

4-1-2002

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### Recommended Citation

Adams, Marilyn (2002) "Neglected Values, Shrunk Agents, Happy Endings: A Reply To Rogers," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol19/iss2/4>

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# NEGLECTED VALUES, SHRUNKEN AGENTS, HAPPY ENDINGS: A REPLY TO ROGERS<sup>1</sup>

Marilyn McCord Adams

In my book *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, I belabor the lameness of moral categories for grasping either what is so bad about horrors or what their remedy might be. To make this point vivid, I try to show how the purity and defilement calculus and the honor code do a better job. To underline how morals are not what is fundamentally at stake between God and human agents, I also appeal to the metaphysical “size gap” between God and creatures. My critics—including Katherin A. Rogers—have found these moves puzzling and have drawn implications from them that I never intended. I try to dispel confusion by re-emphasizing the fact that these alternative conceptual schemes are not congruent with one another, and by reasserting the need for a “developmental double-take” that sizes human agents and their competency both horizontally in relation to one another and vertically in relation to God.

## *I. Neglected Values:*

My recent book, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*,<sup>2</sup> features neglected values. Beginning with the minuses, I aimed to rivet attention on the very worst evils of human experience—*horrendous* evils, which I defined as evils participation in which constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant’s life can be a great good to him/her on the whole. My suspicion—which I tried to confirm with the arguments of chapters 2 and 3—was that a kind of complacency had set in, that Best of All Possible Worlds and Free Will approaches only seemed to work because horrors had not been squarely confronted. Having faced horrors in life, my own theoretical reflection convinced me—as I attempted to explain in chapters 3 and 4—that moral categories are particularly lame when it comes to capturing what is so bad about them, to locating their root causes, and to identifying remedies that might restore the possibility of positive meaning for horror-participants’ lives.

It was in this connection that I looked to other neglected values—to the categories of purity and defilement (in chapter 5), to the honor code (in chapter 6), and to aesthetics (in chapter 7)—for alternative conceptual housing. Horror participation *stains* because it turns both victim and perpetrator into *caricatured* members of their kind. It *shames* by degrading, at the highest level of abstraction by disabling both perpetrators and victims



as meaning-makers, by stumping them and sensitive onlookers as to how or what positive sense could be made of their lives. I located the primary root of human radical vulnerability to horrors in *what we are*, in our metaphysically hybrid condition as personal animals. I contended that created matter and spirit are an “odd couple” that run interference with one another, that personal animality placed in an environment of real and apparent scarcity is dysfunctionally heterogeneous and therefore unclean (cf. chapter 5). If I looked for root causes of horrors in *what we are* rather than *what we do*, I also sought the cornerstone of the remedies (pulled together in chapter 8) in incommensurate Divine Goodness, in *what God is*. The Bad News here is that *what God is* so metaphysically outclasses what creatures are as to make us all—however fine specimens of our kind we may be—unclean before God. The compensating Good News is that—because of this very metaphysical size-gap—the Goodness that God is, is superabundantly sufficient when brought into a variety of relations with any and all horror participation to defeat its negative value within the context of the horror participants’ lives. Thus, Divine identification with human horror participation in Christ crucified, Divine gratitude for our willingness to be personal animals and slog through a human life with all of its costs (à la Julian of Norwich), Divine good-pleasure forever after confer immeasurable *honor* which swallows up *shame*. God as Inner Teacher washes away our metaphysical *uncleanness*, by entering into a triangulated functional collaboration, which—as it becomes evermore explicit and intentional from our side—coordinates matter and spirit into a harmonious working relationship. Since it is only dysfunctional heterogeneity that is unclean, this functional triangulation reclassifies us as “new creations,” as fitting specimens of a different kind. Likewise, just as hypostatic union with the humanity of Christ fits it for Trinitarian fellowship, so functional collaboration with the Inner Teacher issuing in an I-not-I-but-Christ identity polishes us up for heavenly society. And so I thought my appeal to neglected values not only forced us to face the very worst evils, but also enabled us to envision the possibility of happy endings for horror participants, *post-mortem* destinies that enable them to recognize and appropriate depth of positive meaning in horror shattered *ante-mortem* careers.

Katherin A. Rogers, in her characteristically lively and provocative critique,<sup>3</sup> finds my fascination with neglected values decidedly wrong, even disastrously dangerous. She is dissatisfied with my definition of horrors and unpersuaded by my attempts to demonstrate the impotence of free will approaches. Throughout her article she reasserts “the Augustinian tradition” with its “free fall” explanation of the origin of evil, in particular of our present condition, of the dysfunctional state of our personal animality (in Augustinian terms, ignorance and difficulty), and of our location in an environment where we are radically vulnerable to horrors. Rogers presses not only the relevance of moral categories, but takes her stand on the bedrock of moral realism, which she suspects me of rejecting. She contends that my use of the metaphysical size-gap to shrink human agency threatens to erase the *imago dei* and so to eliminate human being as an analogical base for conceiving of God. Likewise, she alleges, my interpretation of the metaphysical gap through purity and defilement categories robs us

of our capacity for sin and so abolishes sin as an evaluative category. The insupportable consequences of my alternative diagnosis of the root cause of evil are thus “the abolition of sin” and the inability to say that God is good in any meaningful sense. Rogers thinks I should have known better: after all, my account runs counter to a whole cloud of witnesses, not only ancient and honorable, but modern and multitudinous. The marginality of my position should stand as an advance warning to me and to others, that “standard brand” “orthodox” Christians should reject it as pernicious at worst and at least false.

Rogers reactions expose points of vigorous disagreement and patches of serious misunderstanding between us. She rightly targets some areas where my position is underdeveloped. I hope in replying to clarify where I stand.

## II. Realism about Which “Values”?

Certainly, in my book and earlier articles,<sup>4</sup> I offer readers plenty of reason to doubt my commitment to *moral* realism. I begin (in chapter 3) with the symptom—that moral conceptuality is inadequate to grasp horrors, their roots of their remedies. I insist (in chapters 1, 5, and 6) that the metaphysical size-gap means that God is not a member of our moral community and conclude that morality cannot grasp what is at stake between us and God. I confront readers<sup>5</sup> with the fact that societies have evolved quite different systems of interpersonal evaluation which have arisen and dominated by turns with changing systems of social organization. I refer to “morality” as a “useful framework for evaluatively challenged human collectives” and confess to the suspicion that it never penetrates to any normative core.<sup>6</sup> And in concluding, I leave readers with the open question, “what are we to make of the fact that evaluative schemes no longer dominant in Western industrial societies—the purity and defilement calculus and the honor code—do a better job of handling the horrendous than morality does?”<sup>7</sup>

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 the 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 about (what Rogers calls) “absolutely objective” facts of the matter—facts about what God is and what human beings are.

Nevertheless, I did not understand Anselm in the *Monologion* to be talking about *moral* goodness. (If I am not mistaken, the words ‘moral’ and ‘ethics’ never occur in his principal works, neither as applied to God nor as applied to created persons.) In *De Veritate*, Anselm does argue that all creatures—non-rational as well as rational, fire as well as humans—owe it to God to be and to do that for which they came to be (that for which they were made; *ad quod factum est*). By contrast, God does not owe creatures anything. But such obligations are fundamentally metaphysical—although Anselm didn’t, he might have said *natural*—based as they are on the fact that to be a creature is to be metaphysically derivative.

I did not and do not have a settled answer to my concluding question, what to make of the fact that the purity and defilement calculus and the honor code shed more penetrating light on the horrendous than modern moral categories do? It may, nevertheless, be useful to sketch out the Anselmian analogy that lay in the back of my mind. Because—for Anselm—each creatable nature just *is* an imperfect way of being Godlike, each can serve as a lens that both focuses something about and at the same time more or less outrageously caricatures Supreme Goodness. So, too, with the various evaluative conceptual frameworks or “language games” that humans have evolved and been played—sometimes separately, sometimes more than one together—in different social circumstances. My assumption was that none would be useful if it didn’t illuminate “metaphysically real” “convention-independent” value from some angle. But just as bovine and platypus natures bring different aspects of Supreme Goodness into view, while gold and human being pierce through to Divine perfection at different depths; so the various evaluative language games represent non-congruent conceptual grids through which we attempt to grasp convention-independent value realities. Each fits some such realities better than others. Where several apply, they may grasp the convention-independent value realities at different levels of superficiality or depth. Thus, when a menstruous woman punches a male suitor and gives him a bloody nose, the purity and defilement calculus judges the suitor unclean by contact, the honor code says he has been insulted and humiliated, while modern morality may praise her courage in defending herself or blame her for unwarranted assault and battery. Here, we are apt to feel that morality offers the most penetrating evaluative angle. By contrast, my claim has been, when the male aggressor first rapes a woman and then axes off her arms, it is true but superficial to say that she has been morally wronged; the language of stain and shame, violation, degradation, and distortion cuts closer to the evaluative heart. Because each conceptual framework manages some things well but is woefully inadequate to others, the evaluative schemes prove to be complementary as well as competitive—which helps to explain why they dominate rather than replace one another even today.

Moreover, Anselmian creatable natures admit of two levels of metaphysical analysis—more superficially, bovine nature is constituted by powers to moo and munch grass, chew cud and reproduce, in general to

engage in bovine functions; more fundamentally, bovine nature is an imperfect way of striving to be Godlike. By remote analogy, we can take evaluative conceptual frameworks and their application from an anti-realist perspective, and count all kinds of claims as true within the framework of those conventions. But we can also admit that in one way or another they are aiming to bring convention-independent value realities into focus, with now greater, now lesser success.

Alternatively (and maybe or maybe not equivalently), just as John Hick regards the cultures (practices and conceptual schemes) associated with the world's great religions, as socially evolved human responses to the Real<sup>8</sup>; so (with as much or as little clarity) I was imagining the plurality of evaluative frameworks to be socially evolved human responses to convention-independent value realities. And just as Hick regards the distinctive truth-claims of the various religions as mythically or metaphorically true but not literally true, so I am willing to say that the many and various evaluative claims of the alternative schemes are true but that their truth has a conventional aspect insofar as the value frameworks within which the assertions are made, are socially constructed. Nevertheless, I take both the schemes and the true value claims made within them to point to beyond themselves to convention-independent value realities, which they focus with more or less clarity and in different ways.

### III. *Shrunken Agents:*

In my book, I appealed to the metaphysical size-gap between God and creatures to underline the radical disproportion in agent competency and thereby to discredit applications of the Doing/Allowing and New Intervening Agent principles to shift responsibility for the origin of evil off Divine shoulders onto ours. I attempted to remodel Divine-human relations by substituting the image of mother to infant or toddler for that of parent to teenager or adult to adult. I also used the metaphysical size-gap to undermine the notion that human agency has sufficient dignity for God to be obliged to pay it the respect of leaving it—apart from creation and conservation—to its own devices and allowing or requiring it to live with the (eternal) consequences of its choices and actions. I dramatized these points by contending 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.”<sup>9</sup> In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard (or Climacas) agrees.<sup>10</sup>

Rogers recognizes that the metaphysical size-gap is likewise an Augustinian/Anselmian theme.<sup>11</sup> But “the tradition” strings us out in the tension between two poles—the metaphysical gulf between Divine and creatable natures, on the one hand, and the fact that creatable natures are constituted as ways of being imperfectly Godlike—enough so that rational natures are said to be in the image of God. She thinks I unbalance the teeter-totter by emphasizing the former to the exclusion of the latter. She contends that agents who possess Augustinian free agency are “made metaphysically closer to the image of God” and so are better than my “unclean infant

humans,"<sup>12</sup> and she wonders whether—on my view—"the sort of agency which the enabling work of the Holy Spirit leads us to will ever be the sort of free agency which Anselm and other free fall theodiscists envision."<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, it was not my intention to obliterate the *imago dei* in human beings, but rather to refocus it on human beings as persons, whose essential functions include meaning-making. Horror participation shatters the image, insofar as it stalemates human capacity to make sense of life. Hence we need a Savior Who can put Humpty Dumpty back together again and resurrect our capacity to participate in the meaning-making process.

When I borrowed the mother-infant/toddler model from Julian of Norwich, I took for granted the developmental "double-take" she effects. Neither Dame Julian nor I had any intention of erasing the facts of human development that psychologists attempt to chart—how humans normally begin copeless but grow in cognitive and emotional capacities through various stages and levels towards adult agency which our society rightly holds morally accountable for many of its intentions and deeds. To be sure, I have emphasized that human development is easily skewed by hostile environments and the peculiarities of adult caretakers and role-models. And I have characterized adult human agency as "impaired" and not obviously possessed of the incompatibilist freedom posited by some moralists (such as Ockham or Kant) and attributed to supralapsarian angels and humans by free-fall theorists (such as Augustine or Anselm).<sup>14</sup> I have remained agnostic but negatively inclined on the question of whether we have incompatibilist freedom. Since, however, I have aligned myself with those who deny that incompatibilist freedom is presupposed for ordinary moral practices, I have readily granted that adult human agency such as we possess has the stature and involves the sort of freedom that makes it appropriate for us to hold one another *morally* responsible in roughly the ways that we do. Accordingly, I agree—*pace* Rogers—that there are significant moral differences among human agents, that Hitler and Stalin were morally wicked in the extreme, while St. Francis and Mother Teresa were morally superlative<sup>15</sup>; that the moral gap between horror perpetrators and horror victims is often (although not always) comparably wide. Nevertheless, a developmental "double-take" is required, because it is one thing to size up an individual human's agency in relation to other human beings, and quite another to measure it in relation to God. Dame Julian's point and mine was that the personal capacities of even the most mature adult human agents are infantile in comparison with God's!

As to my wiggle-worm analogy, Rogers' reaction does demonstrate how my remark is apt to mislead unless further distinctions are drawn. Here 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! So far as convention-independent value rankings are concerned (cf. section II above), human being *is* more valuable than worm, virtuous behavior (arguably) more Godlike than vicious, but only by a *finite* measure. Thus, viewed from the top down, even unfallen human being would

be intrinsically (by virtue of what it is) no more *compelling* for God than worm is; nor would the virtuous person intrinsically have any more claim to be awarded eternal life than the vicious.<sup>16</sup>

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—viz., worm functioning, doing “the worm thing.” And there is also something intrinsically and naturally appropriate for humans in aiming Godward—viz., to enter ever more intentionally and explicitly into functional collaboration with God in coordinating matter and spirit and in making sense out of life, and to reach for that intimacy that (by virtue of what human being is and what God is) is incommensurately good-for us. But—and this was my original point—none of this intrinsically and naturally appropriate behavior makes humans any more than worms intrinsically and naturally fit to enter the courts of the Lord!

Do I agree that Augustinian agency is better, objectively more Godlike than my intrinsically unclean infants? It all depends on how much is packed into the concept of Augustinian agency. If it is supposed to include stature sufficient to qualify as a “new intervening agent” in relation to God, then—invoking the metaphysical size-gap once again—I deny that this is metaphysically possible. Would Anselmian agents enjoy more autonomy than my triangulated agents advancing in explicit functional collaboration with the Holy Spirit? I find that hard to say. For Anselm, the affection for justice is as much required for appropriate functioning as the affection for advantage is. Yet, Anselm stresses, the affection for justice is a *donum superadditum*, a gift of Divine grace over and above our nature-constituting powers. Likewise, he demonstrates in the *Proslogion*, how all our intellectualizing is God-infested in the sense of involving collaboration with an Inner Teacher, Who is badgered with questions until He furnishes the insights which the human investigator articulates before questioning some more.

Turning from metaphysics to epistemology, and to Rogers’ charge that my low estimate of human nature disqualifies it as an analogical base for naming the Divine,<sup>17</sup> I respond that “the Augustinian tradition” and I both share the same infralapsarian boat. Rogers herself suggests that “free fall theorists” would agree with my assessment of our present predicament; the difference is that they posit a primordial position in which our agency was not beset with ignorance and difficulty and in which we were not vulnerable to environmental ills.<sup>18</sup> Either way, our characterizations of God will be projected from the human condition and human relationships as we find them now, in this world in its present condition. Either way, such models stand to be corrected by insights supplied—even *ante mortem*—by the Inner Teacher. Neither way—*pace* Pseudo-Dionysius—is the metaphysical gap supposed to be matched by an epistemological gulf of comparable size.

#### IV. Sin, Short-Shrifted!

Christian soteriology begins with the twin problems—that the human condition and Divine-human relations are non-optimal—and posits Jesus



as the Savior Who reverses these ills. But non-optimality can be subsumed under many rubrics. For Greek Fathers of the Church, death was the chief difficulty; Adam's disobedience corrupted human nature, but assumption by the Divine Word restored immortality. For Augustine, Anselm, and Latin school theologians generally, sin looms large. Lest the horrendous be screened out, I deliberately shifted focus: the human condition is non-optimal because we are radically vulnerable to, inevitable individual or collective participants in, horrors; Divine-human relations are non-optimal because God has set us up for horrors by creating us (allowing us to evolve as) personal animals in an environment of real and apparent scarcity. I argued (in chapter 3) that—where horrors are concerned—sin (in the sense of a disobedient use of created free will) is neither the fundamental *explanans* nor the principal *explanandum*. That is why I gave sin short shrift in my book.

Rogers is convinced that—where sin is concerned—I come not merely to neglect but to abolish. At any rate, she forwards (what split out into) a trio of considerations that this is a logical consequence of my views. First, she suggests, it follows from my alleged anti-realism about morality that no behavior is objectively wrong. Second, my use of the metaphysical size-gap to reduce human agency to infantile status denies humans the agent competence required to be a sinner. Third, if our uncleanness is a metaphysically necessary consequence of what human being is, we are all equally unclean and—because this uncleanness is not within our power—none of us is blameworthy, all are equally good, and the term 'good' is thereby eviscerated of positive content.<sup>19</sup> As if in a triumphant *reductio ad absurdum*, she declares that on my view there will be "no value difference between" Hitler and Mother Teresa "viewed objectively and in relationship to God!"<sup>20</sup>

Such arguments seriously miscalculate the implications of my position. To be sure, my value-realism does make the metaphysical gap and the metaphysical straddling nature of personal animality an "absolutely objective" matter of fact. As to metaphysical size and constitution, we humans—Hitler and Mother Teresa, horror perpetrators and their victims—are "objectively" on a par. Moreover, the metaphysical relation between what God is and what we are, the metaphysical nature of matter on the one hand and spirit on the other, are metaphysical necessities. Thus, they are—as I said in my book—neither within anyone's power, nor are they anyone's fault.

In an earlier paper and in my book, I advance the idea of equating sin—at its most basic level—with uncleanness.<sup>21</sup> On this usage, insofar as all creatures are unclean in relation to God, absent a Divinely initiated cleansing ritual, Rogers is right: Hitler and Mother Teresa, horror perpetrators and horror victims, are alike sinners in the sense that they are equally unclean (cf. Peter's Luke 5:8 exclamation, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"; also Isaiah's response to theophany in Isa 6:5-7). Likewise, since all (mere) humans are born immature and so incompetent either to coordinate matter and spirit or to cooperate effectively with the Inner Teacher, all (mere) humans are sinners twiceover, since—to begin with—they share the uncleanness of dysfunctional heterogeneity within

their very selves. While the purity and defilement calculus is itself a social-construction, so that claims about purity and defilement have a conventional aspect, it is clear how in this case its language points to “absolutely objective” matters of value-fact.

Does it follow from this that there is no “objective” evaluative difference in condition and performance between the adult agencies of Hitler on the one hand and Mother Teresa on the other? Here again, it depends on how one precisions the notion of “absolutely objective” or “realism” in “value realism.” Because human agents are thinkers and choosers whose agency is shaped by social practices in many ways, it becomes tricky to specify which human thoughts and conventions are to be bracketed to get at what they “really” and “objectively are.” Supposing some adequate account can be given, I do not see how it follows from the claim that Hitler and Mother Teresa are alike personal animals, that there is no “objective” difference between them in whether, how, and in what degree they learn to cooperate with the Inner Teacher and grow towards harmonious functioning. Even if the *moral* evaluations of Hitler and Mother Teresa are not “absolutely objective,” why should it follow that there are no metaphysically real value differences between them because of differences in their acts? Top down, I have insisted (cf. section III above), these differences would not be compelling, would not—by virtue of what they intrinsically are—constitute any entitlement on Mother Teresa’s part to receive eternal life from God. Bottom up, however, they constitute a big “objective” difference between her *ante-mortem* working relationship with God and Hitler’s and so in the functional versus dysfunctional condition of their agencies.

Moreover, my conjecture—that placing personal animals in an environment of real and apparent scarcity makes horror participation inevitable—was not meant as the claim that each and every instance of horror perpetration is metaphysically necessary,<sup>22</sup> but rather as the assertion that some horrors or other will inevitably occur. Consequently, I have never claimed that Hitler’s choice to build crematoria or Nazi orders to march children into fiery ditches, were metaphysically necessary or not within the perpetrator’s power (in the sense monitored by conventional moral practice) to refuse. The reader needs to keep in mind that ‘sin’ is not univocal but probably equivocal or at most analogical as applied to uncleanness on the one hand, and non-cooperative choices and actions on the other. This is because, once again, the two value grids—the purity/defilement calculus and contemporary moral conceptuality—are not congruent with one another. Thus, it does not follow from the fact that uncleanness besets all of us, is metaphysically necessary and so not within our power, that that we are all equally and necessarily sinners in the sense of compiling records of choice and action that have the same moral worth, or that we are all sinful because none of our choices or actions is within our power.

Rogers offers a fourth argument that my view “entails the denial of the existence of evil in the Augustinian sense of sin”: for “the Augustinian draws a radical distinction between the sinner and the innocent, whereas” I “apparently” do “not see any *difference that makes a difference* between the victim and the perpetrator of horrendous evil.” Her evidence is that “in explaining how these two came to be participants in horrendous evil and

in discussing how that participation is ultimately to be overbalanced by good, the distinction plays absolutely no role." Noting that I am a universalist, she finds that for me "the story of salvation is the same whether one is merely a victim or also a perpetrator of horrors."<sup>23</sup>

At a high level of abstraction what Rogers says is true and penetrates to one of my main points: viz., that *in the region of horrors the notions of guilt and innocence hobble, because horrors are levellers, inflicting their prima facie life-ruining power on both perpetrator and victim alike*. Moral innocence in the Auschwitz inmate was usually not adequate protection from the stain of the horrendous. Most people—even if morally innocent relatively speaking—did not have strength of character sufficient to ward off the meaning-destroying corrosion. Moral innocence becomes hollow for those whose lives have been shattered. Nor did Nazi officials, camp guards, and collaborators—even if never caught and convicted of "crimes against humanity"—escape the *prima facie* soul-destroying power of their deeds. Whatever their post-war material circumstances, the problem common to horror-perpetrators and their victims was humanly irreparable meaninglessness and fragmentation. And so, at a high level of abstraction, the solution to *that* problem is the same for all participants and involves Divine initiatives of the following three sorts. First, God must identify with their participation in horrors and thereby catch up their horror-participation into the fabric of their relationship with God. Second, God will have to heal and teach them how to appropriate some of the positive meanings such Divine identification affords. Third, for them to be finally free, God will have permanently to re-place them in an environment where they are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors.

For the individual, however, whether one is a victim or a perpetrator makes a huge difference to the kinds of meanings life can have: to what has to be defeated, to the specific character that has to be transformed, to the psycho-spiritual exercises that are required to get there, to the amount and kinds of suffering involved in being "born again/from above." Nor have I had any intention of erasing these differences, which in any event occupy a good deal of my pastoral attention. I gave them short shrift in my book, not because they are unimportant, but because there are so many variations on the theme, and because the general problem—of whether and how horrors could be defeated at all—proved so hard.

#### V. *The Vice-Grip of Morality?*

In characterizing Divine-human relations, some Christian theologians begin with creation, others with soteriology, still others with eschatology. The first group accentuates the positive, spotlights the fact that God created the world and called it good. The second group focuses on our "non-optimality" problems and seeks a Savior to solve them. The third group starts by envisioning the end towards which we are headed, our supernatural goal and destiny. Here there is disagreement about whether evil will last forever, about whether salvation is for everyone, for the many, or for the few. To the extent that we philosophers of religion and philosophical theologians fix our attention on the problem of evil, we join the second

group. It is therefore not surprising if we allow our conception of the problem and the parameters of our “solutions,” set the tone, become definitive for what is at stake between God and us.

Thus, many contemporary free will defenders whom Rogers joins, give the impression that what is *primarily* at stake between God and us is whether we exercise our God-given freedom to choose *for* God or *against* God, by conforming to God’s will for our lives. Insofar as morality is the conceptuality in terms of which they are accustomed to evaluate free action, it is an easy step into the assumption that God regards *moral performance*, its recognition, its reward and punishment as eternally significant. Eschatology is not forgotten, but—as with Kant—the *featured* purpose of post-mortem preservation is to make sure that the difference between the innocent and the guilty, between faithful servants and unrighteous rebels is eternally reflected in the consequences (even on Rogers’ universalist hypothesis, split-levels of happiness for the freely compliant versus the Divinely coerced). In this, contemporary free will defenders fall in with turn-of-the-last-century British theology, that tended to rework soteriology in Kantian moral terms.<sup>24</sup>

Philosophers may reasonably disagree about the nature of human dignity, our inalienable right to autonomy, the importance of distinguishing the morally guilty from the morally innocent, even on the justifiability and desirability of hell and damnation. But the emotional energy with which some free will defenders insist on them suggests a pinched sense of scarcity, a fear that the righteous will get less if the wicked are treated better than they deserve. To me, this is one of the perils of letting moral performance set the parameters for what is at stake between God and us.

By contrast, Duns Scotus begins with abundance, with the unsurpassable and inexhaustible riches of infinite Godhead, with first and last things, with the eternal glory of the Blessed Trinity, with their project to widen the circle, by bringing many sons and daughters, humans and angels to the glory, to face-to-face intimacy and enjoyment of God. For Scotus, election, Incarnation, gifts and graces, are means to that end, and come prior in the order of explanation to any Divine consideration of the problem of sin. For the Subtle Doctor, Adam’s fall and its consequences seem to represent minor plot complications, easily folded into the God’s grand and surprising plan.<sup>25</sup>

In her *Revelations of Divine Love*, Dame Julian of Norwich writes to reassure those who are spiritually serious but now bogged down in sin and its *ante-mortem* consequences. She sets the struggles of “this passing life time” in the context of Our Triune Mother Who enfolds and indwells us, of Mother Jesus from Whom we are ever being born and never delivered, of Christ Our Suitor Who climbs the cross to perform His deed of knightly valor, of a future heavenly welcome, of honors to be paid us by the Father, of friendly at-homeness with God.<sup>26</sup> Again, Bernard of Clairvaux, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and others experience the soul’s union with God as with a Love Who surrounds and suffuses, penetrates, fills and fulfills.<sup>27</sup>

For all of these thinkers, Boundless Love, Eternal Life constitutes the environment and sets the agenda. Mother Love takes the initiative with carnal knowledge, with psycho-spiritual intimacy, with real presence. It begins with joy and wonder, with the desire to nurture, to help the other

grow up to full stature, over and over again to renegotiate relationships, to find ways to become and remain life-long friends. Lovers want to get inside each other, as much as possible to experience what it is like to be the other, to see and value the world from the other's point of view, from time to time to lose themselves in ecstatic union. Neither way is moral performance the be-all-and-end-all. Discipline, education, the habits they cultivate are needed to transform infants into friends and lovers. *Ante-mortem* we never get beyond the need of it, any more than we will permanently graduate from the purgative to the illuminative way. Yet, its purpose is not to enable us to follow the rules, perform our obligations, promote human welfare, or even to become fine specimens of human being. *The Conferences of Cassian* on the monastic life make it clear that virtue, even purity of heart, are only skillful *means* to the end of wholesome relationship, beatific intimacy, and life together.<sup>28</sup> If the words of the liturgy are to be believed, God didn't make us for the purpose of compiling virtuoso moral records; rather God created all things to fill them with Divine Blessing and to rejoice in God's radiant splendor.<sup>29</sup>

What I had to say in my book attempted to reflect these latter perspectives. If Divinity is Boundless Love and Eternal Life, generosity sets the tone, and liberality is the order of the day. "There's a wideness in God's mercy." If the relatively righteous and the horror victims are getting infinitely more than they can ask or imagine, why should they—much less God—want horror perpetrators to receive any less? When the relatively righteous experience the metaphysical size-gap between them and God, they will be amazed and amused that God takes any notice of their moral performance, either of their successes or of their failures (cf. Psalm 8 and the soteriological calculations of Scotus and Ockham). Horror participants will be dumbfounded at the cancelling disproportions: as the power of horrors *prima facie* to destroy positive meaning is disproportionate to the length of the segments their occurrence occupies in the space-time worm of the participant's life; so Divine Goodness outclasses horrendous evils, not only devours them but makes good on them by infusing them with positive meaning. Horror perpetrators will be awed, eventually weep with relief that there is surplus Goodness to compensate their victims and reverse their harms.

Rogers is right: repentance is central to New Testament Kingdom-proclamation. But Rogers is wrong to insist that repentance is only for sinners.<sup>30</sup> Literally, '*metanoia*' means turning again. The invitation is to leave behind one's own, flat world-view, to inhabit a cosmos defined and organized by God, and to live into the meanings that evermore conscious and intentional collaboration with God makes. The Gospels tell us this *metanoia* was even more of a challenge for the relatively righteous (for chosen as well as would-be volunteer disciples) than it was for tax collectors and sinners. Horror-participation shatters our horizontal worlds, and makes the moral and immoral alike desperate for the Inner Teacher we always need.

#### VI. Modern Manichaeism?

In the *Confessions*, Book VII, Augustine tells us that one reason for his youthful attraction to Manicheism was its promise of an easy solution to

the problem of evil. According to him, Manicheanism was metaphysically dualistic, positing an essentially good substance—spirit—and an essentially evil substance—matter—and treating them as alike necessarily extant features of the universe. Because the existence of matter was supposed to be necessary and coeval with God, God cannot be responsible for either permitting or causing its existence in the first place, or for eliminating it in the end. After reading Platonist books and listening to Ambrose, Augustine rejected Manicheanism, and tried to manage the problem of evil by appeals to the Platonic doctrine of evil as a privation and to a free will defense.

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 and so unclean as a result of what it is, skated too close to the edge of that “Platonism and Manicheanism that Augustine defeated a millennium and a half ago.” For it looked to her as if [i] I were associating matter with evil. My quote from Douglas that dirt is powerful and dangerous, appeared [ii] to assign evil positive power over and against God. My contention that the defilement of human nature is metaphysically necessary, made it look as if I were [iii] granting evil a positive power over and against God so great as to be outside Divine control.<sup>31</sup> She also complains that [iv] my dim view of human being runs contrary to affirmations both by Genesis 1 and the Augustinian tradition that human nature is in itself good.<sup>32</sup>

Her worries give me the opportunity to recall how Julian of Norwich analyzes human being into a higher (intellectual) nature and a lower (sensory, bodily) nature. She insists that each part is good—after all, both are and will forever remained joined to God, the higher at creation and the lower in the Incarnation. Sin 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 in their future coordination, and omnitemporally in the love of God that freely counts us as delightful children.

Likewise, in my book, I have not said, nor do I believe that matter, body, or animality is bad or evil. Nor have I endorsed any soteriological plot that involves a Manichean escape of spirit from the imprisonment in matter. On the purity and defilement calculus, dirt is stuff out of order, dysfunctional heterogeneity. The defilement of personal animality in itself does not arise from body or animality alone or from spirit or personality alone, but from the lack of functional coordination between them. The biblical Holiness Code makes “dirty is catching” axiomatic, not because dirt has positive power, but because human beings have limited power and ingenuity to organize heterogeneity into functional harmony. Although I agree with tradition that God cannot do the metaphysically impossible, and so cannot make it the case that human spirit has sufficient power in itself to organize human being into a functional unity; this does not mean that God cannot triangulate Divine power into the equation to become a functional partner in effecting such integration. My soteriological plot line remains incarnational, but it is one that gives us new functional identities in the Pauline manner: “I-not-I-but-Christ” (Galatians 2:19-20)!

VII. *Voices of Authority:*

Most Christian philosophers and theologians see themselves as standing within a tradition, and hold themselves responsible to certain authorities which they regard as somehow regulative of what can count as a Christian point of view. Thus, in debates about philosophical theology, appeals to authority are not merely rhetorical or dialectical maneuvers, but can function to preserve Christian ideological identity. Nor is the idea that some select group of texts and authors define a field, peculiar to Christian philosophy or theology. Most university disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have their "canon" which undergraduate majors are required to read and graduate students to steep themselves in if they are to be certified as legitimate members of their professional guilds.

Rogers tells us that her "own method in philosophizing about religion is to weight the tradition of the Church very heavily" including the way "the tradition has clearly taken Scripture."<sup>33</sup> For Rogers, a wide range of authorities—Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, "the vast majority of the major Christian thinkers in the Latin west from the time of Augustine at least through Aquinas in the mid-thirteenth century," the Roman Catholic Church, and many contemporary philosophers of religion—establish an almost unbudgeable presumption in favor of "free fall theodicy."<sup>34</sup> Likewise, "Augustine and every *orthodox* thinker at least up through the Renaissance" weigh in favor of the claim that God makes human beings good.<sup>35</sup> Traditional readings of Scripture tell against universalism.<sup>36</sup> The endorsement of "most contemporary philosophers of religion" imposes a burden of proof in favor of moral realism,<sup>37</sup> while putative consequences that "most standard brand Christians *should* find insupportable"<sup>38</sup> clinch her case against "rejecting the tradition in favor of Adams's alternative."<sup>39</sup>

Medieval latin philosophical theologians also appealed to a variety of authorities, and assigned them a range of weights. Pre-eminent were the *infallible* authorities of Scripture, the Creeds, and the pronouncements of the ecumenical councils. Other ecclesiastical declarations were held to be fallible but—at least locally and temporarily—binding, if not on what experts can think, at least on what they may publically say (cf. Wodeham on Kilwardby's condemnation of the unity of substantial forms). Anselm concedes to the Church fathers a defeasible presumption, not only of truth but also of completeness of doctrinal coverage. Later on, the burden of proof seems more easily rebuttable, but—depending on the topic—their texts and views must be seriously engaged or at least explained away. For philosophical points—e.g., in logic, epistemology, physics, and metaphysics—Aristotle, Boethius, Avicenna, and Averroes enjoyed a comparable presumption. Even in the fourteenth century, lesser but non-negligible weight was granted to theological consensus and the philosophical or interpretive mind of "the common school."

Nevertheless, during the middle ages, even infallible authorities were not merely memorized, quoted, or commented upon, but set up against one another in apparent contradiction thereby to problematize doctrinal claims, then questioned and disputed to win a deeper understanding. They were also opposed by bringing *pro* or *contra* arguments from other

fields (such as physics or philosophy) the better to integrate theological claims with the rest of human knowledge. Wide-ranging disagreements were not only tolerated but promoted in the schools, because medieval philosophical theologians were accustomed to distinguish between *dogma*—which ecclesiastical bodies require all the faithful to believe—and *theological explanation*—which shoulders the burden of providing precise formulations of what “the articles of faith” mean, of answering detailed questions about them, and fine-grained accounts of how they could be true. During the middle ages, there were as many rigorously worked out understandings of the questions on Lombard’s theology syllabus as there were contrasting philosophical positions. In this process, past minority reports could be particularly useful, precisely because of their “left-field” quality could be skillfully deployed to expose weaknesses, to force clarification, and to provoke more nuanced articulations of main-line positions.<sup>40</sup>

The last hundred twenty-five years of biblical scholarship has exerted considerable pressure on Christian thinkers to abandon harmonizing hermeneutics and to take seriously the notion that Holy Scriptures themselves preserve a wide variety of sometimes conflicting theological perspectives. Within the Wisdom literature, Proverbs and some psalms express confidence that the world naturally runs and/or is governed by the Act-Consequence Principle (“good for good; evil for evil”), while Job and Ecclesiastes mount sharp but contrasting critiques of this idea. Ezra and Nehemiah press a “separatist” policy to maintain ethnic purity, while Ruth and Jonah insist upon the godliness of foreigners. Genesis sets the numinous stories of Abram’s flaming-fire-pot covenant (Genesis 15) and Jacob wrestling by the river (Genesis 32:24-32), alongside a wisdom-style portrait of Joseph as a paradigm of prudent rule. Despite centuries of explaining evidence away, the Bible can still be heard to equivocate on the issue of child sacrifice,<sup>41</sup> not to mention genocide. Biblical scholars invite us to see how—with the patriarchal period reaching back to circa 1700 BCE—our texts still bear the stamp of the widely varying cultural frameworks of the human authors in many times and places. Scholars speculate that ancient editors did not simply “white out” such discomfiting discontinuities lest we lose information about God and the people of God by being denied the opportunity to enter into and wrestle with alternative points of view.

As a Christian philosopher and theologian, I treat the Bible, the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds, and the declarations of the ecumenical councils as primary authorities. In particular, I take the creeds as lenses through which to focus the many witnesses of Scripture, which I take to be the primary tool of spiritual formation for Christians and for Christians the primary source of divine disclosure and revelation. Reacting to such developments at the turn of the last century, Bishop Charles Gore urged Christian thinkers to respect the authority of Scripture, not by endorsing the infallibility of some harmonized interpretation, but by “putting oneself to school to it,” especially to those parts that one finds least congenial, to allow oneself to be turned upside down and backwards to get inside its perspective, the better to squeeze out insights about the nature and character of God.<sup>42</sup>

As a Christian philosopher and theologian, I regard God as the only infallible authority. Among texts, I count Scriptures as the primary tool of



spiritual formation and principal locus of Divine disclosure and revelation for Christians. I take the Apostles' and Nicene creeds and the declarations of the ecumenical councils as lenses that rightly focus how—for the purposes of Christian devotion and theology—the Bible is to be read. So far as past theologians are concerned, I take very seriously the Church Fathers as well as the philosophical theologians and spiritual writers of the medieval latin West. Certainly, I have paid Anselm and medieval Franciscans the dubious honor of persistent professional engagement throughout my adult life. As an Episcopal priest, I add to these representatives of the Anglican tradition, particularly in the period from Gore to Temple. Although I do hold the creeds to be non-negotiable boundaries, and Holy Scriptures as daily bread, for me to take the others as authorities is not a matter of agreeing with everything they say or of letting their majority rule, but of a commitment to put myself to school to them, to question and dispute them, to learn all I can, to be formed and informed by them, even if in the end I beg to differ in greater or lesser degree.

If my book is often “in” the reader’s “face” with neglected values and angles, most of them have a traditional pedigree. Rogers challenges my definition of horrors on the ground that it would be immoral (Augustine implies, impious because insulting to God) ever to doubt whether one’s life could be a great good to one on the whole.<sup>43</sup> But, unsurprisingly, I have begun philosophizing with the book of Job, which features the ruinous power of human suffering and the metaphysical size-gap between us and God. Job does count his sufferings as reason to wish he had been born dead, lodges responsibility for them with God, accuses God of being more of a chaos-monster than a creator, charges God with slaying the innocent with the guilty, and demands a day in court. Job’s blasphemous tirade is rewarded with what few hebrew bible characters get: a face-to-face vision of the bigness and the goodness of God! True, Job is given to see and to hear how the size-gap disqualifies him as an expert on God’s cosmic competence. But God certifies Job’s expertise on the seemingly ruinous power of suffering on human life. Thus, God praises Job for telling the truth when his friends lied (Job 42:7).

What drove me to take the purity and defilement calculus and the honor code so seriously, was not a pre-established fascination with anthropology but their very entrenchment in the Bible’s own formulations of what is soteriologically at stake. God as Mother is not only gets biblical mentions, but also is featured by Anselm (in his prayer to St. Paul) and the later medieval monastic and mystical traditions.<sup>44</sup> God as Lover à la the allegorized Song of Songs is steady theme from Origen to Bernard of Clairvaux to St. Teresa of Avila (a Doctor of the Church).<sup>45</sup> Origen and Gregory of Nyssa in the East, Julian of Norwich (commemorated by the *Book of Common Prayer* calendar) and other medieval women mystics, at least flirt with universalism. Ireneaus and Julian see our *ante-mortem* human journey as beginning with the incompetence of immaturity. Unsurprisingly, I note with interest that “free fall” gets short shrift in the canonical Scriptures (only in Genesis 2-3 and Romans 5), while other hypotheses about the source of evil also get mentions (e.g., the nephilim of Genesis 6 and Leviathan or Rahab of the deep). Nor is free-fall enshrined in ancient

creeds or ecumenical pronouncements. It is the Reformed catechisms—e.g., the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), the Canons of Dort (1618-1619), and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)—(curiously not mentioned by Rogers) that explicitly prescribe it. But in this age of ecumenism most would agree that not all Christians are Reformed—which brings me to my final point.

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!

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#### NOTES

1. Thanks to Robert Merrihew Adams for comments on my comments. As usual, gratitude does not entail agreement from either side!

2. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

3. "The Abolition of Sin: A Response to Adams in the Augustinian Tradition," *Faith and Philosophy* vol. 19, no. 1, 69-84.

4. E.g., "Theodicy without Blame," *Philosophical Topics* XVI (1988), 215-45.

5. Cf. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, Introduction to Part Two, 61; chapters 5 and 6.

6. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, chapter 9, 192-193.

7. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, Conclusion, 207.

8. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1989).

9. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, chapter 5, 95.

10. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by David F. Swenson & Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), Section II, A, sec.2, 386-468.

11. Rogers, *op.cit.*, 74.

12. Rogers, 77.

13. Rogers, *op.cit.*, 75.

14. Cf. "Theodicy without Blame," *Philosophical Topics* XVI (1988), 215-45.

15. E.g., *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, chapter 9, 192-193.

16. Thus, my shrinking human agency in relation to God is not—*pace* Rogers (77)—any more advantageous to universalism than the free will defender's estimate is. Perhaps less so: for me, human innocence is no more worthy of heavenly reward than human guilt; all are equally undeserving!

17. Rogers, 82-83.
18. Note: Rogers does not respond to my argument that "free fall" theories require the supposition that even in Eden humans were radically vulnerable to horrors. For they represent the original position as one such that one wrong choice would trigger a crash into our present condition and situation.
19. Rogers, 81-83.
20. Rogers, 82.
21. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, chapter 5, 94-96. Cf. "Sin as Uncleaness," *Philosophical Perspectives: Philosophy of Religion* (1991), 1-27.
22. As Rogers implies, 81.
23. Rogers, 81.
24. Notable here is R.C. Moberly's *Atonement and Personality* (London: John Murray, 1901) and R.W. Dale, *The Atonement* (London: Congregational Union Lectures, 1902).
25. John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III,d.7,q.3; ed. by C. Balic, OFM in *Ioannis Duns Scoti, Doctoris Mariani Theologiae Marianae Elementa* (Sibinici, 1933), 1-10.
26. Cf. my "Julian of Norwich on the Tender Loving Care of Mother Jesus," in *Our Knowledge of God*, edited by K.J. Clark (Kluwer Academic Publishers: the Netherlands), 203-19.
27. For discussions of their descriptions, see Nelson Pike, *Mystical Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).
28. *The Conferences of Cassian* 19.5-10.197-201.
29. Cf. Eucharistic Prayer D, which has historical roots in Byzantium, in *The Book of Common Prayer According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 372-376.
30. Rogers, 81.
31. Rogers, 79-80.
32. Rogers, 70.
33. Rogers, 73.
34. Rogers, 69.
35. Rogers, 70.
36. Rogers, 73.
37. Rogers, 82.
38. Italics mine; 69.
39. Rogers, 77.
40. Cf. my "Reviving Philosophical Theology: Some Medieval Models," *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, Band 26: *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, ed. by Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 60-68. Cf. Stephen F. Brown, "Key Terms in Medieval Theological Vocabulary," in *Civica: Etudes sur le Vocabulaire Intellectuel du Moyen Age*, III: *Methodes et instruments du travail intellectuel au moyen age: Etudes sur le vocabulaire* (Brepols: Turnhout, Belgium, 1991), 82-96. Bernardo C. Bazan, *Les Questions Disputees, Principalement dans les Facultes de Theologie, de Droit et de Medicine, Premiere Partie* (Brepols: Turnhout, Belgium, 1985), 15-149.
41. For a chilling discussion of these texts and their cultural background, see Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: the*

*Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

42. Charles Gore, "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration," in *Lux Mundi* (London: John Murray, 1890), 315-362.

43. Rogers, 70.

44. Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 1982).

45. Cf. Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1992).