in divine nature and is therefore largely defeasible. One way to repair the potential conflict is for Adams to advocate the minimalist view that Scotus and Ockham refute their predecessors' arguments for the decalogue's indispensability and 'strong' ethical naturalism. She could then also reject their 'weak', non-transcendental ethical naturalism. Alternatively, Adams could take a middle way and argue that because second table morality is *a posteriori* for Scotus, her variation represents a way to reconceive Scotus's understanding of moral obligation given how empirical psychology invalidates what he asserts as right reason's moral implications.

What Adams's theodicy shares with Scotus and Ockham should be neither ignored nor overstated. Adams had been studying them for over two decades when she published "Sin as Uncleaness" in which she first claims that sin is incompetence and reiterates her suggestion from "Theodicy without Blame" that God establishes a relationship with humans by fiat.⁸⁵ Those studies and her explicit statements make it reasonable to take those aspects of her theodicy as retrospective of her studies in pastoral theology and medieval philosophy. However, Adams does not rigorously work out how to negotiate between the rational grounds for theses such as (T1) and (T2) and for other aspects of her project as I shall argue in the next two sections.

5. Impaired Freedom and Franciscan *Via Eminentiae*

When Adams clarifies her "wiggle-worm analogy" she cites Scotus's argument about divine goodness and Ockham's dramatization about how God can freely legislate on what grounds a person is damned or saved. One challenge for Adams's argument is that the Franciscan argument presupposes arguments for divine libertarian freedom that do not work if she is correct that *ignorantia et difficultas* are natural to humans.

for Ockham there are different degrees of moral acts—from acts that conform to right reason to those which conform both to right reason and divine legislation. (4) The following are counterfactually invariant: what follows from right reason apart from contrary divine legislation and that a pagan who followed the dictates of right reason would still be morally just in a lower sense. If God can override the second table, it does not follow that the second table lacks legitimacy. Such a defeater is not also a justifier in non-positive morality.

⁸⁵ Adams 1988c, 238-40; Adams 1991c, 21-22.

In *Horrendous Evils*, Adams summarizes the medieval arguments for the divine perfections as being top-down:

Medieval Christian theologians such as Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham, did not begin from below, with human agency, and then conceive of God's agency to be of the same kind, so that Divine and human capacities for thought and choice differ only in degree. Rather they started at the top, assigning to God both the simplicity, immutability, and eternity of Plotinus's One and the paradigmatic thought of Plotinus's intelligence as well.⁸⁶

While this statement may apply to Aquinas and Anselm, it appears less applicable to Scotus and by extension to Ockham. (i) Scotus argues, via negation and excellence, from imperfect creaturely perfections to the pure perfections that we must ascribe to God.⁸⁷ This method is necessary by his standards to avoid utter equivocation about the divine perfections. What secure the ontological difference between divine and creaturely perfection are intrinsic modes such as finite and infinite. So Adams's summary arguably confuses Neoplatonist simplicity as a premise and as a regulative ideal. (ii) Adams writes that Scotus thinks experience as well as ethics and theology demand that humans have libertarian freedom or the power for willing opposites; Ockham reasons similarly and thinks he is following the tradition in attributing liberty of indifference to the human will.⁸⁸ (iii) Adams openly disagrees with Scotus and Ockham on whether humans have incompatibilist freedom.⁸⁹ She is also ambivalent at best about whether such freedom is something God should infuse or heal in humans and thus is a perfection at all. (iv) If Scotus is a conceptual empiricist as Wolter and Adams claim and if her theodicy's position on human agency is correct, then Scotus's view of divine freedom and ethics is a non-starter. (v) This criticism affects Ockham only if the failure of Scotus's argument for God's libertarian freedom would make Ockham's interpretation less plausible or if Ockham's view on divine freedom depends on humans having incompatibilist freedom. Overall, Adams's theodicy often appeals to these Franciscans' arguments that merit and demerit are wholly matters of free divine legislation. Admitting her

⁸⁶ Adams 1999c, 64.

⁸⁷ Wolter and Frank 1997, 9-11, 14.

⁸⁸ Adams 1986b, 13; Adams 1999d, 252-54.

⁸⁹ Adams remains ambivalent (Adams 1988c, 244n.29; Adams 2002a, 475) to "negatively inclined" (Adams 2002b, 219) on incompatibilist freedom, though in *Horrendous Evils* she admits that "some free play" is among the divine creative purposes (Adams 1999c, 54).

contrary ideas about human freedom would undermine the Franciscan arguments that inspire her as well as their broader projects because libertarian freedom is central to the ideas of Scotus and Ockham.

6. Participation and Moral Philosophy

In her 2002 reply to Rogers's critical review of *Horrendous Evils*, Adams says she agrees with Anselm's Platonist view that creaturely natures are constituted by their essential relationship of imitating God (see p. 197 above). This is representative of her prior work on theodicy. For instance, Adams espouses a "general theological Platonism" in her essay "Aesthetic Goodness as a Solution to the Problem of Evil" (1993).⁹⁰ Adams reasserts the essay's argument in chapter 7 of *Horrendous Evils*. While reiterating her Platonism, she explains that Christian Platonists historically hold that "every created nature is essentially a way of imitating the Divine" and that "[f]or Christian Platonists the created nature is not so independent of and distinct from the Divine essence, but rather participates in the reality it signifies."⁹¹ However, these views seem *prima facie* inconsistent with her use of Scotus and Ockham. For the Franciscans' denial of participation metaphysics is logically prior to their argument that natural law is conditionally relevant to how humans relate to God.

As Adams relates in her essay "Ockham on Truth" (1989), Scotus and Ockham deny that creatures are constituted by imitability relations to God and that Platonic participation is a philosophically acceptable concept:

What breaks the great chain of being is the denial that created essences are constituted by imitability relations in God, so that equinity is not *explained* as a horse-wise imitation of the Divine essence . . . humanity a human-wise imitation, etc. This step had already been taken before Ockham, by Scotus against Henry of Ghent. . . . [T]he important move in Scotus's critique of Henry lies in the insistence that relations are both metaphysically and epistemologically posterior to their relata. A relation cannot be naturally prior, in such a way as to explain the being or possibility of its relata. And that is why a relation cannot be known prior to both of its relata being known. . . . Ockham agrees with Scotus . . . [and] explains away, as "metaphorical" and "improper," the Saints' frequent comment that the perfections of creatures are contained in God. . . . Ockham gives the Augustinian/Anselmian language—that the perfection of a creature is in God in the sense that a "form" or "likeness (*similitudo*)" of the creature is in God—an Aristotelian twist, construing

⁹⁰ Adams 1993a, 49. See also Adams 1999c, 134, 142, 147, 149.

⁹¹ Adams 1999c, 140, 148.

“form” as inherent substantial form “which is no more in God than the matter of a stone is” and taking “image” for a created likeness. . . . Ockham follows tradition in recognizing such relations of comparative perfection between God and creatures, but they are posterior to the constitution of both Divine and created natures, and in no way involve the derivation of the latter from the former.⁹²

The Franciscans interpret creation as meaning that humans have no existence apart from God. However, they deny the intelligibility of creaturely essences participating in the divine nature or being metaphysically posterior to divine essence and will. Scotus and Ockham model the creaturely and divine perfections on Aristotelian universals rather than on Platonic forms and the Idea of the Good. Adams analyzes this move’s value implications in “Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality” (1999). While Christian Platonists such as Anselm and Aquinas think humans have a “double teleological structure” that aims at a natural end and a supernatural end, Scotus and Ockham think that a creature’s teleological structure aims only at internal, natural ends.⁹³ This is a key premise in the systematic argument of Scotus and Ockham that natural goodness and consequently natural law provide suitable but dispensable grounds for how creatures relate to other creatures and to God.

Two difficulties follow from the medieval dispute on participation metaphysics that are relevant to Adams’s value theory. First, can she reconcile her advocacy of Anselm on imitability relations and of the Franciscan Aristotelians on natural law’s defeasibility given their apparently incompatible metaphysical premises? Secondly, can the Christian Platonists provide a defensible account of why natural law is indefeasible and relates creatures to the One God unconditionally? The first concerns her account’s internal consistency and the second concerns a rival account.

The first difficulty is amenable to repair if Adams’s central commitments do not conflict with a non-literal interpretation of Anselmian imitability relations as the Franciscan Aristotelians suggest. Her essay on an aesthetic solution to horrendous evils poses one potential conflict. There Adams appeals to an integrative Platonist understanding of value where aesthetics, morality, etc., are not held separate. She promotes narrative aesthetics as key to defeating horrors: God needs to enable

⁹² Adams 1989b, 158-62. See also Adams 1987d, 223-28; Adams 1989b, 158-62; Adams 1996b, 521; Adams 1998d, 62; Adams 1999d, 247-49.

⁹³ Adams 1999d, 247-49.

participants in horrors to narrate their lives as wholes through their relationship to divine goodness. However, the psychological good of narrative integrity on which Adams insists has no obvious necessary dependence on the metaphysical interpretation of beauty of Anselm and other Christian Platonists. So her aesthetic solution to horrors seems *prima facie* compatible with a non-literal reading of Anselm and a literal reading of Scotus and Ockham. Adams's reply to Rogers points to another potential conflict. There Adams adopts a summary of Anselm's natural theology as her justification for her major premises such as God's goodness being incommensurately good for creatures and for her more general commitments such as the doctrine of the *imago dei*. However, Scotus and Ockham attempt to preserve these ideas. So perhaps interpreting Anselm non-literally would not interfere with Adams's theodicy or at least would be more defensible than disregarding the conflict. Alternatively, rather than developing a more systematically Franciscan theodicy, Adams could abandon medieval metaphysics and value theories altogether and opt for a modern theology that fits with her empiricist moral theory.

The second difficulty is that Anselm and others medieval Platonists ground an indefeasible, objective understanding of natural law in divine transcendence. This is more serious than the first difficulty, and I shall devote substantially more space to it. I shall examine Aquinas's account of how creaturely natures are constituted by their relationship to God and its consequences for his value-theory. I earlier argued that Aquinas thinks that the creaturely relationship to God is asymmetric and this follows from his analysis of divine simplicity. Reworking Avicenna's distinction between existence and essence, Aquinas argues that creatures must have their *esse* through participation in God who alone is self-subsisting *esse*. The consequent differences between the Platonists for whom Aquinas speaks and later anti-Platonists such as Scotus and Ockham seem irreconcilable. I shall discuss their contrasting views on metaphysics and piety and on participation and its implications for God's love of natural goodness, creation's integrity, and human freedom. I shall also comment on their contrasting view about the common good and morality's conventional nature.

6.1 Dependence and Freedom

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas insists on a distinction between infinity *secundum quid* and *simpliciter* where the former is proper to creatures alone and the latter to

God alone.⁹⁴ Arguments that extrapolate God's unqualified infinity from instances of relative infinity inevitably fall short and may mislead us into thinking we have some adequate, positive grasp of divine infinity.⁹⁵ This is among the ways that I suggested Aquinas might criticize the proof for divine infinity from exemplarity (e.g., where the potentially infinite number of creatures is transformed into the intensive infinity of divine knowledge) in Scotus's *Reportatio Parisiensis* 1A. Scotus and Ockham seem to encounter a parallel problem on non-positive morality.

Scotus construes 'regard for creaturely goodness' as an external constraint on God and he frees God from any intrinsic relationship to the decalogue's second table. Ockham frees God from the internal constraints of the first table. Adams represents this in "Sin as Uncleaness" as a way to "measure the gap between finite and infinite."⁹⁶ The statement is pious but puzzling. In the literal mode of speech that Scotus and Ockham favor, a person cannot measure the immeasurable. Additionally, Adams's statement implies that determining the second table is defeasible (Scotus) measured the gap between finite and infinite, and determining that the first table is also defeasible (Ockham) measured the gap that much more: the Franciscans succeed in showing God is more infinite than their predecessors were able to show. So the predecessors did not measure the gap properly, which implies the successors may also have fallen short. Adams's statement is more sensibly construed as a retrospective confession rather than a justification for the successive Franciscan views about non-positive morality. Indeed, philosophy alone does not drive the dispute between the Augustinian Platonists and the great Franciscan Aristotelians.⁹⁷ Catherine Pickstock criticizes Scotus for "extreme pietism" that motivates certain problematic theological moves because they seem to flatter God.⁹⁸ Adams lends credibility to this concern in when she writes that "Scotus' novel reading of tradition

⁹⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.7.2co., 1.50.2ad4, 1.75.5ad4. See chapter 2, section 6, above.

⁹⁵ Aquinas *ST* 1.14.7, 12; 1.25.2; 1.105.2.

⁹⁶ Adams 1991c, 21; see the full quotation at p. 207 above.

⁹⁷ Burrell 2004, 91-93, 111-12.

⁹⁸ Pickstock 1998, 134.

serves to magnify God's love and generosity towards the elect" and she declares his "dramatic . . . picture" is "attractive" on those grounds.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, philosophy plays a crucial role in the debate. Participation metaphysics offers a powerful way to ground morality objectively in a metaphysical and theological order. Aquinas articulates the following Augustinian position on imitability that presupposes the framework he establishes in *prima pars*, questions 3-11. In the self-same act that God is, God knows the divine nature, loves the divine nature, knows creation both in general and particular, and loves creation into being and continuing existence.¹⁰⁰ This is why Augustinian Platonists would reason God is not and cannot be indifferent to the natural goodness of creatures. However, it does not entail that creatures can compel God or that God has natural obligations to creatures. In loving created things according to their natural goodness, God renders the divine perfections their due with respect to how creatures participate in them.¹⁰¹ The difference between God's essential goodness and a creature's participated goodness entails that indebtedness flows in only one direction. So the Franciscan objection presents a false dilemma between God being subordinate to creatures or natural law being defeasible.

Burrell comments that from our "non-reciprocal relation of dependence" to God it follows that our very being is "to-be-related."¹⁰² "The *esse* of creatures is an *esse-ad-creatorem*" and this "utterly transforms Aristotle's world, where the hallmark of *substance* is to 'exist in itself'."¹⁰³ A consequent objection is that such a relationship seems to "alienate the creature from itself."¹⁰⁴ Relations are accidents in an Aristotelian account and thus inessential to substances.¹⁰⁵ Aquinas's argument implies that philosophy must bend to theology on this point, because one relation or quasi-relation is essential to and thus part of the definition of what is a creature.

⁹⁹ Adams 1987a, 489-90, 502.

¹⁰⁰ See Aquinas *ST* 1.14.5-6, 8, 11; Aquinas *ST* 1.20.2.

¹⁰¹ Aquinas *ST* 1.21.1ad3; Aquinas *ST* 1-2.100.8ad2.

¹⁰² Burrell 2004, 134, 237; quoting from Grant 2002, 40. Cf. Kerr 2002, 48-50.

¹⁰³ Burrell 2004, xx-xxi; emphasis in original. Cf. Burrell 2001, 213.

¹⁰⁴ Burrell 2004, xxi.

¹⁰⁵ King 2003, 33-38.

Worries about the integrity of Aristotelian substances may partly motivate Scotus's metaphysical objection to participation that where God knows creaturely *possibilia* the knowledge relationship is unintelligible unless it is posterior to the creaturely *relata*. However, Ockham puts in question the substance-accident distinction when it comes to Chalcedonian two-nature Christology.¹⁰⁶ So at least for him the substance-accident distinction is not inviolable—both Franciscans think theological concerns sometimes trump philosophical concerns. For Burrell's part, he argues that the dependence relation to which Aquinas points is so unique that no alienation or loss of integrity occurs.¹⁰⁷ This stretches the Aristotelian definition of relation in order to provide an analogical foothold for understanding participation. To defend against the potential complaints what Burrell needs is an account of metaphors and the language of participation such as in his book *Aquinas: God and Action*.

The dispute widens when turning from metaphysics to ethics. Freedom for Augustine and Aquinas is a response where humans are drawn to the good from an inbuilt orientation to which sin does critical damage.¹⁰⁸ God cannot compete with free secondary causes because as Dame Julian says “God is in everything” and “does everything.”¹⁰⁹ There are no lulls in divine action in the world, so miracles are not divine intervention strictly speaking.¹¹⁰ As McCabe puts it, Aquinas thinks God “brings about my free actions” because as first cause God creates and sustains in being all things including actions but “this does not make them any less free.”¹¹¹ Human freedom consists of acting independently of other secondary causes (other creatures) but never independently of the *sine qua non* divine cause. Human freedom does not surmount nature but pursues an innate ‘teleological lure’ that terminates in

¹⁰⁶ Adams 1982a.

¹⁰⁷ Burrell 2004, xxi.

¹⁰⁸ Burrell 2001, 214; Burrell 2004, 145-51; Adams 1987d, 231.

¹⁰⁹ Julian *Shew*. (Spearing and Spearing 1998, 58) 11. Cf. Kerr 2002, 42-48.

¹¹⁰ Rowan Williams (1996, 138-48) presses this argument against Adams. Regarding an account of signs and wonders that avoids the idiom of intervention see Burrell's (2004, 60-63) discussion of Dorothy Sayers's *The Mind of the Maker*.

¹¹¹ McCabe 1980b, 457.

God.¹¹² Participation inscribes transcendence into all creaturely natures, and rational creatures actualize this not in choosing itself but in choosing to perfect their natures.

In contrast, Scotus and Ockham argue that it befits the best natures to transcend their natures through free choice.¹¹³ They progressively “sever connections between the will and the agent’s own nature,” and this move is facilitated by how they unlike Aquinas repudiate participation and unlike Aristotle assert a doctrine of the will.¹¹⁴ Scotus reworks Anselm’s *affectio commodi* and *affectio iustitiae* where the former inclination is our natural appetite which the latter inclination for justice moderates and restrains.¹¹⁵ Anselm’s *affectio iustitiae* is a divinely infused disposition whereas for Scotus it is innate to human nature.¹¹⁶ So Anselm cannot be directly credited or faulted for undermining Christian Platonism.¹¹⁷ Ockham rejects Scotus’s theory of dual affections but goes further than the Subtle Doctor in arguing that the will can not only be indifferent to the good but will against it.¹¹⁸ The moral imputability of human acts is what concerns the More Subtle Doctor, and for him volitions are morally assessable while habits, which include virtues, are not.¹¹⁹ Ockham’s account of non-positive morality also permits the deliverances of divine will to differ from those of nature. Scotus and Ockham preserve Aristotle’s view of responsible agency where initiative lies with the agent.¹²⁰ However, both construe Aristotle’s view of the

¹¹² Pickstock 1997, 135 (adapting a phrase from Derrida’s essay “Signature Event Context” on J. L. Austin).

¹¹³ Boler 1994, 27, 33fn.35; Adams 1987d, 234.

¹¹⁴ Adams 1987d, 231. Aristotle asserts human teleology, a unified good, and exceptionless precepts (MacIntyre 1984, 148-52). Nature and choice do not diverge for Aristotle because he does not have a theological doctrine of the will. Bereft of Platonic participation, their doctrine of the will is foreign to Augustine as well. The rejection of participation puts creaturely and divine activity and causation in competition, and one consideration (and just one) in the distancing of will from nature may be how one seems to offset the other.

¹¹⁵ Adams 1986b, 6-10; Adams 1987d, 231-32; Wolter and Frank 1997, xii.

¹¹⁶ Wolter and Frank 1997, 12-13.

¹¹⁷ It may be that Anselm’s *affectiones commodi et iustitiae* is like the view of Aquinas (*ST* 1-2.65.2) that *iustitia* and the cardinal virtues are possible apart from grace but only fulfilled when God bestows *caritas* which directs them to their unifying, supernatural end.

¹¹⁸ Adams 1986b, 13-14.

¹¹⁹ Adams 1986b, 16-17; Adams 1987d, 233-38, 245; Adams 1990b, 14-15; Adams 1999d, 254.

¹²⁰ Burrell 2001, 214; Adams 1987d, 231-34.

human good as less Platonic than it in fact was.¹²¹ This is a rough sketch of what divides the great Franciscan Aristotelians from Christian Platonists such as Aquinas on the matter of human and divine freedom. It suggests the considerations to which either side might appeal are internal to their philosophical theologies and depend how they regard participation. Such appeals cannot settle the debate.

So Adams's affirmation of imitability relations independently supports the prior section's conclusion that her doubts about freedom bar her appropriation of Scotus and Ockham on divine freedom and non-positive morality. Adams's criticism of modern voluntaristic philosophical theologies in "Theodicy without Blame" and "Sin as Uncleaness" also has uneven application to Christian Platonist theologies.

Burrell states, "The chasm between medieval and modern thought regarding human freedom turns on whether one regards free human actions as at root responses or initiatives."¹²² This implicates Adams's project. First, thinkers as diverse as John Duns Scotus, David Hume, Bernard Williams, and Marilyn Adams, posit inevitable competition between individuals and communities and the personal and impersonal. Hence, morality is about restraining the competition of individual goods rather than about ordering life to a complex but unified common good. Secondly, Adams and Hume, and to a lesser extent Scotus, are skeptical about whether human actions and ritual have non-instrumental significance. These issues in moral philosophy and moral theology are linked. They relate to why theologians, for whom participation is philosophically indispensable, claim that natural law and the entire decalogue relate essentially and indefeasibly to God and thus to our supernatural end.¹²³

6.2 Common Goods

Aquinas argues that God as self-subsisting *esse* contains all perfections without any composition or potency whatsoever.¹²⁴ God communicates these perfections to created natures.¹²⁵ However, God as first cause does not stand to creation as a

¹²¹ Adams 1989b, 158. See also Burrell 2001, 214.

¹²² Burrell 2001, 214. See also Chisholm 2003, 28; Burrell 2004, 145-51; McCabe 1980b, 457.

¹²³ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.98.5; *ibid.*, 100.2, 6, 8.

¹²⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.2.

¹²⁵ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.3, 6.4, 44.1-4, 47.1.

univocal cause to effect but as an analogical cause.¹²⁶ Thus each creature insofar as it acts according to its nature is a natural but imperfect sign of the divine wisdom.¹²⁷ The order and harmony of the entire creation images God more perfectly than any one created nature, and this partially explains creation's diversity and hierarchies.¹²⁸

In observing the decalogue and natural law we give natural social hierarchies and thus the divine perfection they image their due.¹²⁹ These ideas along with the theological correction of Aristotle, that the very being of humans is "to-be-related", illuminate certain Thomist criticisms of modern individualist philosophies. For instance, MacIntyre thinks the concept "individuals-as-such" is a fiction—an artifact of the modern search for a context-neutral morality—and that "individuals-in-social-relationships" is the proper subject of practical rationality.¹³⁰ He understands the true common good of humans as that "of a kind of community in which each individual achievement of her of his own good is inseparable both from achieving the shared goods of practices and from contributing to the common good of the community as a whole."¹³¹ The passage does not discuss Aquinas but it resembles arguments of Thomas in *secunda secundae*, questions 26 and 101, and Jacques Maritain in *The Person and the Common Good*.¹³² In an essay on natural law that acknowledges this debt to Aquinas and Maritain, MacIntyre argues that society is "primarily constituted as a web of familial and communal relationships" rather than "a set of individuals to each of whom everyone else is an 'other'."¹³³ This Thomist conception of social life helps explain Eleonore Stump's argument that Aquinas avoids rendering justice an impersonal virtue that requires supplement by an ethics of care.¹³⁴

¹²⁶ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.3, 6.2

¹²⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.3ad1, 14.8ad3, 44.3.

¹²⁸ Aquinas *ST* 1.11.3; *ibid.*, 1.44.1, 3; *ibid.*, 1.47.1-3.

¹²⁹ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.100.6, 8.

¹³⁰ MacIntyre 1998b, 242.

¹³¹ MacIntyre 1998b, 240-41. MacIntyre (*ibid.*, 243-52) is not a communitarian given that he thinks liberal democracy cannot be reformed.

¹³² Maritain 1966.

¹³³ MacIntyre 2000, 108-109, 111. See also Pickstock 1998, 135-58.

¹³⁴ Stump 1997. It is also the erosion of this scheme in practical life that causes her (*ibid.*, 74) to declare that its "implementation is virtually inconceivable in the world as we know it."

Adams writes that for Ockham the common good is a function of the goods of individuals (presumably he would deny the converse), and given the “desideratum of personal liberty” authorities have no legitimate part in the project of individual perfection except in maintaining sufficient social order for individuals to pursue their own perfection.¹³⁵ Scotus’s rejection of imitability relations and reworking of Anselm’s *affectiones commodi et iustitiae* plant the seeds of Ockham’s individualism and arguably of modernity.¹³⁶ Adams states Scotus’s understanding of the common good less directly than that of Ockham. Scotus views non-positive morality in terms of competition between our obligations to created goods: “Since not all finite goods are mutually compatible, there can always be a reason against loving any finite good” from which it follows that “there is no unconditional obligation for any agent to love any finite good.”¹³⁷ Either we love or do not love things, and one’s obligation to one good must be sacrificed for another where goods are mutually exclusive.¹³⁸ Aquinas agrees that goods compete in the sense that there is a hierarchy of value. But to articulate his view of natural law adequately we need the concept of desert and not only of obligation. Desert is important because it allows for hierarchy without sacrifice. To love the greater good more than the lesser is to give each its due and to love the lesser good more than the greater is to do an injustice to both.

Consider *secunda secundae*, questions 26 and 101, which treat the order of charity and the connected virtue of piety. Aquinas says piety is a special aspect of justice and the virtue whereby we render our parents, kinfolk, and countrymen their due.¹³⁹ As a connected virtue, piety also is the aspect of charity whereby we give kin and countrymen their due because we love them for God’s sake.¹⁴⁰ Aquinas’s article on competition between religious vocation and provision for one’s parents presents an illuminating contrast with Scotus.¹⁴¹ Religion and filial piety are both virtues

¹³⁵ Adams 1990b, 17.

¹³⁶ MacIntyre 1991, 155; Pickstock 1998, 135; Burrell 2001, 216.

¹³⁷ Adams 1987a, 488.

¹³⁸ See Wolter and Frank 1997, 18, 21, 26.

¹³⁹ Aquinas *ST* 2-2.101.3.

¹⁴⁰ Aquinas *ST* 2-2.101.3ad1-2.

¹⁴¹ Aquinas *ST* 2-2.101.4. See also *ibid.*, 2-2.122.5, 189.6.

where the former directs us to God and the latter directs us to our kin and country. Aquinas insists that virtue cannot oppose virtue because as Aristotle teaches good cannot oppose good. He also recognizes that scripture both prioritizes the kingdom over family (e.g., Mt. 10:34-39; Lk. 14:25-27) and condemns the neglect of one's family for the sake of religion or otherwise (Mk. 7:9-13; 1 Tm. 5:8).

The circumstances relevant to the conflict are whether one's parents have other means of support, one has already entered religious life, and one's parents demand not only support but also the abandonment of God's service itself. Aquinas's ordeal in entering the Dominican order surely colors the article. It is thus remarkable that he follows scripture's lead and argues religious vows do not release Christians from their debts to indigent parents and it would be a failure of piety for a person who had not taken religious vows to do so if his parents lacked other means of support. Knowingly to abandon poor, dependent parents for religious life is also to tempt God, which is a failure of religion or to act in justice and charity to God.¹⁴² A person who takes vows anyway and sins or whose parents become destitute only afterwards owes his parents whatever support is appropriate given his debts of obedience, poverty, and service of God.¹⁴³ So Aquinas did not wrong his family by becoming a Dominican. His parents had no legitimate demands for support given their wealth and other offspring, and their attempt to coerce him specifically to forgo his Dominican vocation was illegitimate. Had Thomas complied with his family's demands, then he would have failed to correct their idolatry and thus to give them their due and to exercise charity in directing them to God.¹⁴⁴ In these circumstances, compliance would also have been a failure to exercise charity to himself.¹⁴⁵ Though circumstances appear to create an exception to the command to honor one's parents, the appropriate act is actually a paradigm example of fulfilling that command.

Desert provides flexibility that allows apparently competing obligations to be simultaneously satisfied. Notice how Aquinas's analysis of potential conflicts in

¹⁴² Aquinas *ST* 2-2. 101.4ad4. See also *ibid.*, 2-2.97.

¹⁴³ Aquinas *ST* 2-2.101.4ad4. Aquinas (*ST* 2-2.187.2co., 189.6ad1) considers petitionary prayer and commerce governed by charity to be among the legitimate solutions

¹⁴⁴ Aquinas *ST* 2-2. 25.1, 33.1-4.

¹⁴⁵ Aquinas *ST* 2-2.25.4-5.

entering religion makes explicit and implicit appeal to a metaphysical hierarchy of hierarchies wherein human relationships to God and selves and others are prime constituents. The tendency to discuss morality in terms of obligations alone, to render morality procedural and desert derivative from obligation, is characteristic of moral philosophies that attenuate or dismiss teleology.¹⁴⁶ So it is no surprise that the Franciscans and modern day expositors such as Wolter or Adams for whom there “can always be a reason against loving any finite good” would articulate morality in terms of mutually exclusive obligations apart from and conceptually prior to desert. I suspect that Scotus’s *affectio iustitiae* would render particulars such as kinship relations irrelevant to what is a human and morality consequently more prone to conflict and sacrifice. The particularities that could structure and prioritize our lives become irrelevant—both bales of hay appear equal in quality and distance—and the structure of our choosing must be imposed through choice itself.

On Aquinas’s account, circumstances determine whether a given act accords with the mean of virtue but circumstances never revoke genuine moral obligations.¹⁴⁷ The distinction between negative and affirmative precepts is key to the relationship of virtue and law he articulates. Certain sorts of actions without exception preclude a life ordered by the virtues.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, the natural law’s negative precepts are the beginning, and only the beginning, of our education in the virtues.¹⁴⁹ Affirmative precepts point to how we become perfect in virtue, which centrally involves giving each their due.¹⁵⁰ The key affirmative precepts are the commands to love God and neighbor which derive from their first principle God, and the decalogue’s negative precepts are directed to those affirmative precepts and to God.¹⁵¹ Now what a person deserves varies between different degrees of relation and sorts of community and other circumstances.¹⁵² This ineliminable diversity of circumstance is why Aquinas

¹⁴⁶ MacIntyre 1984, 52-57, 118-19, 148-55, 232-33, 250.

¹⁴⁷ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.7.2ad3, 18.3.

¹⁴⁸ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.100.2co., 2-2.122.6ad1.

¹⁴⁹ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.100.9ad2.

¹⁵⁰ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.100.2, 2-2.122.6.

¹⁵¹ Aquinas *ST* 2-2. 26.1, 44.1-2.

¹⁵² Aquinas *ST* 1-2.100.2co., 2-2.122.6ad1.

reasons that the second table of the decalogue does not include affirmative precepts but those teachings are treated as matters of judgment.¹⁵³ McCabe uses an apt analogy from football.¹⁵⁴ There are basic rules that remain exceptionless during a match such as players other than the goal keeper cannot touch the ball with their hands during play except in circumstances such as throw-ins. There are also goods that give the game its point such as scoring on the other team, preventing the other team from scoring, and outscoring the other team. The latter governs in part what is good and bad football. The former governs what is football and what is not. The circumstances may suggest that my teammate should pass the ball to me and I should immediately return it to him just further ahead on his path. But they would never make it appropriate for me to pick up and carry the ball into the opposing team's goal and not just because it would result in a penalty. (Rules can be changed outside the match but there are limits to how much change can occur before we are no longer playing football but rather, say, piano.) So we can delimit what one may not do with the ball in a way we cannot delimit what one may do with the ball. Other examples abound: essay requirements and prohibitions against plagiarism perform different functions needed to achieve and sustain the good specific to communal study, etc. McCabe and other ethical naturalists argue that morality is the activity of being human, broadly speaking, and our nature sets boundaries and goals by which we are adjudged good and bad humans or inhuman and naughty.

Scotus, Hume, and Adams, argue on different grounds that circumstances can create exceptions to obligations. The preceding discussion suggests a common analysis of their reasons for rejecting the rationalist accounts of Aquinas and those like him. For whether genuine moral obligations admit of exceptions involves the interrelationship of goods, virtues, and rules.¹⁵⁵ The issue is very much the same with moral dilemmas, which are a more dramatic species of the conflicts between goods that Scotus analyzes. MacIntyre writes, "Where we stand on issues of large-scale moral theory . . . will determine our characterizations of the relevant facts concerning

¹⁵³ Scotus (*Ord.* 3supp.37 [Wolter and Frank 1997, 198-207]) apparently rejects affirmative precepts as being part of natural law, strictly speaking, because it does not follow deductively from the commandment not to hate God.

¹⁵⁴ McCabe 2002, 192-93.

¹⁵⁵ MacIntyre 1998a, 142-44.

moral dilemmas.”¹⁵⁶ From one set of necessarily theory-laden characterizations we may conclude that a given set of moral rules are incompatible and at least one must yield in theory or in practice. The theoretical perspectives of Scotus, Hume, and Adams have this result: they diminish teleology, desert, and hierarchies such as kinship relations; and they often characterize virtues and justice in terms of negative precepts rather than in terms of affirmative precepts. An alternative set of characterizations may lead us to conclude that moral dilemmas are not a conflict of goods and rules *simpliciter* but *secundum quid* as Aquinas does about religious life and filial piety.¹⁵⁷ According to the *secunda pars*, moral inconsistency is a property of agents and their prior offenses or ignorance rather than of the teleological scheme of goods, virtues, and rules, to which Christian and Aristotelian traditions lead.¹⁵⁸ So Adams’s top-down argument for second-order moral skepticism does not furnish what Augustine or Aquinas would recognize as a good reason for rejecting the realist moral philosophies they receive and develop.

6.3 Utopia and Convention

I shall conclude these remarks by discussing Adams’s claims about how non-positive and positive morality relate. I have argued that Adams resembles Hume in maintaining that humans would not need morality in a utopian environment because they would experience neither a mismatch between our constituent personal and animal natures nor scarcity in our environments. She says that virtues are a means to an end for John Cassian and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, and building empathetic capacity in a purgatory-like setting is sufficient to rehabilitate Adolf Hitler. Hume likewise claims that natural virtue or fellow-feeling is sufficient apart from justice in ideal situations. These ideas terminate in Adams’s claim that humans have invented morality and that other value systems have come and gone from the world of humans with changes in our social organization.¹⁵⁹ Again Hume.

In writings on theodicy from 1991 to 2002, Adams follows Scotus and Ockham in thinking that “finite beings” cannot do or be anything in themselves that is

¹⁵⁶ MacIntyre 1990, 382. But see the criticism of Kerr (1995) regarding tragic dilemmas.

¹⁵⁷ MacIntyre 1990, 378-82.

¹⁵⁸ MacIntyre 1990, 379.

¹⁵⁹ Adams 1999c, 61, 192

“worthy of” or “naturally suited to honor” God.¹⁶⁰ In “Sin as Uncleaness”, she says divine fiat creates conventions that enable relationships with creatures. She compares this to how reserve banks confer stipulative, contractual value on “relatively worthless paper.”¹⁶¹ Likewise in her essay “Ockham: Voluntarist or Naturalist”, Adams compares the Oxford Franciscans’ position on positive morality to “the way commercial value of metal or paper is fixed by government decree.”¹⁶² Her comment in “Sin as Uncleaness” clearly has in mind the great Franciscans on merit.

Now historic Christianity holds that material privation will cease in beatitude. However, justice has both a material and formal aspect, and this is why one can give another their due regardless of scarcity or plenitude. Aquinas makes this distinction and argues that the order of charity and the cardinal virtues will remain and become formally perfect in the saved.¹⁶³ Insofar as Aquinas and other traditional Christians believe order and justice are perfections identical with the divine nature, it makes sense that they would think the order of giving and receiving what one is due (and more than one is due) should continue in heaven.¹⁶⁴ He would grant Adams’s objection in part and deny it in part.

Teresa of Calcutta’s self-reports are not entirely important on this point. Like Adams, Teresa may have mistakenly believed “virtue theory[’s] concern about . . . becoming a fine human being” and being a “beloved daughter returning love’s initiative” are mutually exclusive rather than the former being ordered to the latter.¹⁶⁵ Aquinas, who is a student of Augustine and Aristotle, thinks rational creatures cannot understand and reciprocate Love’s initiative unless the order of charity informs them. Adams also reports that “virtue, even purity of heart, are only skillful *means* to the

¹⁶⁰ Adams 1991c, 21; Adams 2002b, 219-20.

¹⁶¹ Adams 1991c, 21: “Immutable as the ontological incommensuration itself is, the resultant *formal* obstacles to relationships can be easily overcome by Divine fiat: just as governments confer value on relatively worthless paper through legislation stipulating a value-equivalence to silver and gold; so God . . . can simply count finite creatures as valuable by loving them, declare *ex officio* certain conditions and deeds of creatures to be honorific of Him. The result is to create . . . a “*stipulative*” or “*statutory*” contrast among created beings and doings between what is sinful and what is worthy and acceptable and righteous in God’s sight.”

¹⁶² Adams 1987d, 243.

¹⁶³ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.67, 2-2.26.13.

¹⁶⁴ Aquinas *ST* 1.4.2, 21.1

¹⁶⁵ Adams 1999c, 193.

end of wholesome relationships, beatific intimacy, and life together” according to Cassian.¹⁶⁶ This is true insofar as a teleological hierarchy obtains of (i) negative precepts to affirmative precepts to the first principle and of (ii) natural law to the eternal law. However, her language obscures how the virtues are constitutive of the common life that she and Cassian desire. Consider an analogy. In football, theoretical learning about what actions are prohibited and practical learning about ball control, passing, and so forth, are only proximate ends. But they are constitutive of good play, such that we cannot characterize a good football player or a good match apart from them. Adams’s counterexamples err. One explanation is they read modern ethical theories into ancient and medieval theories of the virtues. She misleadingly suggests that Aristotelian ethics recommend the virtues as means to “follow the rules, perform our obligations, . . . [and] compil[e] virtuoso moral records.”¹⁶⁷ This resembles Hume and other modern philosophers who think the virtues are “dispositions to obey the rules of justice,” which are construed in terms of negative precepts.¹⁶⁸

As a traditional Christian, Aquinas would agree in part and disagree in part with Adams about worthiness and positive morality. He insists that devotion to God does God no favors.¹⁶⁹ Grace is a sheer gift. Aquinas affirms the Aristotelian argument that every effect must be contained in its cause, and therefore an effect cannot exceed its cause.¹⁷⁰ From this he then infers theologically that nothing natural can prepare us for or compel the bestowal of the Holy Spirit through whom we share in the divine life.¹⁷¹ The “antidote to Pelagianism” for Aquinas is not that “the whole system of eternal rewards and punishments is entirely a product of God’s free and contingent volitions” as it is for Ockham.¹⁷² Rather, Pelagianism is a mistake about what creatures are and what God is not. Ockham requires a solution such as the one he proposes because he rejects participation metaphysics.

¹⁶⁶ Adams 2002b, 225; emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁷ Adams 2002b, 225.

¹⁶⁸ MacIntyre 1984, 232.

¹⁶⁹ Aquinas *ST* 2-2.81.7.

¹⁷⁰ Aquinas *ST* 1.2.3, 4.2, 13.2.

¹⁷¹ Aquinas *ST* 1-2.109.6, 112.1-2

¹⁷² Adams 1987d, 244.

However, Aquinas argues that human minds need to use corporeal things as signs of the spiritual realities whereby God unites us to the divine nature.¹⁷³ We can gloss his point in terms of humans naturally being appraisers of things. We are taught from an early age to distinguish bad from good and better from best. Of the good and the best, we celebrate them in poetry, song, dance, meals, oratory, arguments, plays, jokes, pictures and sculpture, and through prioritizing our activities. Neither the form nor the object of this celebration needs be explicitly Christian. Activities such as seasonal harvests, childbirth, marriage, graduation, and baseball, and objects such as wine and suspension bridges, are goods that modern secular communities and non-Christian faiths rightly pursue and celebrate. The Abrahamic faiths should not condemn such pursuits and celebrations, because in their proper order those activities are constitutive of being human. Kerr repeats Wittgenstein's apt remark that we are "ceremonious animals."¹⁷⁴ However, the Abrahamic faiths do condemn failures to render celebration and thanks unto God (Rom. 1:20-21) as foolishness and sin. A common objection is this argument renders God comically self-involved. The prophets and apostles reply that God is an incomparable good (Is. 40) and the good that makes every other thing good (Acts 17:22-31). It is ignorant or farcical to laud and organize one's life around Belgian abbey beers, music groups such as the Grateful Dead, television situation comedies, weekend fishing trips, property investments, and backyard gardens, but to deny such of the Creator.

MacIntyre comments that William Robertson Smith failed to recognize that "all systematic relationships of human to human or of human to divine are and cannot but be ritualized and routinized by means of contingent materials whose use is always arbitrary relative to the nature of those materials themselves."¹⁷⁵ Adams lapses into a related mistake with the Oxford Franciscans. She asks rhetorically, given our finitude and God's infinity, "How could any created person not hide his/her face when confronted with the fact that s/he is not even the kind of thing that could respond to God appropriately (any more than a ladybug is capable of an

¹⁷³ Aquinas *ST* 2-2.81.7.

¹⁷⁴ Kerr 1997, 160; quoting Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*.

¹⁷⁵ MacIntyre 1991, 180.

appropriate response to human beings)?”¹⁷⁶ Likewise, she asserts that “because of the size gap nothing we could be or do could count—simply by virtue of what it is—as an appropriate move in relation to God, any more than a worm’s wiggling to the right could be intrinsically more respectful of humans than its wiggling to the left.”¹⁷⁷

These statements conflate arbitrariness and indifference. In a sermon on prayer, McCabe notes that given the mystery God is, what we pray is not so important as that we pray, though this does not preclude there being ways of talking to God that are illegitimate and blasphemous.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, if I approach an opponent’s undefended net, whether I strike the ball myself or pass it to my teammate running alongside is a matter of judgment, but to pick the ball up and throw it into the net is not. In contrast, Adams renders everything devotional and liturgical a matter of indifference and divine fiat. As she indicates with her ladybug and worm examples and her phrase that we would rightly hide our faces due to our “ontological shame,” the phrase ‘not appropriately’ means both ‘not meritorious’ and ‘not fitting’.¹⁷⁹ Adams takes this position due to her respect for Scotus and Ockham. They argue the relationship of creature to God is wholly voluntary and contingent because they reject participation metaphysics—and this move renders the relation of creatures to God external or posterior to the *relata*—but still need to hold theologically that God owes creatures nothing and creatures cannot act as efficient causes on God.

When backing off her worm analogy under pressure from Rogers, Adams affirms imitability relations. This undercuts her argument except for the aspect with which Anselm and Aquinas would agree: a perfectly virtuous human is not “intrinsically and naturally fit to enter the courts of the Lord” which is to say neither “compelling” nor having any “claim.”¹⁸⁰ The “paper” of human ritual and morality is no more “worthless” than the water Jesus turns into wine is worthless. It is fitting—in the sense of *conveniens* between necessity and contingency which Denys Turner seeks to recover—that God takes up central aspects of ordinary humanity into the

¹⁷⁶ Adams 1992f, 279-80.

¹⁷⁷ Adams 1999c, 95.

¹⁷⁸ McCabe 2002, 215-18.

¹⁷⁹ Adams 1992f, 280.

¹⁸⁰ Adams 2002b, 220.

sacramental mysteries.¹⁸¹ For if we are conversations and ceremonious animals, if mentalist-individualist philosophies are a mistake, then we have no union with God without our social and thus bodily existence being divinized.

7. Conclusion

Marilyn Adams contends that moral value theory, construed broadly, is an inadequate framework for explaining how horrific individual suffering is a problem and how God might go about being good to individuals involved in that suffering. She proposes several alternatives to morality. The alternative in which she works out her developmental anthropology holds that sin is not rebellion. Sin is natural incompetence and metaphysical uncleanness. I distinguished two lines of arguments in her alternative: Adams argues that sin and morality are separate and that morality is not objectively grounded. I then spent the majority of my time on the latter second-order criticism which itself has a bottom-up and a top-down formulations.

The bottom-up criticism is that empirical psychology teaches that humans are developmental beings rather than the ideal agents that morality usually presupposes. In non-ideal environments and under the care of non-ideal choosers, humans form maladaptive habits and are vulnerable to horrendous evils. Our biology tends to overwhelm our personality. The upshot is that morality is a scheme created by non-ideal agents for non-ideal agents with the mere pragmatic purposes of overcoming our maladaptive, antisocial habits and enabling us to survive in an environment of scarcity. In a utopian environment such as heaven, morality and the virtues would be superfluous; but for now there is no better substitute for an ethics of justice and that pragmatic status in no way releases us from our rights and obligations.

The top-down criticism derives from Scotus and Ockham who argue that human natural goodness is finite and so has no necessary claim on God's love. It follows that the decalogue in one or both tables is dispensable and humans have no relationship with God apart from divine fiat. This explains why teleology and morality never penetrate to a normative core as Adams argues in her treatment of the purity calculus as well as her interactionist psychological account.

¹⁸¹ Turner 2004.

I argue that Adams second-order moral skepticism from empirical psychology is deeply indebted to David Hume even if it is inadvertently. Both thinkers take scarcity and selfishness as key premises in their moral philosophies and they develop similar accounts of the purposes, limits, and legitimacy of morality and justice. I also pointed out Adams's resemblance to Mackie's Neo-Humean moral skepticism and to researchers in moral psychology who explicitly acknowledge their debt to Hume and the moral sentimentalists. This deflates Adams's claim that her empirical moral theory is not theory-laden whereas her opponents espouse *a priori* moralities. On brief inspection, psychological and neuroscientific research on moral psychology does not preempt the difficulties of philosophical disagreement. Even if Adams is correct, her readers have little reason to accept her summary as establishing that no human moral system has objective grounds. Were she to lay out her case from modern psychology and perhaps in conversation with Hume, one of the greatest modern philosophers, her readers would be in a better position to cast judgment.

The balance of my argument compares the moral theories of Christian Platonists such as Augustine and Aquinas and the Franciscan Aristotelians Scotus and Ockham. I argue that Adams is inconsistent in how she blends the former with the latter. For she is skeptical about incompatibilist freedom and she asserts that creatures are constituted by imitability relations with God. I argue that these admissions, given Scotus's *via eminentiae*, undermine the Franciscan Aristotelian understanding of divine freedom. I also argue that the Augustinian and Thomist interpretation of participation metaphysics entails that natural goodness cannot become something God can hate or to which God can be indifferent. For all creaturely goodness is participated goodness and all the major medieval theologians except perhaps Ockham (given his views about the decalogue's first table) hold that God must give his goodness what it deserves. I sketch the implications of the Christian Platonist argument regarding the common good, desert, natural law, virtues, and so forth. This illustrates both the theoretical instability that Adams's admissions generate and, arguably, a powerful and more consistent ethical alternative to Adams and her conversation partners. Given her insistence on a top-down natural theology these consequences for value theory are all the more significant.

CONCLUSION

MEDIEVAL AND MODERN APPROACHES TO THEODICY

1. Introduction

Writers who draw upon the material conclusions of medieval thinkers to address contemporary debates in philosophical theology do not always explain how their colleagues without such inclinations should receive such projects. What do medieval philosopher theologians have to teach modern persons about God and evil? It is a serious question, and I aim to answer it in two stages. I shall summarize Marilyn McCord Adams's project on theodicy and my points of agreement and disagreement with her. I shall then address the more general question of how medieval resources can be profitably appropriated within contemporary treatments of God and evil.

2. Summary of Argument

Although Professor Adams intends her work on theodicy to be relevant to a broad discussion, her critical arguments begin with the narrower debate on evil in Anglo-American analytic philosophy of religion: e.g., the contributions of John Hick, J. L. Mackie, Alvin Plantinga, Nelson Pike, William Rowe, and Roderick Chisholm.¹ In *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, Adams summarizes the problems with those debates in terms of the overly abstract manner in which such philosophers approached God and evil.² Their informal methodological consensus restricted the discussion to religion-neutral metaphysics and to commonplace moral value theories.

These analytic philosophers also want to address the rationality of persons who are outside of academic circles. However, Adams argues that their discussion has limited relevance to the God of historic Christianity. As Rowe states, analytic philosophers of religion mostly focus on 'restricted standard theism' or belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent creator as opposed to an 'expanded theism'

¹ Adams 1999c, 3-4.

² Adams 1999c, 3; see also *ibid.*, 7-31. She first articulated these ideas in "Problems of Evil" (Adams 1988a).

which includes more particular theological content such as Christology. She also criticizes the standard treatments for sidestepping horrific suffering, which to worshippers is arguably the most troubling evil. Adams argues that these problems undercut the theoretical agreements that using thin conceptual resources helped philosophers to achieve. Moreover, she argues that classical foundationalism's collapse and the acceptance of pluralism in metaphysics and value theory entails that there is no neutral way to frame a singular 'problem' of evil. There are many 'problems' of evil. To grasp the originality and import of Adams's criticisms, consider Richard Swinburne's contrasting assessment of how Plantinga's Free Will Defense altered the debate on God and evil: "It seems to be generally agreed by atheists as well as theists that what is called 'the logical problem of evil' has been eliminated, and all that remains is 'the evidential problem'."³ I think Adams's criticisms are well taken.

I shall use three of Adams's ideas to distill my dissertation: her idea of rival problems of evil, her occasional distinction between top-down and bottom-up approaches to philosophy and theology (as ends of spectrum rather than as a binary opposition), and her more frequent distinction between incommensurate and commensurate goods and evils. With them I shall contrast the standard treatments of God and evil in analytic philosophy, Adams's project, and my discussion of both.

The standard analytic treatments of evil follow David Hume and J. S. Mill and "begin from below": they construe God on the model of human agency where personhood necessarily entangles God in a network of mutual rights and obligations with other persons including humans.⁴ Adams argues there are "honorable" traditions that instead "started at the top" with ideas about divine transcendence that deny the One God is personal and a moral agent (rooted in Plato) or only deny the One God is a moral agent (such as Anselm and Ockham).⁵ Adams associates Paul Tillich with the former branch.⁶ Resembling the latter branch, Adams describes the divine nature

³ Swinburne 1998, 20fn.13. See also: Rowe 1979, 335fn.1; Wykstra 1984, 91; Alston 1996, 97, 113.

⁴ Adams 1999c, 10-11, 64.

⁵ Adams 1999c, 64.

⁶ Adams 1999c, 64-66.

in terms of “incommensurate goodness” which she associates with “classical theology” in *Horrendous Evils*.⁷ In her DuBose Lectures, she advocates describing God in terms of a “personified metaphysical size gap” which she connects more explicitly to “mainstream medieval” thinkers from Anselm to Ockham.⁸ However, she makes the qualification that God may be voluntarily subject to suffering and this may help redeem human suffering.⁹ Here she learns from recent thinkers such as C. E. Rolt, Richard Creel, Charles Hartshorne, and Jürgen Moltmann.

Mackie’s ‘logical problem of evil’ and the replies of Plantinga and others construe evil in a relatively top-down fashion where moral evil (i.e., freely rebelling against God or refusing the good) is the root of all evil and natural evil and suffering are secondary. Many think libertarian human freedom is necessary for moral good and evil and thus conceive of humans, as Chisholm does in his 1964 Lindley Lecture, as near-divine first causes of their own actions.¹⁰ Classic texts such as Augustine’s *De Libero Arbitrio* encourage or even require a moralist approach to God and evil.¹¹ Adams likewise notes in *Horrendous Evils* that a focus on “sin and disordered human agency” is characteristic of “ancient and medieval” writers, while “writers from Hume onwards have shifted the spotlight back onto personal pain and suffering”.¹² The top-down and bottom-up approaches to evil compete insofar as a focus on sin caused “classical theologians” to “give suffering short shrift” as “educational” or as a secondary, “punitive consequence” of moral evil.¹³ Adams argues that horrendous evils shift the debate from top-down theories of evil because moral frameworks cannot account for why horrors are so bad or how they might be remedied. Modern psychology and a proper understanding of divine transcendence furnish further reasons for doubting morality’s transcendental roots and thus its importance to theodicy. She contends that centering value on God’s incommensurate metaphysical

⁷ Adams 1999c, 82-85.

⁸ Adams 2004b, 132.

⁹ Adams 1999c, 83-85, 168-69.

¹⁰ Chisholm 2003, 26.

¹¹ Adams 1988c, 240n.2; Adams 1993b, 184n.18.

¹² Adams 1999c, 3.

¹³ Adams 1999c, 83.

goodness and on subordinate, non-moral value theories (e.g., purity, honor, aesthetics) better explains the root of and remedy to horrors.

Adams uses the term ‘size-gap’ and ‘incommensurate’ to articulate how God and extreme suffering differ in kind rather than in degree from ordinary goods and evils. Moral rubrics mislead philosophers into viewing God, humans, and evil, as only different in degree. In her DuBose Lectures, Adams expresses appreciation for how medieval and classical theologians developed a rich and rigorous top-down language for how God is the beginning and end of creaturely perfections yet there are no fully adequate creaturely models for the divine nature. For divine goodness explains and yet exceeds the goodness of any individual creaturely nature or any set of such natures (including the set of the entire possible or actual created order). Broadly speaking, top-down philosophies make what is more excellent prior in value, explanation, and being, to what is less excellent: intelligibles are prior to sensibles, agents are prior to events, and natures are prior to their constituents. Adams grounds her theodicy’s central claim that only divine incommensurate goodness can defeat any and all evils in an Anselmian version of these metaphysical claims in her reply to Rogers and in a broadly medieval version in her DuBose Lectures.¹⁴ Horrors are incommensurate on Adams’s account insofar as some evils devastate the psycho-biological unity of participants but the addition of an ordinary good cannot restore such unity. Horrors are non-additive evils in a similar sense to how God is a non-additive good. However, on her account horrors occur irrespective of humans having near-divine libertarian freedom or deserving moral praise or blame.

My dissertation largely concurs with Adams about interpreting God in a top-down manner, but I press two main criticisms of her project. First, I argue that Adams too often essentializes and therefore oversimplifies the metaphysics and value theories she discusses. On metaphysics, I point to the division that her medievalist writings posit between Platonist and Anti-Platonist medieval thinkers. Her appeal to a “mainstream medieval” interpretation of divine incommensuration from “Problems of Evil” (1988) to “The Metaphysical Size Gap” (2004) falls short of the ideal of *fides quaerens intellectum* that her philosophical theology adopts. For understanding requires explanation, and the goal of explanation requires her to choose a particular

¹⁴ Adams 2002b, 216-17; Adams 2004b.

theory if there are indeed several medieval theories of divine transcendence with incompatible premises and entailments. On value theory, her first-order criticism of morality is highly leveraged because she tells a story of the collective failure of ‘moralist’ approaches where Augustine is paradigmatic. I respond that there are many incompatible moral theories and Augustine’s difficulties do not obviously implicate Plantinga or any other major analytic philosopher of religion. Additionally, while her first-order criticisms, which focus on pain experience and empathy, apply to Humean moral theories her criticisms have little application to Augustine’s focus on eternal law and natural order. Adams contends that morality is not relevant where the subject is incommensurable (e.g., God and horrendous evils), but her first-order criticisms establish this only for medieval and modern thinkers who agree with her somewhat Humean conception of morality. Adams’s treatments of natural theology and morality underplay how many rivals problems of evil there are despite her admonishment to analytic philosophers on exactly that point. My second major criticism is that some top-down natural theologies exert a strong influence on moral theory that brings it into a corresponding, top-down alignment and preserves its objectivity. Her second-order criticisms of morality are compatible with the relevance and objectivity of morals, or are not decisive, or can be shown false. My constructive contention is that God is not a moral agent but evil is rooted in moral agency. This approach, which Christian Platonists such as Augustine and Aquinas exemplify, avoids the problems that Adams attributes to Mackie and Plantinga. It also avoids the two major problems that I attribute to Adams’s project and the need for those revisions she contemplates to classical Christian doctrines.

In sum, the standard treatments of theodicy in analytic philosophy employ a bottom-up understanding of God and a top-down understanding of evil. Adams’s theodicy reverses this: she understands God top-down and horrendous evils bottom-up. She intends her argument to shift our attention to a problem of evil where God and horrors are incommensurate to ordinary goods and evils. She argues that this confronts us with the most perplexing evils and the only good that can overcome them. My thesis argues for a third view where God and evil are both understood top-down and where God is transcendent and, as a consequence, horrors are amenable to moral analyses.

My study of Adams has several limitations. First, I do not examine her constructive value theories (e.g., purity, honor, aesthetics) or theological theories (e.g., Chalcedonian Christology, divine passibility and solidarity with human sufferers). So even if Adams does not show that the very different moralist theodicies of classical theology or analytic philosophy fail internally, she may articulate a rival non-moralist theodicy whose explanatory power is far superior. Secondly, even if I represent the premises of Adams's theodicy correctly and I advance criticisms that are *prima facie* plausible, there are many ways that she could stabilize her project. (i) Adams could argue that the Platonist and Anti-Platonist divide on metaphysics and natural theology is solvable and that the resultant *prima facie* conflicts in value theory are not real. Her project only requires her second-order criticism of morality, so Adams could concede that her first-order criticisms from empathy and pain experience do not apply to Augustinian moralists. (ii) She could abandon any substantial use of medieval Platonists such as Anselm and instead approach natural theology and the metaphysics of morality from a more Scotist direction (with allowances for her moral pragmatism). (iii) She could abandon her appeals to "mainstream medieval" interpretations of divine transcendence and argue for a more modern and perhaps more bottom-up understanding of God and evil. I do little work to measure whether this proposal is plausible as a defense of Adams's major theses or as a rival family of theodicies. The reason for my reticence is practical: across all her writings on theodicy (and her larger corpus), Adams's cumulative commentary on figures such as Hartshorne and Moltmann is minor in length compared to that on Anselm, Scotus, and others. Whether Adams's general ideas about God and evil could be more firmly established on a framework that, say, Moltmann or Barth supplies remains a good question.

3. Medieval Lessons for Modern Thinkers

Hierarchical ontologies of natures and perfections, with the One God at the apex, were commonplace for medieval theologians even through fairly anti-Platonist thinkers such as William Ockham.¹⁵ However, the dominance of these metaphysical families ended several centuries ago. Platonist and Aristotelian philosophies lost

¹⁵ See Adams 1999d, 246-50.

credibility through a series of criticisms including, prominently, those of Locke and Kant. The metaphysics of natural kinds and their consequents remain much disputed today, for instance, in post-Quinean analytic philosophy.¹⁶ Nonetheless, realist ontologies of material objects and of possible worlds flourish in the same Anglo-American departments of philosophy.¹⁷ Now suppose that Adams's theodicy does appeal to medieval metaphysical theologies respecting divine transcendence and Christology but equivocates between incompatible medieval theories. Suppose further that Adams's first and second-order criticisms of moral theories miss their targets of Augustinian and analytic philosophies. What of value can modern readers appropriate from my criticisms of Adams and my constructive arguments which both regularly appeal to medieval ideas? For medieval metaphysical theologies appear to be non-starters, much like geocentric cosmologies, from which a commentator at best should rescue Adams. I shall argue that medieval ideas can make useful contributions to modern theodicies, but first I shall clarify my answer's framework.

3.1 Distinguishing Medieval and Modern

The labels 'medieval' and 'modern' function more adequately as guides to socio-historical location than to philosophical and theological theses. Calling Anselm of Canterbury and William Ockham medieval Latin thinkers and Bishop Butler and David Lewis modern Anglophone thinkers provides some useful information about where and when they did their work and orients inquiry about the discussants and cultural history that their respective writings reflect. The labels tell us much less about how to characterize their respective writings or how debates with each other might proceed because the thought of both periods was heterogeneous. For instance, in his introduction to *The Modern Theologians* (Blackwell 2005), David Ford states that theology since the Treaty of Versailles "has been immensely varied" including "fundamental differences about what theology is, what modernity is, and what Christianity is, and which questions within these areas are to be given priority"; thus "an integrating picture" of modern theology is impractical.¹⁸ His sketch gives readers some footholds on modern theology but the results are pluralist. Likewise, I have

¹⁶ Quine 1969; Putnam 1982.

¹⁷ Van Fraassen 2002, 4, 9-10.

¹⁸ Ford 2005, 1.

argued that phrases such as “mainstream medieval” are problematic.¹⁹ For though there is some unity between medieval theologians on the problematic (e.g., Nicene and Chalcedonian doctrine and Lombard’s *Sentences*) and authorities (e.g., scripture, Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm), there is no easy way to reconcile philosophically prominent Platonists and Anti-Platonists on natural theology and value theory.

In his introduction to *The Rise of Modern Philosophy* (Clarendon 1993), Tom Sorrell argues that the received view of modernity’s break from scholasticism is far too neat but the rejection of one or more elements of the prior scholastic focus on “natural kinds, forms, the four causes” is still “at the heart of a real intellectual opposition between many figures in the early seventeenth century.”²⁰ Similarly, I have argued that a negative approach to some ideas that medieval thinkers would reject is one way to understand ‘medieval’ family resemblances. However, I said a negative approach as not very useful for constructive philosophical theology. The same seems true of Sorrell’s suggestion. The rejection of some key features of scholasticism has historiographical value, but the intervening four-centuries of social history and accompanying debates prevent the negative definition from being a basis for constructing positive philosophical arguments.

I conclude that a plausible case for the relevance of medieval philosophical theology to modern theodicies will focus on particular thinkers rather than on a generalizable account. For how persuasive a theodicy with medieval interests may be to someone will vary depend on whether his conversation partner is a student of writers such Kant, Kierkegaard, Marx, Wittgenstein, or Quine, each of whom has generated multiple readings. Adams anticipates this outcome when she argues in “Problems of Evil” and *Horrendous Evils* that incompatible metaphysical and value premises generate different problems of evil. Absent the ability to compose a general account of how medieval and modern theodicies may relate, I shall narrow my attention to how medieval ideas and analytic philosophy may relate.

3.2 From Logical Positivism to Analytical Thomism

The outlook I am recommending conflicts noticeably with classical medieval and modern thinkers who on the whole were not skeptics. They thought that if inquirers

¹⁹ Adams 1988c, 134; Adams 2004b, 132.

²⁰ Sorrell 1993, 11.

had the right tools and education then consensus on core philosophical issues was achievable. Skepticism was a result of errors. The interest in medieval ideas of some distinguished Anglo-American philosophers follows partly from the pessimism about reaching a consensus. The arguments of postwar analytic philosophers for why logical positivism and classical foundationalism failed rationally seem to leave room for pre-modern philosophies to reassert themselves.

Standing at the forefront of this transition is W. V. O. Quine's article "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951), which criticizes the Kantian analytic-synthetic distinction. (Analytic truths are independent of matters of fact and synthetic truths are grounded in fact.) Quine argues that accounts of analyticity are inevitably, viciously circular. He also argues that experience does not impinge on singular statements but on entire frameworks such that every constituent statement can be held true or revised depending on which other statements we hold true or revise. It follows that analytic and synthetic statements are different in degree rather than in kind. Quine then discusses his criticism's wider implications:

As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries—not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. Let me interject that for my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience. . . . Each man is given a scientific heritage plus a continuing barrage of sensory stimulation; and the considerations which guide him in warping his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings are, where rational, pragmatic.²¹

Affirmations of epistemological or ontological pragmatism are commonplace among recent analytic philosophers. However, most philosophers, like Quine, do not think such pragmatism is salutary for medieval metaphysical theologies any more than it is for the Milesian first principles of water or air. Indeed, many analytic philosophers still think that the logical positivists were correct that there is no God regardless of

²¹ Quine 1951, 40-41, 43.

the failure of the verificationist objection to theology (i.e., talk about metaphysics and God cannot be empirically verified and thus is not false but meaningless).²² Nevertheless, the postwar criticisms of radical empiricism left “heritage” or tradition as a measure of rationality internal to a problematic. Quine’s appeal to naturalism was persuasive to many analytic philosophers. However, for many others, the study of non-physical entities became acceptable again. The existences of Homeric deities or possible worlds or the Christian God are obvious scientific errors, as Quine suggests, only if the putative existents belong to the domain of physics.

Many Anglo-American Christian philosophers took positivism’s collapse as an opportunity to rethink philosophical matters from what they represented as a more distinctively Christian perspective.²³ For example, Alvin Plantinga has explored the value of John Calvin’s *sensus divinitatis* to an account of warranted belief in God.²⁴ Some of his colleagues have appropriated even older sources, as Adams notes:

In 1978, the founding of the Society of Christian Philosophers and the adoption of its motto, ‘*Fides quaerens intellectum*’ . . . challenged its members to reassess the relationship between faith and philosophy. The thoroughly secular atmosphere of mid-twentieth-century British-American analytic philosophy had fostered compartmentalization. It was natural for some of us to leapfrog back to the middle ages for alternative models.²⁵

Elsewhere she clarifies that those Christian philosophers turned to medieval thinkers because the legacy of Anglophone empiricism limited what metaphysical resources were legitimate, which in turn made integrating philosophy and orthodox theology impossible.²⁶ This provides background to some related statements in Anthony Kenny’s review of Eleonore Stump’s book *Aquinas* (Routledge 2003), which added to the important series *The Arguments of the Philosophers*. Kenny writes:

There is much to admire in Eleonore Stump’s book. It is a work of devotion and careful scholarship, and it takes great pains to relate Aquinas’ thought to contemporary currents of thought in American philosophy. . . . Stump is a more

²² Adams 1999b, 50.

²³ See Alvin Plantinga’s 1983 inaugural address as John A. O’Brien Professor of Philosophy at University of Notre Dame published as “Advice to Christian Philosophers” (1984) and Marilyn Adams’s related 1987 Presidential address at the Society of Christian Philosophers published as “More Advice to Christian Philosophers: Problems of Evil” (1988c).

²⁴ Plantinga 1984; Plantinga 2000, 172-86, 240-46, 330-347, 484-92.

²⁵ Adams 1995d, 13.

²⁶ Adams 1999b, 50, 54.

thoroughly committed Thomist than most recent writers have been. She is very unwilling to allow that he has got anything wrong, or that some of his views have been superannuated by the progress of science. Very rarely she rebukes him—for instance, for not accepting that the brain is the organ of the mind. Ironically, on this issue, I believe Aquinas is right and Stump is wrong.²⁷

Stump, who has delivered Gifford and Wilde Lectures, like Adams was a doctoral student of Norman Kretzmann at Cornell University. Kenny, who is a distinguished Aquinas scholar himself, casts Kretzmann as the scholar “more than anyone who has been responsible for the revival of interest in Aquinas in Anglophone universities.”²⁸

I noted in this study’s first chapter that there is some interest in thinkers such as Anselm and Scotus as well, but the largest group focuses on Aquinas. I also noted that the revival to which Kenny refers is documented in several places: symposia in *The Monist* (1997) and *New Blackfriars* (1999); and edited volumes such as *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretations* (SCM 2003), *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (SCM 2004), and *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue* (Ashgate 2006). Sympathetic scholars such as Fergus Kerr and John Haldane, writing on the roots and progress of such projects, admit that inquiry at the intersection of medieval metaphysical theology and constructive analytic philosophy is a minority enterprise although it is growing.²⁹

While my constructive use of medieval ideas also resembles some segments of Anglican theology and movements such as ‘Radical Orthodoxy’, the developments in postwar Anglophone philosophy that I have outlined constitute my study’s context.³⁰

3.3 Christian Platonism and Modern Theodicy

One plausible interpretation of this background is that the interest of some analytic philosophers in medieval ideas represents an overreaction. Christian analytic philosophers were isolated from developments in modern theology and positivists denied Christians even the respect of being told their belief in God is false. When released from those constraints, perhaps some simply latched onto the strong theological realism of the Magisterial Reformers or the Christian Platonists with little

²⁷ Kenny 2004, 458, 462.

²⁸ Kenny 2004, 457.

²⁹ Kerr 2004, 123-24; Kerr 2006, 167; Haldane 1999, 168-71; Paterson and Pugh 2006, xx.

³⁰ See Sedgwick 2005, 179-80; Milbank 2006, xi-xxxii.

regard to the intervening centuries of theological debate. Insofar as those older forms of Christian theology are rationally or spiritually inferior to their modern counterparts, religious analytic philosophers risk ‘re-inventing the wheel’. Adams recognizes this risk, but she concludes that medieval philosopher theologians may be useful mentors (see p. 40 above). She argues that studying the great medievals would give analytic philosophers methodological models for integrating philosophy and theology and historiographical pointers about why past Christians proscribed or avoided certain routes respecting Trinitarianism or Christology.³¹

A reader who is interested in modern theodicy can reframe the discussion in order to learn from movements such as Analytical Thomism even if he stands outside of them. First, rather than upbraiding Christian analytic philosophers for not realizing the advantages of a Schleiermacher, Barth, Moltmann, or Pannenberg, over an Aquinas or Calvin, a modern reader could allow that re-engaging historical theology is healthy even if the syllabus lacks adequate breadth. Secondly, a modern reader could interpret medieval theologians along the lines that Marie-Dominique Chenu and Hilary Putnam suggest where metaphysical theology is not an *a priori* enterprise but is subordinate to spirituality and experience.³² In his paper “Thoughts Addressed to an Analytical Thomist” (1999), for *The Monist* symposium, Putnam praises the arguments of Maimonides and Aquinas for the existence and unity of God. However, he is no neo-scholastic. Putnam writes, “For me the ‘proofs’ show conceptual connections of depth and significance, but they are not a foundation for my religious belief. . . . Nor are ‘proofs’ the way in which I would try to bring someone else to Judaism, or to religious belief of any kind.”³³ Metaphysical proofs, Aristotelian or otherwise, can act as a “trigger that released something deeper” in persons but the value is heuristic and instrumental rather than isomorphic and essential.³⁴ Putnam denies that religious language is commensurable with scientific language or reducible to some univocal form. Nonetheless, he argues that religious language can help sort out confusions and mistakes about what God is not. The notion to which he

³¹ Adams 1999b, 49-54.

³² Kerr 2006, 141-45; Putnam 1997.

³³ Putnam 1997, 490.

³⁴ Putnam 1997, 492.

gestures is indebted to Wittgenstein. It grounds religious meanings in religious ways of living. In how the religious adherent lives rather than just what she says, she discloses what God is. However, his view has more substance than some influential readings of Wittgenstein on religion. Putnam insists that the Neoplatonist concern with divine simplicity is legitimate even if their arguments are flawed.

Thirdly, a modern reader can on this basis reinterpret my conversation with Adams about divine transcendence as not centering on the details and relative merits of the Thomist *ens-essentia* and Scotist *essentia-existentia* distinctions and so forth. What matters is the broad idea of personified transcendence that the medievals considered essential and its conflict with more modern notions that, for instance, separate personality from transcendence. Where Aquinas is right is that easy acceptance of anthropomorphic language risks understanding God as the “biggest thing around” or a “gaseous vertebrate”³⁵ His metaphysical arguments in *Summa Theologiae* 1.2-11 are dispensable illustrations. A person who grasps Thomas’s point might infer that Mill was mistaken in his influential argument that God must be a moral agent on par with humans.³⁶ Subsequent works of theology also would need reappraisal. This sort of argumentation might be sufficient to support Adams’s main thesis that only God’s transcendent goodness can overcome horrendous evils in the lives of individuals.³⁷ Philosophical theology becomes a form of spiritual exercise or contemplative prayer that merits no privilege over other forms. Adams sometimes argues in this manner, though she is not willing to sharply distinguish inquiry about realist metaphysical ideas from pastoral care and storytelling.³⁸

Though this sketch of how to reframe the discussion is straightforward, it has several challenges. First, Putnam is interested in a modest concept of truth insofar as he discriminates between more and less adequate notions of God but is skeptical about traditional metaphysical projects. In contrast, most of the analytic philosophers that his paper addresses are interested in more robust concepts of truth and

³⁵ Burrell 2004, 17; Putnam 1997, 495 (following Ernst Haeckel).

³⁶ The relevant essay of Mill titled “Mr. Mansel on the Limits of Religious Thought” replies to Dean Mansel’s 1858 Bampton Lectures. Those lectures defend a doctrine of divine transcendence where language about humans is related equivocally to language about God.

³⁷ Adams 1999c, 208.

³⁸ Adams 1988a, 140-41; Adams 1995d; Adams 1999c, 183-91.

metaphysics.³⁹ Given how few Christian analytic philosophers favor pragmatist and antirealist views of religion, Putnam's advice requires supplement. Secondly, the ascription of naïve biblical and theological primitivism does not fit this group of philosophers. On one hand, even among those who specialize in medieval ideas, their training emphasizes modern and analytic philosophy and their appointments usually are to departments of analytic philosophy. They are at least as well placed as self-consciously modern theologians to evaluate intelligently the theological significance of modern thinkers such as Hegel and Wittgenstein. On the other hand, philosophers who chart the direction of Analytical Thomism from inside the movement give less direct advice than Putnam about how to frame the inquiry. Haldane and likeminded philosophers conceive of Analytical Thomism as drawing on both Thomist and analytic philosophical traditions where there are no essential doctrinal commitments but analytic philosophy governs method and style.⁴⁰ The resultant conversations often will not involve first principles, though Haldane suggests that the theological *telos* that Christians articulate may help unify the overly compartmentalized analytic discussions.⁴¹ The emphasis is more on the exchange of ideas than expositing Aquinas accurately, but the discussants think both skills are desirable.⁴²

Those engaged in modern theodicy presumably allow some theological ideas, even if only for the sake of argument. So I shall bracket how modern thinkers such as Quine might profit from this study. The challenge is that robust realism about philosophical theology requires close attention to whether an argument's premises are consistent with the premises of the alternate framework into which the argument is imported or whether the argument and framework can be made consistent without doing unacceptable violence to either component. These are problems of translation, which are difficult to elucidate except in the concrete. My brief comments to this end, which follow, are correspondingly limited.

Natural theology: Plantinga might have genuine interest in whether Adams's theodicy uses medieval ideas about God's nature and goodness. For he rejects such

³⁹ Kerr 2006, 147-48; Haldane 1999, 170-71.

⁴⁰ Haldane 1997, 486; Kent 1999, 185, 187-88; Taylor 1999, 206, 208; Zagzebski 1999, 213.

⁴¹ Haldane 1999, 168, 170.

⁴² Haldane 1999, 167; Kent 1999, 185-86.

ideas in his 1980 Aquinas Lecture at Marquette University, and Adams's criticisms of his Free Will Defense may rest on ideas such that her criticism is question-begging. On the other hand, Plantinga's argument against Aquinas and others depends on construing divine perfections as properties.⁴³ Christian Platonists want to argue that properties or states-of-affairs and the like are how we talk about creatures being perfect. The difference between God and creatures is not just that God necessarily lacks no perfection but that God is perfect in a different way than in having properties or being a property. Whether Plantinga is willing to have that conversation and can stretch his conceptualities is a limit on whether he can make sense or use of medieval natural theologies. *Evil*: I think the privation theory of evil is elegant. It explains that great evils occur because they employ great goods—whether individuals or communities—and undo the unity of great goods. It fits well with an excellence hierarchy that descends from God. However, this explanation would seem less sensible to a committed empiricist for whom sensation rather than intelligible nature is the primary moral guide or for whom there is no clear relationship between goodness and being. A person who grants that there are essences and natures, such as Plantinga, may be able to make more sense of Augustine's idea. *Morality*: The distinction between first and second-order moral claims is modern, although a scholastic thinker could easily understand the point. A Kantian moralist could argue that, while medieval natural law theories are not tenable, Adams's objection from empathy and pain experience does not limit the domain of first-order moral claims. The more stimulating argument for a modern person would be the second-order medieval claim that divine transcendence bars God from the domain of moral agents and may bar morality's objectivity. Whether his or her modern framework could generate this outcome is a distinct and open question. *Method*: A lesson with which medieval philosopher theologians may provide their modern counterparts, regardless of their premises, is how different doctrines of God, evil, and value, among other topics, can affect each other. Given the extreme specialization of many analytic philosophers today and the difficulty of doing systematic inquiry through the genre of journal articles, such medieval lessons are valuable to modern theodocists.

⁴³ Plantinga 1980, 26-61.

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