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# Animals and the Problem of Evil in Recent Theodicies

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## ANIMALS AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN RECENT THEODICIES

The problem of evil is unanswered and puzzling to the majority of philosophers and Christian theists who address theodicy, and in the way it is articulated, the question cannot be truly resolved. The answers conceive God according to Biblical traditions, as if we can comprehend the full meanings of total omnipotence, all loving and all knowing. *If* God exists and these three attributes are aspects of his being or essence, then why is there moral and nonmoral evil in the world? Why does he not prevent it?

Firstly, this paper shall question and discuss only a few of John Hick's flaws in his theodicy because the late Roland Puccetti has attacked many of his problems and fallacies in his well argued paper "The Loving God—Some Observations on John Hick's Evil and God of Love."<sup>1</sup> More importantly, we shall explore why a loving powerful God permits suffering, pain, and early deaths to millions of animals for seemingly no reason. Richard Swinburne's response and the answers of process theodicy are also critically addressed. This paper argues that if God exists, his love for humanity does not entail loving each and every human, just as our love for some animal species does not necessitate loving every single animal. Considered this way, God's love

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<sup>1</sup> Puccetti, R. (April, 1967). The loving God – some observations on John Hick's Evil and the God of love. *Religious Studies*, (2), p.260.

(assuming it exists) is primarily general, not particular. This new radical mode of thinking is contrary to traditional theism, and is capable of explaining all human and animal misery and deaths throughout time. This perspective is argued at the end of the paper. Firstly, we shall address Hick's basic theodicy, briefly, and then his answers to animal evil.

### **Hick's Approach to Theodicy**

Hick developed a rather new theodicy which has been the subject of much constructive criticism. As he states, his task is one of faith seeking an understanding; to preserve one's faith from being overcome by the problem of evil. A worthy goal, but we should challenge the premise that evil does not render faith irrational. Hick's agenda is to look toward the distant future to explain the mystery of evil, rather than to the past—the Fall—through Augustine's vision. Humans are not finished beings, but rather still in the process of creation, of fulfillment into a finite likeness of God in his vision. Drawing from St. Paul and Irenaeus, Hick envisions humankind on a long spiritual journey toward eventual perfection, but we still have a very long road ahead. The Bible, he believes, clearly shows that humans are not in a finished state. His Irenaen hypothesis is that humans are in the process of soul-making to become children of God and this explains the considerable amount of evil in the world.

Modestly, Hick admits "...so far as we can see, the soul-making process does in fact fail in our own world at least as often as it succeeds."<sup>2</sup> But the skeptic can easily argue that the soul-making process, assuming it exists, fails far more than it succeeds. Moreover, as Puccetti points out, Hick's admission that so much human suffering is a mystery hardly helps resolve this crisis of evil. Puccetti's attacks to Hick's argument are on target, so that it is unnecessary to repeat them. Similarly, William Rowe's criticisms of Hick's position are also accurate. He accepts part

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<sup>2</sup> Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of love*. New York: Harper & Row, p.372.

of Hick's argument, but I deny it entirely. Rowe concludes "...we must judge Hick's own theodicy as falling substantially short of its goal...when we turn to our final two problems—the explanation of the amount and degree of intrinsic evil, and the explanation of particular evils—I believe Hick's theodicy, like all other theodicies, fails to offer any believable solution."<sup>3</sup>

However, we should not accept Rowe's assertion that Hick provides a reasonable answer to the question of why God would permit any evil, nor can we accept his answer to why God allows different kinds of evil that are excessive and unrelated to the soul-making process. God's higher goal to create morally superior humans need not justify permitting the Holocaust, Black Death, Inquisition, and innumerable other deaths and pain. Similarly, it need not justify suffering of lower magnitude, such as disease and mental anguish because humans are capable of and have become morally superior without personal suffering.

Rowe and Puccetti both point out fallacious argument, e.g., an "all or nothing" or false dichotomy in Hick's work. The problem is that God could and should have limited the human propensity for evil, at least slightly, and could have prevented even a minority of natural disasters or their effects, and there would still be *more* than ample opportunity to develop morally virtuous souls and God's Plan would still work. As Puccetti points out, he (and other skeptics) never expected the world to be a hedonistic paradise.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, some evil is necessary (inevitable) in the world, but the magnitude of a Katrina disaster, AIDS, or especially the Holocaust are not needed so that humans can develop sympathy, appreciate happiness, and/or form superior souls. Numerous virtuous people have developed fine "superior souls" with love and altruistic caring without experiencing great pain and evils. Others

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<sup>3</sup> Rowe, W. (1991). *Paradox and promise: Hick's solution to the problem of evil*. In H.Hewitt, Jr. (Ed.) *Problems in the philosophy of religion: critical studies in the work of John Hick* (p.122) New York: St. Martin's Press.

<sup>4</sup> Puccetti, The loving God – Some observations on John Hick's Evil and the God of love p. 260.

experience great pain or terrible evils and become criminals, or at least never develop “superior souls”. Millions of individuals cannot (or do not) pass on their experiences so that others may learn from them, especially the next generation. Theists claim that human lives are richer for the suffering they endure, but even assuming that is true, (depending how ‘richer’ is defined), it still can not justify every slaughtered person and all human anguish throughout time. The victims and survivors of the Holocaust were in no way better for the hardships they endured. Some theists claim that God might have prevented countless evils in such a mysterious way that it is beyond human knowledge. However, this return to faith is based solely on pure speculation and is not acceptable.

Some human evils are believed to be justifiable as divine retribution for sins, among other reasons, but there seems no justification for animal evils. These innocent creatures have no sense of good and evil and their suffering is without meaning.

### **Hick on Animal Suffering**

My major purpose here is to question fundamentally why so many animals must suffer with (and even without) pain unnecessarily and why so many millions must die before their normal life spans, assuming an all-loving, omniscient and omnipotent God. Again, Hick’s comments are not very assuaging, contrary to Puccetti, who writes:

Hick has quite a few assuaging things to say on animal pain. The lower species are probably not even conscious; higher vertebrates other than men are mostly doomed to die violently, as parts of a self-sustaining organic system; animals have a ‘happy blindness’ to the inevitability of death, which is therefore not a problem to them; animals live from ‘instant to instant’ merely, and cannot carry their past experience with them in conscious memory...<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.261

In the first place, numerous lower species are conscious, depending on how ‘conscious’ is defined. The traditional Cartesian view that holds that animals have no feelings is erroneous. Let us assume it is a being that is aware of its surroundings and has simple desires, basic needs and interests. Although not all philosophers agree that animals have simple beliefs and desires, much empirical evidence suggests that many animals do, in fact. We will assume that being conscious does not imply self-consciousness or reflective thinking among animals. They have their own projects and interests and though unlike ours, they try to survive satisfactorily, relative to the given situation. Their desires may seem meaningless or unimportant to us, just as some human goals and projects seem unimportant to God as well as other people. Scientific studies show that many species experience at least simple levels of consciousness. *The search for neural correlates of consciousness have not discovered any consciousness producing structure or process limited to human brains.* For instance, some birds exhibit all the objective attributes of episodic memory, crows can creatively make tools, apes and parrots can answer complex questions and make requests<sup>6</sup>. It is also highly likely that conscious animals, such as reptiles, can experience at least simple and perhaps intense pains. Pain thresholds can be measured in animals by the appearance of escape behavior. The pain detection threshold level seems to be the same in both humans and other vertebrates, and is affected by analgesics only when the pain can be no longer tolerated, according to David DeGrazia. Although this is speculative, pain may well

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<sup>6</sup> Recent strong evidence suggests that animals such as chimps and scrub jays, have episodic memory and are able to plan for the future. Although it is often difficult to measure or understand animal thinking, it seems like that they can remember and recall past events, as well as knowledge about the world. Chimps can remember where food is hidden outside their enclosures. This experiment confirms common sense and ordinary observations. Dolphins use tools and have unusually large brains, four times the size of chimpanzees. Some scientists believe that they show evidence of self-consciousness by recognizing themselves in a mirror. Moreover, many species, such as felines, canines and primates exhibit a trivial freewill through their movement and play.

be a product of the development of consciousness in creatures that have nociceptive pathways.<sup>7</sup> It is very evident, then, that some animals, including members of many lower species, can experience much pain and suffering. The distinction is that one can experience pain, such as a pin prick without suffering, and one can suffer mentally and physically without feeling direct pain. Suffering can include boredom, anxiety, fear, worry and loneliness. Empirical evidence shows that most or all mammals and vertebrates are capable of experiencing states of anxiety.

Most animals are violently killed and devoured by other species which, in the economy of nature, live by preying upon them. The animal kingdom forms a vast self-sustaining organism in which every part becomes, directly or indirectly, food for another part---its situation must seem agonizing indeed...whilst feeling evils of which it is not conscious.<sup>8</sup>

Yet they are very often conscious of the evils that are suffered. The fact that most wild animals die violently from predators (predation) and natural disasters within the chain of nature is not assuaging at all, nor does it justify their countless deaths, contrary to Hick and Swinburne. An absolutely *omnipotent* God would be capable of creating and sustaining all possible natural worlds. *Omnipotent* shall be defined as capable of doing anything that is not logically impossible. The total power and knowledge of this hypothetical God is all encompassing, immense, and beyond our imagination. Contrary to Leibniz, God did not create the best of all possible worlds, but he would have known of them, and could have designed nature so that less carnivores and more vegetarian species exist as well as a larger number of plants to feed them. Animal bodies could have been structured to suffer less pain and fewer deaths. The entire ecological system could have been greatly different. Theoretically, an infinite number of possibilities could have been designed for animals throughout the past and present natural

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<sup>7</sup> DeGrazia, D., Rowan, A. (1991). Pain, suffering, and anxiety in animals and humans. *Theoretical Medicine*, 12, pp.197-199, 201

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<sup>8</sup> Hick, Evil and the God of love, p.349.

worlds. Given all the possible combinations for human physiology, human bodies could have been designed with less taste for animal meat, so that animals would not be hunted and slaughtered by the millions, and humans could easily flourish on a dairy and vegetarian diet. (I am certainly not arguing for vegetarianism, only to suggest the original possibilities for an all powerful divine being.) Of course, animal reproduction could be greatly diminished, life spans would increase, and there would be far fewer animal lives spent in pointless futility and dying young.

Hick then argues,

Not only is the animal's experience not shadowed by any anticipation of death or by any sense of its awesome finality; it is likewise simplified, in comparison with human consciousness, by a happy blindness to the dangers and pains that may lie between the present moment and this inevitable termination; and again by a similar oblivion to the past.<sup>9</sup>

Death, supposedly, is not a problem to them. True, animals, as far as we know, do not realize that death is inevitable, but it does not follow that it is not a problem. Observations show that when animals are close to death, they can sense or feel their lives in grave danger. Some sense that they are too sick or injured to go on. They do not know why, but they have some awareness that something is very wrong with their bodies. Animal minds cannot be known, of course, but the large amount of anecdotal evidence is much more than mere conjecture. Philosophers who minimize or reject the suffering and awareness of animals have not observed them very closely. For instance, deaths of matriarchs and baby elephants elicit much grieving behavior as mourning is an integral aspect of their culture.<sup>10</sup> In addition, some members of animal species instinctively plan for the future. Their behavior often indicates that they are aware, generally, of yesterdays and tomorrows.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Bradshaw, I.G.A. (2004). Not by bread alone: symbolic loss, trauma, and recovery in elephant communities. *Society and Animals*, 12:2, 145-147.

<sup>11</sup> Clayton, N.S., Bussey, T. J., Dickinson, A. (August 2003) Can animals recall the past and plan for the future? *Neuroscience*, 4, pp. 685-87.



Contrary to Hick, the subject of animal pain is not largely speculative and theoretical as he states, not even in 1966 when his book was published. Animal pain is very real, and we are not merely transferring our emotions to the animal. Perhaps it is because animals cannot cry as we do that so many people fail to understand their suffering. Their pained expressions sufficiently resemble the looks we associate with human pain and discomfort. Moreover, much evidence demonstrates that domestic animals in shelters exhibit clear signs of depression, sadness and loneliness, and even the most cheerful objective observer notices that phenomenon. Otherwise, one might object that the depressed observer is projecting his or her feelings to the animal. Besides, skeptics of this point of view would be expressing their lack of empathy toward animals.

Consider this hypothetical example. Suppose an alien species visited earth and were unable to understand human languages. When humans were suffering, the aliens would have to rely on physiological examinations and observations of them in pain or distress. The presence of hospitals and doctors still does not persuade them. The fact that humans suffer maladies and accidents would not prove subjective pain sensations. Suppose that even their advanced tests and technology could not totally prove the existence of real human pain. Their skeptics would demand absolute proof, and might claim that the lower primates experience no pain and do not possess full consciousness. In any case, they would argue that they cannot understand the human mind and it is beyond their comprehension. Some observers are indifferent to the whole problem. Besides, most of them are incapable of empathy or compassion toward the human creatures. This illustration implies that our ignorance of some non-human species does not mean that they do not suffer in pain, nor can we conclude that they have a significantly lower status in the universe-wide realm and to God's mind.

Moreover, it suggests (but does not entail) that if and when members of an intelligent species can alleviate the suffering of members of another sentient species with no harm to themselves, then they should do so. Jeremy Bentham rightly argued that our shared bond with animals is the capacity to suffer. Assuming that this is true, we can state that for broad utilitarian reasons, humans should exercise empathy to prevent and relieve animal suffering and pain, thereby allowing the creature to survive in comfort, when possible. Relieving suffering can include mercy killing only when truly necessary. This normative rule includes an increase in the sum total of pleasures for the species. Mill argues that “our feeling for humanity” establishes the reasoning or basis for utilitarianism, and here it also includes a feeling for sentient members of higher species.

### **Swinburne on Animal Suffering**

Richard Swinburne in *Providence and the Problem of Evil* has attempted to justify the suffering and deaths of animals by arguing that it is necessary for some of them to get caught in a forest fire, using William Rowe’s much discussed fawn example, so that others can be warned to avoid the fires. “Fawns are bound to get caught in forest fires sometimes if other fawns are to have the opportunity of intentionally avoiding fires, and if deer are to have opportunities of rescuing other fawns from fires.”<sup>12</sup>

The fact is that fawns and members of numerous other species are warned by their natural instincts by the sight and smell of smoke or fire to avoid going in, and so it is unnecessary to witness other deer or animals caught and suffer in them. Similarly, such animals instinctively know better than to jump over cliffs, fall into earthquakes and avoid other dangers. Basic scientific and amateur observations of animal behavior including pets demonstrate that. He is

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<sup>12</sup> Swinburne, R. (1998) *Providence and the problem of evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.172.

right that “you cannot intentionally avoid forest fires or take trouble to rescue your offspring from forest fires, unless there exists a serious danger of getting caught in fires”,<sup>13</sup> but from this does not follow that animals must see others caught to avoid the fires themselves.

Furthermore, he argues that bad actions like physical pain provide opportunities for good actions to be done in response, such as courage, sympathy, and caring among animals. However, pain would be without significance or meaning to animals incapable of having beliefs. We can add that the pain may be just as intense, but the animal could not understand or give it any meaning. This pain and suffering would not be justified, he says, *except* for the useful good to other animals, such as behaving sympathetically. However, I believe that this is irrelevant to the pain suffered. First, animals cannot understand this possible tradeoff or compensation between pain and courage and it seemingly makes no difference to God or them. Secondly, animal souls are not in any way developed or created, most likely, for an ascent to Heaven. Few theists believe animal souls (if they exist) have a place in the afterlife either in immortality or for a long duration. Thirdly, God could have created their brains so that courage and caring, for instance, could be developed utilizing other behavioral patterns without seriously endangering their lives.

John Hick argues in his book review that Swinburne might be projecting a human state of mind into animals. As he argues, merely because the survival instinct causes a wounded lion to struggle to live, it does not then mean that they are experiencing the human quality of courage.<sup>14</sup> Swinburne probably did not mean that, exactly, but animal “courage” is certainly not human courage, and we have no way of understanding *all* their mental states, especially cognition. Hick is also right to question Swinburne’s project of matching every bad state with a good state of which it is a necessary condition, in that this requires very counter-intuitive moral judgments.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hick, J. (F 2000) Review of *Providence and the problem of evil*, by Swinburne, R. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 47:1, p. 60.

That is, it breaks with common sense. Clearly, this is not a fatal flaw, but it certainly weakens his argument.

Swinburne goes further to argue that the killing of one animal by another for food is not itself a natural evil. “To be killed and eaten by another animal is as natural an end to life as would be death by other natural causes at the same age”.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps, but it is not metaphysically necessary, and it is an evil to the animal insofar as it experiences and seeks pleasures and there are strong sufficient reasons for us to believe it is an evil. For instance, the destruction of elephants. The pain of being devoured is an evil in the animal’s small mind (unless it was already near death), because its life suddenly ends. Instinctively, the animal senses that an awful death is immediate and it struggles to escape. Its sensory pleasures and other creature comforts are over much too soon. Higher animals, such as horses, can feel the anguish. It may be natural, but Swinburne cannot know, nor anyone else, that it is not an evil. Besides, to say it is merely the end of a good is a gross understatement because if it is argued that life is a good, then the end of life is surely a non-good.

Swinburne argues that “the world would be much the poorer without the courage of a wounded lion continuing to struggle despite its wound, the courage of the deer in escaping from the lion.”<sup>16</sup> Animal lives have far greater value for the heroism they show. But Philip Quinn rightly argues in his book review that Swinburne gives us no assurance that this good alone will always outweigh their suffering.<sup>17</sup> I strongly agree that it is wildly counterintuitive, as he facetiously says, to suppose that chickens benefit from their suffering. They do not freely accept it; nor does it improve their character. It is also farfetched to claim that their misery is justifiable

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<sup>15</sup> Swinburne, R. *Providence and the problem of evil*. p. 182. See also Tattersall, N. (1998) The evidential argument from evil. P.8 [www.infidels.org/library/modern/nicholas\\_tattersall/evil.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/nicholas_tattersall/evil.html)

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Ibid. 173

<sup>17</sup> Quinn, P.L. (July 2001) Review of *Providence and the problem of evil*, Swinburne, R., *Faith and Philosophy* 18: 3, p.397. July.

because it gives farmers the free choice whether or not to relieve their suffering. The animal's life is not richer for the complexity and difficulty of their daily struggles and hardships, as Swinburne states. Richer or better for whom, humans or animals? Most humans are indifferent or unaware of these daunting hardships which existed eons before the first human walked the earth. He is correct that we have no right to cause animals to suffer, but if God has that right and exercises it, then we must question his love for all creatures, great and small. Swinburne is right to suggest that our compassion for sentient animals is too narrow and restricted.

### **Process Thought on Animal Suffering**

Process thought, developed from the philosophy of Whitehead and Hartshorne, attempts to justify an answer to animal suffering by arguing that animals do not act according to God's desires because God can only persuade and not coerce animals and humans. I will address only Gary Chartier's consequentialist answer in his lengthy complex article because it offers the best hope for a process theodicy. The (process theorist's) non-consequentialist view denies that God wills any predation, and requires an explanation why animals resist divine persuasion against predation, or else why God does not attempt divine persuasion with animals. This view seems to me very problematic and probably untenable. Chartier's own views are not always clear because he distances his ideas by writing from the viewpoint of the process thinker. Chartier says that "the process thinker can opt for a consequentialist account of divine goodness... thus she can maintain that acts of predation can contribute to evolutionary advance, that God wills at least some such acts to foster evolutionary advance, and that God's decision to do so is consistent with belief in God's goodness..."<sup>18</sup> The process thinker concedes that God's power is limited

<sup>18</sup> Chartier, G. (2006) Non-human animals and process theodicy. *Religious Studies*, 42, p.21.  
Predation is the killing and consuming of animals in the wild.

because he can only persuade, not force beings, and therefore reduces his omnipotence. God might try to guide the deer away from the forest fire, for instance, but all the events leading up to the fire might not respond to God's wishes. Thus, the process thinker's God does not possess total power, and as such, her position does not provide a genuine answer to the traditional problem of evil which holds that God is totally omnipotent. God is "perfectly powerful" yet has limited powers, and even atoms are beyond his control. Secondly, evolutionary advance, which "embodies God's creative intention" still does not justify or explain the countless deaths and suffering of animals, which are far more than necessary for a long evolutionary development to occur. Animal suffering began over 250 million years ago without any interference from God, and its only possible purpose would be discovered through the theory of evolution, the survival of superior species. New species gradually evolve, partly as a consequence of innumerable deaths and suffering. (An animal's sudden death might cut a few years from its life, whereas a human's death could cut far more years.) Darwin noted that the suffering of millions of members of the lower species throughout time cannot be reconciled with a God who is infinitely good.<sup>19</sup> An omnipotent God could have permitted fewer animals to procreate, thus reducing their vast multitude and their demise, as mentioned earlier.

Chartier admits that process thinkers, but not necessarily process theists or what he calls *zoophiles*, maintain that God sometimes wills the predator's actions as well as those of the prey. They argue that predation is not morally wrong (in that animals are amoral beings), and it is consistent with God's absolute omnibenevolence. We are challenging the latter idea that God's omnibenevolence is sacrosanct. Consequentialist zoophiles argue that when God lures predators into predatory actions, his goodness is not questioned because those actions contribute

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<sup>19</sup> Murray, M.J., Ross, G. (2006) Neo-Cartesianism and the problem of animal suffering. *Faith and Philosophy*. 23:2, p.169.

to evolutionary advance. Process theorists realize rightly that it is easier to defend predation than to justify sport hunting (see n 22.) Chartier understands that this view challenges the idea that God loves animals as *individuals*. I return to this important point later.

The consequentialist view is that God is concerned with the sum total of goodness in the world, and this goodness or love may or may not lead to protecting animals and humans. We agree to the extent that his goodness or love is for the *whole* species or genus (until it is extinct), *not* for the individual. The process theorists (not theist) want to argue that when predation is undesirable or unwanted, then it occurs against God's intentions, and when we desire predation, then it is as God wanted. We can object that this is having it both ways, so that God conveniently enables the process thinker's position. And what if environmentalists are against the wolves' predatory killing of their prey but ranchers favor it? Which side is consistent with God's will? The question is impossible to answer and is purely speculative.

Process theists (zoophiles) can also argue that innumerable animal deaths, especially predatory deaths, are part of God's plan to create humans who are capable of more subtle and valuable experiences. Only through predation can higher life forms emerge into existence as evolution progresses onward. This evolutionary stage of development toward more intelligent species that are capable of greater pleasures (and harms), and richer experiences is supposed to justify countless harms and deaths to animals (some Christian and process theists argue), but Chartier is right to oppose this view.

According to Chartier, the process thinker can claim that God suffers with all creatures. He knows their suffering from the inside. "Thus whenever God brings about a risk for a creature, this is also a risk for God."<sup>20</sup> Any creature's suffering will also be God's suffering. This suggests that God is empathic, which Chartier states without argument. For people who already believe in

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<sup>20</sup> Chartier, G. Non-human animals and process theodicy. p. 6.

God, “the fact of divine suffering” shows that the suffering had good reasons and it is a risk worth taking. But if God is suffering, then we can have no idea how to understand, appreciate or truly know that with reasoned assurance. In any case, it would be radically different from human and animal suffering. Suffering suggests vulnerability, anguish, and much sensitivity, but these are clearly animal and human attributes, and we cannot know that they are divine. Contrary to process theism, if God is transcendent and outside time, then it seems not logically possible for this divine being to experience the feeling of suffering. Most likely, it is logically impossible or contradictory for a transcendent being to exist beyond the sensory world, and yet also partake of experiences within it. Besides, if God possesses total power, then he could easily protect himself from any suffering or risks in the universe. If he is omniscient, then he would probably have *a priori* knowledge (very generally), of the experience of sentient suffering, and thus it would be unnecessary to actually experience it. Truths *a priori* (e.g. mathematics) are more fundamental and primary forms of knowledge, as the rationalists have shown, and do not require secondary empirical contingent truths.

A suffering God also implies that he is so caring that, *if possible*, he would wish to experience and understand human and animal suffering. Besides, suffering suggests God has sympathy, but that is a human and perhaps animal attribute, thus Peter Geach’s claim that God is non-sympathetic is more plausible.<sup>21</sup> In the end, he argues that because God does not care about animal suffering, then there is no justification for animal evils. We can question whether true loving must include sympathy. (See Lynch, J.J., [cla.colpoly.edu/~jlynch.html](http://cla.colpoly.edu/~jlynch.html).) Moreover, regardless of whether God is omnipotent or not, there is no evidence or strong argument for the

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<sup>21</sup> Geach, P. (1977) *Providence and evil*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.80. Geach approves of Hobbes’ assertion that God’s almightiness is a sufficient justification for his infliction of pain on humans; it also raises no more of a problem than pains to animals, p.109.



claim that God suffers. (Some Christians may cite Christ's crucifixion.) In any case, divine suffering is beyond our knowledge and remains an enigma.

The central problem has been noted: process theodicy tries to resolve the problem of evil by claiming that God's power is only persuasive not coercive. Humans and animals can ignore God's persuasion and act as they wish. But this is not an answer or solution for the theist who strongly believes in God's absolute and total omnipotence (p.6) Persuasion without full power is simply not omnipotent. Kings who can only persuade their subjects to follow their desires lack power, and that is still true even if that is the only power in the Kingdom. It is strange, indeed, to believe in a God who cannot control and coerce small animals such as mice. A God who cannot coerce and command small animals who possess, at most, trivial freewill is a far lesser God and is closer to a mere deity. Most theists cannot accept this premise, even hypothetically, because it is not consistent with their worldview and religious convictions. Therefore, the process thinker's concept of a God who lacks omnipotence fails to provide a solution or adequate answer to the problem of evil. Other theological problems arise regarding process thought and none can be easily resolved. Process theism does not depend on particular empirical data, Chartier states. Obviously-- that data are not likely to support their position or are irrelevant. Process theism and theory deserves a more complete critical analysis.

We have seen that the attempts to answer and/or understand the problem of evil and animal suffering from the theories of John Hick, Richard Swinburne and the process thinkers (or theists) are not totally adequate to the task. Misunderstandings of animal life flaw their arguments. My argument which follows is a radical attempt to rectify these theories by departing from the standard concept of God's love or goodness toward animals and humans. It is an answer (but not a true solution) to the problem of evil. That is, a metaphysical road away from traditional theism,

but which can be consistent with liberal theistic approaches and perhaps to deism. I reinterpret the status of animals and their suffering, and the old view that humans are necessarily superior to them.

### **Human Reasoning, rights and animals**

Consider that the lives of wild animals are filled with fear, hunger, suffering, and often a miserable death from predators or natural disasters, as Hume had Philo argue in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. They try to survive the worst weather conditions, natural disasters, and from hunters and poachers throughout the world. Only the most ardent and caring animal lovers provide some assistance to a very small number of animals. The most loving knowledgeable person would never interfere between two animals in the wild, fighting to the death. Certainly, some small animals are saved and some large animals are salvaged and cared for, usually in captivity or in zoos. Yet these exceptions are an infinitesimal percent of all animals everywhere. They suffer but their cries are usually not heard or answered by the most kind and dutiful people. If they could reason, they would wonder why the powerful humans do nothing while they suffer and die. Dogs and cats in shelters might reason (if they could) why these humans who seem to care and provide minimal survival and comfort, put them to death and allow them to suffer in cages for no particular reason. They would ask, as Job did, why do we deserve this fate? It is not a stretch of the imagination to suppose that they perceive people as gods (or devils?), albeit imperfect ones.

Moreover, human understanding of divine attributes is meager and extremely difficult to comprehend in that we possess a tiny but significant knowledge of the universe. Let us suppose that God (if he exists) regards people roughly as we regard wild animals, and to some extent, unwanted domestic animals. God is as unlikely to interfere in a natural disaster or criminal act as

people would between two wild animals. Suppose that Smith truly loves all animals and has the strength, weapons and skill to stop one animal from attacking another. Despite his strong feelings, he would refrain, and view the situation as an example of nature's course and that he has no duty or obligation to help. This is the Way of Life and the natural order alone determines who lives and dies. If the most ardent animal lovers knew in advance of the deaths or suffering of wild animals, the vast majority would still be untreated and left alone, despite human sympathy and abilities to prevent it. Yet it is not absurd to expect that some caring individuals might interfere to rescue prey from their predators for purely altruistic reasons. In many cases it would arguably be morally acceptable and even obligatory if a special bond with a wild or domestic animal caused one to prevent it from killing its prey, or rescue the prey from being killed. If I stop a rabbit or bird from predation without harm to the environment or other animals, then it is surely acceptable, as long it does not become a systematic practice which would upset the ecosystem. The predator will find other prey and continue on the prowl. In this way, the argument used by sports hunters to challenge human interference with animals in the wild fails.<sup>22</sup>

Brian Luke refers to Cowen and Sapontzis who argue, agreeably, that we should interfere against natural predation when it would reduce suffering and/or when the costs are low. Luke's case that predation is not an evil is weak. The arguments he tries to rebut (pp.109-115) convincingly show that predation is a good only to the predators, not to the prey, nor necessarily to the ecosystem, or in itself. It is certainly an evil when an animal devours a human, though it is a "good" to the predator. Luke acknowledges that animals, in many ways, are more sensitive than humans and feel certain things more intensely than us. Furthermore, the argument that predators

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<sup>22</sup> Luke, B. (2007) Men's hunting and the disvalue of natural predation. In H-L Li, A. Yeung (Eds.) *New essays in applied ethics*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan. pp. 104-105, 117.

Sport hunter advocates claim that arguments of animal rights proponents are, perhaps, hypocritical. The pro hunting argument claims that if hunters are at fault for inflicting pain on animals in the wild, then animal rights proponents should consider preventing predation in the wild, but that seems absurd to them.

keep the prey's population from rising excessively is often untrue. So, too, the idea that predators prevent the prey from the worse evil of starving to death is often incorrect. Luke's explanations of the opposing arguments are much stronger than his rebuttals. Thus, predation (in most cases) is an evil and sport hunting is worse yet.

Naturally, humans possess a moral conscience, high powers of intelligence and language, and ostensibly, this makes all the difference between man and animal. Humans understand moral agency and have moral standing whereas animals do not. Traditionally, with these attributes come human rights, especially the right to live, whereas animals cannot understand rights and are presumed to have none. Nevertheless, several philosophers, psychologists and biologists extended the Bill of Rights to the great apes, even if they could never defend themselves nor understand rights. Perhaps the question is whether the animal understands and respects other's rights and assumes responsibility for his or her actions?<sup>23</sup> Zoologist Marc Hauser claims that if the apes do not, then they are only moral patients, not moral agents, and it is difficult to ascertain whether they feel the actual obligation to perform certain cooperative actions.

While this distinction is crucial for humans, clearly no empirical evidence or logical proof exists to show that God holds the same view as it is impossible to know or verify. Nevertheless, it is a strong *possibility* that God overlooks this moral distinction and that it is relatively unimportant to him. It is certainly not obvious or conclusive that moral status entails human superiority. Conversely, one cannot argue with any certainty that humans and animals are reasonably equal in God's mind, primarily because he is unknowable. Where is the sufficient evidence, apart from the Bible, that this special moral distinction is the crucial one, above all the others, in the mind of God? This assumption has not been fully justified, or else it is an article of faith in divine wisdom.

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<sup>23</sup> Hauser, M.D. (2006) *Moral minds*. New York: Harper Collins. p. 414.

Of course, humans have an extremely complex brain, but it is questionable why this organ and the spiritual bond through prayer with God should cause him to prevent human suffering and unfair deaths. Although humans understand justice and have a meaningful purpose in life, this unique distinction may not be so special and overriding to God. Let us assume that God has the highest divine morality. As the absolute epitome of morality, he would have at least one moral duty to fulfill in the universe, and he certainly would and should perform it, and yet he fails to save or protect humans and animals from evils. There is no certain evidence to the contrary. It follows, then, that this is not his *prima facie* duty. Assuming that he has at least one moral duty or responsibility, then certainly he would be negligent not to perform it. If it is not his *prima facie* duty, it might be a secondary or tertiary duty, but in either case, he is not performing it.

I do not claim that all animals have rights, or that animals should be considered the same as humans or vice-versa. On the other hand, I suggest that primarily human arrogance and hubris is the source of spiritual superiority on the basis of moral and intellectual intelligence. Throughout history, humans have been a very vain species, full of conceit and arrogance for their own kind. Arguably, ethical egoism is the chief motivator for the majority, if not all people. The peculiar reasoning that assumes that intelligent moral superiority is the overriding distinction, and then uses that as the criterion for rights almost begs the question or is at least suspicious. Assuming that Bentham is right, then suffering is a very significant shared capability that may well override the differences. Therefore, noninterference in human suffering is akin to our noninterference with animals both in the wild and among domestic animals.

### **God's Love for Humanity and Individuals**

Despite this, God can still be claimed to love humanity as theists argue, but this love must be understood very differently, if it can be truly understood. Consider that animal lovers generally love animals as a whole in their entirety, (as well as some individual animals), or at least some species, but that does not commit them to loving each and every animal. So, too, Christians can still claim that God loves all men, but this must be taken as the human race, not every individual, otherwise theists could commit the division fallacy and contradict a central Christian tenet which holds that God loves every individual. This fallacy infers the nature of the whole or class from the nature of the particulars or attributes. It challenges common sense views that what is true for a totality (P) must be true for each individual or particular (Q), but logically and empirically, that is not always true. Philosophers are unlikely to use this reasoning, but other theists may very well do so. The division fallacy holds true whether the subject is theology or ordinary matters of fact. God's love for humanity would not necessarily include or entail loving every single person. To avoid this faulty inference, we should realize and accept that his love does *not* and never did entail interference from all evils. If the Devil exists, his evil actions toward humans would also not entail evil directed toward each individual.

One might compare God's love to a father loving all his children, as well as each child individually, but analogies from God to humans tend to be weak and too anthropomorphic because the father's love is subjective, originating from mental states, behaviors, thought and speech. Divine love cannot be ascertained in the same way and cannot be demonstrated or verified with behaviors, speech nor mental states, notwithstanding dubious religious experiences. Parental love is unlikely to be an example of the division fallacy, but some interpreters of the Bible may very likely make this mistake. For instance, God's love for the World (John 3:16) does not commit him to loving every person throughout time, especially not equally.

Furthermore, it is very doubtful that God loved Hitler, Stalin and every homicidal killer. In these kinds of cases, it is extremely difficult to separate and distinguish God's supposed love for a particular human from his criminal acts. To love the man only, divorced from his terrible and immoral criminal life challenges our credulity. When we consider all the countless violent crimes, unnecessary and painful deaths (moral and natural), wars, and other human suffering throughout time, it is apparent that these are not expressions of divine love. On the contrary, if anything, they present a picture of indifference, disregard, and lack of concern for these victims. Theistic belief in God's love for them is obviously not supported by the overwhelming evidence. This irrational mode of thinking is an epistemic denial whose analysis is beyond my intentions.

Moreover, we should question what sort of God would love Hitler (though *not* his actions), as he loves saints and selfless humanitarians. Furthermore, did God love all the Holocaust victims or was he merely indifferent? Obviously, permitting them to suffer horrible deaths hardly expresses sufficient caring or love. This momentous tragedy shows that God did *not* love every human. Contrary to Swinburne, neither the "good" of their heroic struggles, nor peace in the afterlife, can ever justify the tragedy.<sup>24</sup> The State of Israel was created after the Holocaust, but even this putative good does not justify the suffering, especially considering that only a small number of survivors benefitted from it. Some orthodox Jews and others say that this was God's will, or that God was punishing Jews for becoming too secular or for assimilating, among other reasons. But these possible answers, even taken together, cannot explain the deaths of six million people. Moreover, this horrific event serves as evidence, I believe, that God does not love every person, but rather humans as a whole. The total systematic magnitude of the Holocaust has raised

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<sup>24</sup> Swinburne, R. (1996) Some major strands of theodicy. In D. Howard-Snyder (Ed.), *The evidential argument from evil*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp.46-47.

many new questions about God and man, which deserve another lengthy paper. Jewish theological opinion is divided on the Holocaust.<sup>25</sup>

By *modus tollens*,

1. If an omnipotent God loves all persons, then he should prevent their suffering and unnecessary deaths.
2. The unnecessary deaths and suffering are *not* prevented.

(An omnipotent) God does not love all persons.

It is often argued that evil actions can be explained by human freewill, and that without it we would not be truly human. Hick argues that humans, by definition, cannot be totally good (do the right thing) or be unfree like moral robots without sacrificing their humanity. But the skeptic does not demand that the agent *always* do the right thing—only that God should permit *less* terrible evils, even if that entails somewhat less freewill. It is *not* all or nothing, and apologists who argue that create a false dichotomy. If God had stopped Hitler, Stalin and others from exercising their freewill, he could have prevented many millions of innocent people from unnecessary death and suffering. Some of these lives would have improved the health and well-being of their nation and the world. God with his power and knowledge could and should have created humans with less violent evil desires and with a stronger altruistic conscience. At the very minimum, he could have prevented the Holocaust and other genocides. Most skeptics do not expect him to prevent every war or grisly death, though we can hope that he would. Furthermore, if humans were created with less evil intent or slightly less freewill, this image of humanity

<sup>25</sup> Theologians have argued that God could or would not interfere with the Nazi's freewill. Martin Buber and others have been silent on the Holocaust, and believe that it does not necessitate a special response. Others cite Biblical passages (such as Daniel 12) where God seems to foresee a distant terrible tragedy. Influenced by Nietzsche, Richard Rubenstein claims that the Holocaust (Shoah) demonstrates that God is dead and that no viable answer is satisfactory. This existentialist response has been sharply criticized by other Jewish theologians. Rubenstein offers instead a radical secular opinion which announces the final death of God. He concurs with Sartre and Camus on the human condition, however unlike them, Rubenstein is not an atheist. He believes that it is important to promote a religious community, especially after the death of God. Logically, it is difficult to assess his book because it is essentially a testament to Jewish beliefs and historical background, rather than a sustained argument.



would be accepted as our true human nature and human beings would be merely defined differently. We would not think that we were less human because of that change. J.L. Mackie has rightly argued that all forms of the freewill defense fail.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to Mackie, though, God's omnipotence need not be restricted, at all. Omnipotence is necessary for God to control and create the universe, but his love for every individual, especially mass murderers, is certainly not a necessity. If God is said to be the creator and sustainer of the whole total universe, then we can infer that it is necessary for him to be omnipotent and omniscient, but logically, this creation does *not (and should not)* entail that he is all loving. It is not imperative for God to be loving or caring in order to create, sustain and know everything in and about the universe. In order to be the creator, God must have the knowledge and power to sustain life on earth, ultimately, but love is *not* a necessary attribute of his being. Certainly, there is no shred of evidence of it. Obviously, such love is comforting and provides great emotional support, and though this is a strong widespread intuition and feeling, it does not imply or in any manner demonstrate a logical reason.

Consider this analogy. Imagine that God watches us from high above as if civilization was a long parade. He loves the parade, but does not need to recognize each individual's movements in order to maintain such love. We might watch animals from a high tower, seeing their beauty, playfulness, grace and innocence. We admire and "love" them, but our interference with their pain does not necessarily follow. In this context, love is defined as the Biblical *agape* or charity. God loves the animal species or genus, but not individual animals or their families, and if evolution drives it extinct, then arguably, he still loves its phylum. His love toward them is

<sup>26</sup> Mackie, J.L. (1990). Evil and omnipotence. In M. McCord Adams, R.M. Adams (Eds.) *The Problem of evil*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp.33-37. (See also Mackie, J.L., *The Miracle of theism*)

Also see Trakakis, N. (2008) Theodicy: the solution to the problem of evil, or part of the problem? *Sophia*, 47:pp.161-191.

limited (qualified) by the forces of the vast evolutionary time. This can partly explain the billions of creatures killed in their brief lives over time. One might say he had charity for the whole and malice toward none. So, we infer that he loves the bald eagles, all eagles even more, and birds, generally even greater.

Moreover, God's love for each particular creature commits a *reductio ad absurdum*. The argument would follow: If God loves every creature (perhaps excluding insects?) does he then love every mouse, rat, slug and worm? Consider that each worm is almost indistinguishable from another and that they have numbered in the trillions or more ever since the Cambrian era. What could it mean, and what is the likelihood that God loved every particular rat and tadpole that ever lived? Obviously, it has no meaning to the animal and probably none to God. If he does *not* love every one, then how far down the animal kingdom does God's love go? What are the criteria, if any, for loving every particular creature? Does he love only animals that have a rudimentary self, or are conscious, or have a nervous system, or that experience pain or suffering? Of course, we can have no true knowledge of these answers. It is absurd indeed to argue that God loves (has charity) toward every rat or tadpole, especially since they die so fast and are a minute blip in time.

My answer to the problem of evil provides a reason for animal suffering and death, and forces us to take the problem seriously. Probably few theists will accept this general approach to the problem of evil because it places humans on the level of animals in regard to this answer, but logically, the truth of the matter does not require widespread acceptance.

Basil Mitchell offers a useful approach with his parable of a partisan, Stranger and a war.<sup>27</sup>

The Stranger, who represents God, assures the partisan (who represent the theist) that he is on his

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<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, B. (2006). A debate on the rationality of religious belief. In L.P. Pojman (Ed.) *Philosophy – the quest for truth* 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (pp. 148-149). New York: Oxford University Press. Originally in A. Flew, A. MacIntyre (Eds.) (1955) *New essays in philosophical theology*. London: SCM Press.

side, but then is seen aiding the partisan's enemy. Friends question whether the Stranger is really on their side but the partisan insists that the Stranger knows best, and does not waver from his belief or faith that the Stranger loves him. Mitchell's question can be rephrased: "what would have to happen for the theist to change his mind, and see that God's love for all men does not entail loving each and every man?" What else is required besides this total lack of evidence? What more is required to accept the idea that God does not distinguish between man and animal on earth? As Mitchell shows, if the theist has no plausible answer, then perhaps his belief is not rational, and it is either an article of faith only, or a vacuous formula that expresses a need for reassurance.

It is important here to point out a significant causal connection between faith, reason and religious belief. Religious belief usually arises from faith, and is unlikely to arise from logical argument. Problems develop when logical reasoning is expected to validate and strengthen beliefs from faith alone. Moreover, it is doubtful that argument can seriously alter or persuade beliefs that originate from non-rational sources, especially deep emotions such as fear. As Jonathan Swift said, it is impossible to reason someone out of something that he did not reason himself into in the first place. Some adamant theists have a faith without limits which strongly influences most or all of their beliefs. Their faith possesses a special priority over their belief system. However, the skeptic can argue that if faith acts as the trump card then anything can be asserted in its name. That is, if faith is the sufficient reason and basis for belief, then innumerable beliefs can become acceptable precisely because no shred of evidence is expected. In theory, virtually any assertion about God could be believed. If we use Popper's falsifiability principle, when, if ever, do these "rational" statements of faith become irrational, unreasonable or false? What *could* make them false? We can also ask whether there are any assertions in the Bible that

orthodox theists would *not* accept. The expression of stubborn, perhaps naïve faith, skeptics claim, is no justification for rejecting or accepting universal truths, and instead appears as the epitome of ultimate wishful dreaming and hope. For instance, Holocaust survivors tenaciously held their beliefs in God even after they were freed.

Similarly, belief in Heaven (such as Hick's) has rarely been directly challenged in the literature largely because of its origin in faith. Skeptics argue that belief in Heaven originates from a need for reassurance, rather than expressing metaphysical *a priori* truth. Of course, the fact that theists so strongly desire it does not make it true, as John Stuart Mill rightly argued<sup>28</sup> and yet this deep-rooted common fallacy is very intractable. Swinburne and many theologians argue that God has good reasons to permit evils for the benefit of greater goods, e.g., Heaven. Interestingly, though, theists rarely acknowledge the opposite: often good events bring about evil ones.

Regardless, it should be too large a gamble for humans to accept a miserable death for the prospect of an unknowable afterlife. Besides, this faith in Heaven might decisively influence the million people who commit suicide every year. Hick realizes that this is a puzzling question and we can only guess at the answers, yet he maintains that the puzzle is not great enough to overthrow his theodicy. But this attempt to minimize the mystery is not acceptable because truly acknowledging the entire history of world evils would, arguably, overthrow all theodicies, past and present.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have briefly examined Hick's basic theodicy, and have shown that his answers to animal suffering are inadequate and somewhat erroneous. Swinburne's later

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<sup>28</sup> Mill, J.S. (1988). Utility of religion. In *Three essays on religion*. (p.70). Amherst: Prometheus Books.

scholarship on animal suffering is partly based on the false premise that animal suffering in a natural disaster, such as fire, is necessary so that other animals can be forewarned to avoid said fires, but this suffering does not (and cannot) improve their character. Moreover, observations and studies show that even small lower animals consciously suffer and experience pain. Some process theists and thinkers, such as Chartier, defend a less than omnipotent God who can persuade but not coerce animals in the right directions. But this response does not offer a satisfactory answer to the animal or human problem of evil. I argue for a nontraditional view that God (if he exists) should be understood as loving humanity but not necessarily individual humans, in contradiction to traditional theism. One might claim that God is selective regarding whom he loves or that he loves no particular individuals.

Similarly, God loves (has charity) for animal species or the genus as a whole, not the individuals, and this theory still maintains that he is totally omnipotent. We do not prevent or stop the pain and deaths of animals in the wild, in that it is an aspect of nature; so too, God does not generally prevent the pain, suffering and deaths of sentient beings. Ample evidence shows that animals experience considerable pain, suffering and deaths, far more than is necessary, especially considering the course of evolution going back to the Cambrian era. As Darwin noted, the suffering of millions of the lower animal species cannot be reconciled with an infinitely good God. Moreover, the belief that God loves every individual animal commits a *reductio ad absurdum*.

The traditional view may be open to committing the division fallacy. My argument does not diminish God's love; it only reinterprets his goodness as true for the whole. This answer is not intended as a solution to the problem of evil in its conventional form, though some theists and skeptics might accept it as such.

A theocentric approach to theodicy, rather than an anthropocentric one enables theists to realize the more radical view that humans are not the center of God's world at all. The theocentric approach drops the assumption and illusion that human good and happiness are consistent with God's purposes. God's ultimate purposes are an enigma. As Frederick Ferre wrote regarding theodicy in Gustafson's *Ethics From A Theocentric Perspective*, "...once man is removed from the center of the moral universe, human judgments of value will no longer count as the measure of God's righteousness."<sup>29</sup>

An anthropocentric approach that is humanistic has much merit, but it also includes the error of assuming too much about God's purpose and plan. As Ferre says, a theocentric approach recognizes that God's ways are not to be measured by our standards of benevolence, nor should we expect God to produce "happy endings." Partly, this is because God loves humanity in a way which is not self-evident, nor does it entail loving each individual, or loving sufficiently to prevent serious evils.

The way the problem of evil is framed is a puzzle without an answer acceptable to everyone. After all, it is one thing to want to hold that one is personally loved by God, and another to accept one's life and choices as they are in stark reality without false wishful dreams and hubris.

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<sup>29</sup> Ferre, F. (January, 1986). Theodicy and the status of animals. *American Philosophy Quarterly*, 1, pp 26-27.

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