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GOD, SIN, AND ROGERS ON ANSELM: A REPLY

Hugh J. McCann

Based on views she draws from Anselm, Katherin Rogers mounts an extended attack on my account of God's relationship to human sin. Here I argue first that if Anselm's view of the relationship in question is different from my own, then Rogers fails to locate any reason for thinking his account is correct. I argue further that Rogers fails to demonstrate her claim that my account of God's relation to sin makes him a deceiver, that her criticisms of my theodicy of sin are misguided, and that she is mistaken in claiming a world in which God has full sovereignty over human willing is less safe for the repentant than I hold it to be.

In "God is Not the Author of Sin: An Anselmian Response to Hugh McCann," Katherin Rogers gives an extended critique of my views in "The Author of Sin?"¹ Her criticisms raise a great many issues, several of which deserve much more complete treatment than I can provide here. I think, however, that her main points can be answered, and I try to do so briefly in what follows.

I

First, a word about my answer to the question that forms the title of my article. According to Rogers, "His answer is, yes!" (p. 300) Perhaps this is a point on which I should have been clearer, but if I thought things were this simple, there would not have been a question mark in my title. In fact my answer is only a qualified yes, as is indicated in the passage Rogers quotes just two sentences later. What I hold is that God "is the first cause . . . of those acts of will *in which we sin*" (emphasis added).² This qualified way of expressing the point was meant to reflect Thomas Aquinas's views on this question, to which I refer in a footnote to the sentence Rogers quotes. In *Summa Theologica* I-II Aquinas espouses this position:

[E]very being, whatever the manner of its being, must be derived from the first being. . . . [Thus] every being in act is reduced to the First Act, viz., God, as to its cause, who is act by his essence. There-

¹Katherin Rogers, "God is Not the Author of Sin: An Anselmian Response to Hugh McCann," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), pp. 300–309; Hugh J. McCann, "The Author of Sin?" *Faith and Philosophy* 22 (2005), pp. 144–159. Page references in the text are to Rogers's paper.

²"The Author of Sin?" p. 149.



fore God is the cause of every action, in so far as it is an action.—But sin denotes a being and an action with a defect. But this defect is from a created cause, viz., free choice, as falling away from the order of the First Cause. . . . Consequently, this defect is not reduced to God as its cause, but to free choice; just as the defect of limping is reduced to a crooked leg as its cause, but not to the power of locomotion, which nevertheless causes whatever there is of motion in the limping. Accordingly, God is the cause of the act of sin; and yet he is not the cause of sin, because he does not cause the act to have a defect.³

It is clear from this passage that Aquinas takes God's activity as First Cause to be compatible with human free will, and in my paper I tried to offer an account on which this would be so. Thus far, then, my position on whether God is the author of sin is substantially identical to that of Aquinas.

Now it is also clear that Aquinas does not want to attribute what I called the sinfulness of sin to any act of God, and I did not do so either. By Thomas's account, the sinfulness of sin is owing to our free will. But it arises in an interesting way: Sin is for Aquinas a *defect*—that is, in Augustine's terms, a privation of being. What this suggests, and the example of limping bears the suggestion out, is that in fact the sinfulness of sin has no *active* cause at all. Sinfulness belongs to our will and not to God's, for it is only our will that is out of kilter with God's commands when we will wrongly. But the sinfulness is not something that even we *produce*, in the proper sense of the term. Indeed, as Thomas goes on to say in response to an objection, it is not even our object in willing. Rather, "[T]he defect consists in this, that man is not subject to whom he ought to be, though he does not intend this principally."⁴ I adhere to the same line of thinking in my treatment of sin, especially as it occurs in the Adam and Eve story, which I take as a kind of paradigm of wrongdoing. In it I argue that Adam and Eve do not, in eating of the Tree of Knowledge, have it as their primary object to reject God's command, but rather to be like him. It is in willing to pursue this end that they sin. But the sin is as Aquinas suggests: a defect, a falling away from the commanded order. So the sense in which God may be said, on my view, to be the author of sin has very strong underpinnings in traditional theology. Indeed, it represents no departure at all from what I think are the two most respected figures in the tradition.

And maybe a third as well. For the interesting point here is that Rogers seems to find the same view (or at least the first part of it) in Anselm. She holds that following him, "it is possible to analyze choice in a way which allows that all that has being comes from God without that making him the author of sin" (p. 300). Seemingly, then, this should be a point on which, apart from wording, we are in essential agreement. Yet it is not clear that we are. My claim that it is God who confers existence on those acts of will in which we sin is founded on the premise that we cannot confer existence on them ourselves. Were we to do so, I argue, it would have

³*Summa Theologica* I–II, Q. 79, Art 2. I rely here on the standard translation.

⁴*Ibid.*, ad 2.

to be either by performing some other action, or as a part of the very act of will on which we are supposed to be conferring existence. The first alternative leads to a vicious regress, and the second is impossible, because once the act of will is on hand there is no need for existence conferral, and before it is on hand there is nothing to do the conferring. Assuming, then, that acts of will are exempt from having natural causes, only God can be the source of their existence.⁵ Now I am no expert on Anselm, but in light of what Rogers says in the sentence quoted above it seems unlikely that Anselm's position would deviate from this. Yet it is not clear that Rogers takes things that way.

First, there is a misunderstanding to clear up. Rogers interprets me as holding that we creatures, in our willings, count as secondary causes, so that, "It is correct to say that you cause your choice, but you, and everything about you, all your properties and actions, are immediately caused by God" (p. 301). The first part of this is mistaken; secondary causation has a place in the natural world, but I would *deny* that rational agents may be said, in any useful sense, to be the cause of their choices. Second, Rogers claims that I myself posit "at least one agent, God, who brings choices into being presumably without any vicious regress, and so such a thing is not impossible *simpliciter*. And if it is possible for some agent to create a choice, and God is omnipotent, ought he not to be able to create an agent who can create a choice?" (ibid.). Here, however, there is an equivocation. I take the dilemma argument summarized above to show that indeed it is impossible *simpliciter* for an agent to confer existence *on his own choices*, and I postulate no being with this capacity. I do hold that God is the primary cause of *our* acts of will, and that his activity in this regard is indeed direct: in particular, he does not engage in an act of commanding which *in turn* causes our choices. Our choices are the content or the embodiment of God's will, not the effect of it.⁶ But this is not a matter of anyone, divine or human, conferring existence on their own choices. We cannot do that, and in God's case no such thing is even necessary. God's choices are, like him, timelessly eternal, and nothing confers existence on them.⁷ There is, then, no such thing as the ability to create one's own acts of will. God has no

⁵"The Author of Sin?" p. 145.

⁶Ibid.

⁷One might wonder, if God's choices are timelessly eternal and require no existence conferral, how their existence is to be explained. A thoroughgoing treatment of this matter would in my view have it that God's choices are in fact essential to him, and hence partake of his own, essential existence. It is worth noticing that if one takes this tack an interesting further question arises: whether, if they are essential to him, God's choices could be other than they are? I would answer that, although it is sometimes convenient to speak of what God can and cannot do, the truth is that either a yes or a no answer to this question is a mistake. This is because the essence of God is ultimately such as to transcend all modality. Obviously, this is too much to go into here. It is worth noticing, however, that even if God's choices are essential to him they need not be causally determined in the nomic sense, even by other features of his essence. They can therefore be free in this regard, and they may also display the other two features that, in my paper, I associate with free action—namely, spontaneity and intrinsic intentionality. "The Author of Sin?" p. 157.

need of such an ability, and if we make the usual assumption that nothing God creates is in violation of the law of non-contradiction, then he confers no such ability on us either.

By contrast, Rogers's interpretation of Anselm wavers on this question. On one hand she wants to say that when we make a moral choice, "Every *thing* (original emphasis) in the choice is caused by God. You did not bring anything new into being, any more than if you had had but a single God-given desire to follow" (p. 302). I think Aquinas would agree completely with this, and so do I. Yet she also holds that by Anselm's lights, when we decide between sin and justice, "There is an aspect of the event of you choosing sin over justice, or justice over sin, which is entirely up to you" (ibid.). And although she holds that in a sinful choice, "[T]he only property which can be credited to the agent is the sinfulness, which isn't any sort of a thing at all, being only the absence of the justice that ought to have been there," she immediately goes on to state that, "Still, it is up to the created agent alone whether it will cling to justice or throw it away" (p. 303). There is, however, a serious problem with this combination of claims: if all that is positive in our choices owes its being to God, and if sinfulness, being entirely negative, is not in itself brought into being at all, then it is hard to see what sense can be made of the claim the sinfulness is "entirely up to" the created agent. Rogers gives no example, so consider again the Eden scenario. There, Adam and Eve face the decision whether to obey God's command, or to become like him, to achieve knowledge of good and evil by eating of the tree. Simply by opting for the latter while knowing that God has forbidden it, they incur the stain of sin. No separate act of "throwing away justice" takes place; rather, the two throw away justice simply by making an unjust choice. In itself, it is a choice *for* something: for parity with God. The injustice of it is entirely a negative thing, a matter of their act of deciding being out of keeping with God's command. Finally, as Aquinas (and, according to Rogers, Anselm too) would say, this act of deciding owes its existence entirely to God's creative fiat. The sinfulness of the act is, of course, imputed to Adam and Eve, for the decision it characterizes is predicated only of them. But the sinfulness of their choice is neither more nor less "up to them" than any other aspect of the act. I argued in my paper that this is characteristic of wrongdoing, and I cannot see that Rogers is able to draw from Anselm any plausible reason for thinking otherwise.⁸

II

A second line of criticism offered by Rogers has to do with whether God is not, by my account, an unloving deceiver. Her criticism here is threefold. First, she holds that, "McCann does not see human virtue as reflective of the will and nature of God" (p. 303). I made no claim whatever on this

⁸In support of her claims about Anselm Rogers also cites some views of Robert Kane's about moral responsibility, in "Responsibility, Luck and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Determinism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96 (1999): pp. 217–240. Again, space does not permit a full treatment, but I would say that Kane's views are subject to the same dilemma I raise against agent causal views, and so are able to provide no support.

subject, so I take it that what Rogers means is that it would not be possible for me to see things this way. But of course I do. As for virtue, Rogers chief point seems to be that one cannot, on my view, “have some grasp of the goodness of the divine nature through understanding its reflection in the . . . moral goodness of human creatures” (ibid.). And this is because “McCann . . . apparently sees virtue as consisting in deliberately choosing to follow God’s commands, which commands do not follow from the divine will or nature” (pp. 303–304). Again, however, I made neither of these claims and I believe neither. Rather, I suspect that Rogers attributes these views to me because she herself misperceives the nature of virtue. To display the virtue of courage does not consist in exhibiting what Hemingway called “grace under pressure” *as we are commanded*, or *as we ought*. It is simply to exhibit grace under pressure, and many examples of great courage—e.g., a soldier throwing himself on a grenade to protect his comrades—involve no command of any kind. The same goes, for love, justice, temperance and just about any virtue one could name, the obvious exception being obedience. We are, of course, commanded to be loving and just, but these traits themselves do not depend for their nature on moral injunctions, and they would exist whether imperatives of duty existed or not. Accordingly, our own traits of benevolence, justice and the like can offer insight into these traits as they are exhibited by God, and hence insight into his goodness, even though he himself is not subject to the commands of morality.

Rogers’s second point on the topic of deception concerns whether God must be conceived as the author of deception—that is, the cause of human ignorance. On Anselm’s view he is not, she says, since by Anselm’s lights God is not the author of sin, and ignorance is traditionally held to arise from sin. I, by contrast, court the opposite view because I must hold that “insofar as any created believer is deceived, God made them in their mistake” (p. 304). This is too complicated a matter to go into here. Suffice it to say, however, that while I do hold that God creates us in our errors, I find nothing in Rogers’s presentation of Anselm’s views to justify claiming that he would in the end say anything different. Indeed, my guess is that this case is fairly analogous to that of sin. The defect of error, that is to say, is a matter of deviating from what is true, just as the defect of sin is one of deviating from what is commanded. Both are privations, and as such neither requires a cause in the true sense. For the rest, I suppose it can be argued, *à la* Descartes in *Meditations VI*, that error is owing not properly to God but to the weakness of believers. How much sin may have to do with that I do not know, but I shall have to leave the matter there.

Rogers’s third accusation on the topic of deceit is that on my view, God is guilty of a twofold deception in presenting us with the commands of morality. The essence of her argument is as follows:

When someone issues a command . . . the tacit entailments are that he wants to be obeyed, and he believes it is possible that he can be obeyed. It follows that, on McCann’s account, when God commands he deliberately deceives in that he knowingly conveys that he wants to be obeyed and he believes it is possible that he should be obeyed, when in fact, in the cases where he causes sin, he does not really

want to be obeyed, and he knows it is not possible for the sinner to have obeyed in any case. (Ibid.)

Here too I shall have to content myself with saying a lot less than could be said. But for one thing, if, as I argue in the previous section, Rogers has given us no reason to think there is a defensible Anselmian view that is different from mine, it may be that Anselmians will in the end have to face the very same pair of accusations. But how good are the accusations? Taking them in reverse order, consider first the matter of whether it is possible for the sinner to have obeyed God's command. I never claimed in my paper that it is possible both for God to will the action in which the sinner sins and for the sinner not to perform the action. So if this is the impossibility of which Rogers speaks, then we are thus far in complete agreement. But I also claimed that since our doings are not the causal product of God's will but rather its content or embodiment, this impossibility does not matter to legitimate and authentic moral freedom. Further, I offered a set of conditions that I hold constitute such freedom, and that are left untouched by the way in which God's creative will operates in our actions. Those conditions are that the decision or willing in question not arise from some independent event by nomic causation, that it exhibit the spontaneity of agency, and that it be intrinsically intentional. Now if Rogers means to imply that I was wrong in this—that is, if her claim is either that these conditions do not constitute legitimate freedom, or that they are indeed violated by God's role as creator in our doings—then she needs an argument to that effect, and she has offered none on either score. So if the aim is to trade on a supposed loss of moral freedom given the relation I articulate between God's will and ours, then the argument is question begging. Finally, consider Rogers's claim that when a command is given there is a tacit entailment that the commander believes the command can be carried out. This is simply false. An army commander may order a unit to take a certain objective even if he believes it is impossible for the unit to do so—for example, if he believes that a mere attempt to take the objective is important to the army's overall success. Furthermore, experienced troops know that such commands are sometimes given. But that does not alter their behavior, because they also know that this fact does not change or diminish their obligations in any way.

A similar point applies to Rogers's alleged entailment from the giving of a command to a desire on the commander's part that the command be obeyed. When God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, it seems clear that he does not want the command to be obeyed—for just at the point where preparations are complete and Abraham is about to obey, the angel stops him. To be sure, Abraham demonstrates a willingness to obey, so it is fair to say that God did want this much to occur. But there are certainly cases of commanding where even this much is false. A parent might command a rebellious child to perform an action *A*, not because he wants *A* done but because he knows the command will induce the child to perform *B* instead, which is the action the parent really wants performed. And again, this situation does not take away the child's obligation to do *A*. So there is no entailment here, either. At best there is a widespread conversational implicature that commanders want their commands to be obeyed.

But even this implicature does not make God a deceiver in issuing the commands of morality. As I pointed out in my paper, these commands may be taken as in accord with God's antecedent will, but not always his consequent will. In itself, adultery must surely be displeasing to God, so that the Biblical injunction against it is in accord with his antecedent will. It may be, however, that a better world overall will result if certain adulteries occur. Thomas Paine and Alexander Hamilton were both born of adulterous relationships, and no less a figure than Leonardo da Vinci was illegitimate. Despite their wrongness, the liaisons resulting in these births did take place, hence God's consequent will—that is, what he wills all things considered—must surely have been that they occur. Furthermore, regardless of the role it assigns to God in those acts in which we sin, *any* account on which God knew in creating the world that it was *this* world he was creating and not some other, must be an account on which every bit of wrongdoing that ever occurs is in accord with his consequent will. Again, I am certainly no expert on Anselm; but I would be very surprised to learn that his own view does not, with mine, fall under this rubric—and this despite any disagreement there may be between us as to God's role in the occurrence of sin.

III

Rogers, however, questions the usefulness of the distinction between antecedent and consequent will in God, arguing that a God who exercises complete sovereignty over the universe ought to be able to accomplish whatever ends he might have without having to "cause sin." This suggests that as Rogers understands Anselm, he does not think God enjoys complete sovereignty over creation. There are hints of the same thing further on, where she allows that in Anselm's universe God might *permit* sin, but insists that for him "the choice to reject God really must come only from ourselves" (p. 305). As I have argued above, however, Rogers provides no reason for thinking this is anything more than a distinction without a difference. Pious writers—Aquinas, for example—often speak of God as "permitting sin," and this is perfectly justified if, as Anselm, Aquinas, Rogers and I all seem to agree, sin is a defect or privation, rather than something that has in itself positive being. But it hardly follows from this usage that the role of the creature in sinning compromises God's sovereignty, and I cannot see that Rogers gives us any reason for thinking it does. I would hope, therefore, that there is some reading of Anselm that would preserve God's complete sovereignty even over the actions of sinners—and I am not above suspecting that Anselm would prefer it that way too.

Be that as it may, it is not at all obvious that a completely sovereign God can accomplish all of his goals without the occurrence of sin. For it may be that part of God's purpose in creating universe is the defeat of evil—that is, to create a universe in which evil is not avoided or minimized, but rather is treated as a challenge to be overcome, and is ultimately vanquished. If this is so then since what does not exist cannot be defeated, and since sin counts as a significant kind of evil, God's purposes could not be achieved without creating a world in which there is sin—and very probably a good

deal of it. Now to be fair, I did not in my paper mention the possibility that creation might in general be oriented toward the defeat of evil, and the possibility is easy to overlook. I did, however, point out that there is a way for sin to be defeated: namely, in the sinner's accepting God's offer of friendship toward us, and consciously surrendering his autonomy—which by my account always operated under God's provident will—to God, in the act of conversion. I claimed that this decision can only be made responsibly if the sinner understands the alternative, which is the guilt and desolation of being isolated from God, which we can come to know only through the experience of sinning. For me, then, a proper theodicy of sin is founded, at least for the saved, in the phenomenon of conversion, in which God's friendship is responsibly accepted, and the rebellion implicit in sin is defeated, by our consciously reposing our trust in God to rule our lives.

Rogers's response to this is, to say the least, surprising. It begins with an implicit misreading, and here again I may have been unclear. It must be possible, she says, to understand guilt without sinning. This is because God, who creates that feeling in us, must understand it, and he does not sin (p. 306). But I did not claim that a responsible decision to accept God's friendship requires understanding what the guilt of having sinned *is*; I claimed it required the *experience* of guilt *as one's own*. God has no such experience, although I would certainly agree that he must understand what it is like for us to have it. The pertinent question, however, is whether we could have this experience without ever having sinned. And the answer surely is: Not legitimately. Rogers, however, is untroubled by this; mixing the experience of guilt with the belief that one is guilty, she continues:

If God can make the belief in us, the secondary causes involved in our actually having sinned are not necessary. For example, God could, having created in us a choice to sin, to abuse a child, let's say, then create in us a very vivid, but false, experience that we are carrying through with the sinful deed, though in fact we are not. Or perhaps he could create us on the doorstep of heaven with a lifetime of memories of having sinned, done the sinful deed, and ultimately repented. Presumably the understanding of what it is to be cut off from God would follow just as surely, but no children would have to suffer. If the good goal to be achieved by the sin is the understanding, and the understanding is created in us immediately by God, then . . . a memory of having sinned might do every bit as well as actually having sinned. (Ibid.)

There is some confusion here as to whether the sinfulness of sin lies in the objective harm the sinner might cause in the world, or in the illicit acts of decision and volition through which the harm is brought to pass. I was at pains to argue that it lies in the latter, and that we would sin if only we decided and/or attempted to do evil, regardless of whether the completed action ensues. So for God to create in Rogers's would-be child abuser even the choice to indulge in abuse would be enough for the evil of sin to be present in the world, regardless of whether the consequences of the choice were then short-circuited. But of course even the evil of sinful

deciding and willing would not occur if God were to create in us only a false memory of such activities, as Rogers goes on to suggest he might. She is wrong, of course, to imply that a false memory of having ultimately repented would be enough to put us right with God—but on the other hand perhaps a false memory of repentance is all that is needed to cover falsely remembered sinning.

But let us not tarry over this mystery, for there are far more important difficulties that afflict Rogers's argument here. One is that if the counterexample she offers succeeds against the theodicy of sin I propose, it would succeed against many others as well—I suspect even including Anselm's, although Rogers offers us no Anselmian theodicy of sin. Nearly all philosophers who invoke free will in addressing the problem of evil find important value in there being creatures capable of free choice, and many lay special emphasis on the role of freedom in our choosing to accept God's offer of friendship by repenting of our sins. If, therefore, these goods can be achieved on my own view with God either rendering our choices inefficacious or even deceiving us as to their very occurrence, surely they can be achieved in the same way on many other theodicies of free will, making all of them subject to the same objection. Rogers seems not to appreciate this point, apparently because she thinks she has established that on my view God must be a deceiver, so that whereas I cannot appeal to his honesty to reject her counterexample other theodicians can. But even if, as I deny, Rogers had established what she thinks she has, other theodicies are not immune to her argument. It is no good for any theodicy to appeal to the premise that God is not a deceiver if, as Rogers's example clearly suggests, there is every reason to think that a good God would be.

But would a good God behave in any of the ways Rogers suggests? Well, not by my theodicy. In the case where sinners repent—the only one Rogers addresses—the good that I claim arises out of sin consists in two things: the defeat of the rebellion that constitutes our sinfulness, and the establishment of a relation of friendship with God. Consider, then, the general possibility Rogers suggests: that we might be created “on heaven's doorstep” with a lifetime of memories of sinful choice, the execution of those choices, and ultimate repentance. This obviously, is a scenario on which neither sin nor repentance ever occurs, only the “memory” of them—which is really only apparent memory, since it is false. But then there was never any evil to be defeated, nor any friendship established. It is wrong, therefore, to suggest that the goods claimed on my theodicy can be obtained by a divine deception this thoroughgoing. All right, but perhaps we should opt for a lesser deception. We might suppose that the creaturely agent's memories of sinful decisions and their execution are false, but that the sense of remorse to which they give rise is genuine, along with the agent's ultimate act of entrusting his life to God through repentance. But here again the evil of sin never occurs, and so cannot be defeated. Worse yet, the act of “repentance,” through which friendship with God is supposedly established, misfires completely. It may be sincere enough on the creature's part, but there is no true repentance, for there is nothing to repent. And on God's side any relationship to which it gives rise is founded on wholesale deception. No matter what the creature may think, nothing that rests on this basis can count as friendship. The agent

may think he has found friendship with a loving father, but he has in fact been cozened by a petty buffoon. Friends do not make fools of one another.

The goods claimed in the theodicy of sin I proposed cannot, then, occur on either of the above scenarios. This leaves only the one implicit in the example of child abuse, where sinful decision and the volition to execute our wrongful aims occur just as we would expect, but we are systematically deceived as to the consequences of our volitional activity. Whenever we endeavor to carry out a sinful intention God intervenes, preventing the volitional activity from having any harmful effects. Yet he causes in us the illusion that such effects occur. Thus the would-be child abuser is right to repent his sinful acts of will, but he is wrong in believing that any actual child abuse occurs. God prevents this, and similarly for any other case in which sinners seek to bring about harmful effects in the world. Would a good God engage in this third sort of systematic deception?

Again, I think not. I should point out in this connection that I did not, in my paper, attempt to provide a general theodicy. What I aimed for was a theodicy of sin, where sinfulness is understood to consist in the rebellion that occurs when we knowingly will in opposition to God's commands. This rebellion pertains primarily to the sinner's mental acts; it would be present, as Rogers's example illustrates, even if the harmful effects in the world did not occur. Furthermore, the harmful effects caused by sinful action are mostly of kinds that might have occurred without being consequences of sinful willing. All of us, for example, will die, but very few will be murdered. Accordingly, the task of accounting for the harmful consequences of sinful willing belongs primarily to the theodicy of suffering, not the theodicy of sin. I did not attempt such a theodicy in the paper Rogers criticizes, nor can I do so here. Had I offered one, however, it too would have emphasized the theme of the defeat of evil, the idea that in the best of creations suffering would not be fled or minimized, but instead addressed and overcome.⁹ If this is the right approach, then it is wrong to assume, as Rogers does in her example, that a better world would result if God systematically short-circuited sinful willing, so that no harmful consequences would ensue. In my view a good God would not do that, quite apart from considerations having to do with sin.

But of course there is more to be said, for the harm we cause to others and to the world by our sinful choices does bear on the theodicy of sin in at least one important way: that it counts as a source of remorse, and as evidence of how badly we bungle things when we claim autonomy for ourselves rather than placing our trust in God. The suffering we cause by sinning counts, therefore, as an important part of the reason for the sinner's sense of desolation, and hence as an important source of motivation for his turning to God in repentance. Accordingly, while a situation where God systematically deceives sinners as to the worldly consequences of their rebellion is not as absurd as the one where their memory of having rebelled is false as well, any friendship with God thereby achieved would

⁹I attempt a theodicy of suffering in "Pointless Suffering? How to Make the Problem of Evil Sufficiently Serious," *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 2 (2009), forthcoming.

still be a hollow sham. In this case too, therefore, the theodicy of sin I propose in my paper could not be satisfied.

IV

By way of closing, let me address a few remarks to the question Rogers takes up in the final section of her paper, of what dangers might await sinners who repent of evil-doing and accept God's offer of friendship. For me, repentance is a matter of abandoning the false autonomy claimed in sinful rebellion, and placing one's trust in God to direct one's will to righteous ends thereafter. And I remarked at the end of my paper that if our choices were not completely at the bidding of divine providence, we could never rest fully in that providence, and so could never be safe. What I had in mind is that on my view the repentant enjoy what is sometimes known as the security of the believer: the assurance that, having once invested full trust in God to see to their salvation, that trust will not be betrayed, so that their ultimate union with him is guaranteed. The same would not hold in a universe where our decisions escape providence, so that we have only ourselves to rely upon. Rogers seems willing to grant this last point, for although she cites a view of Anselm's that it is possible to advance so far in the spiritual life that we will no longer see anything of value in rejecting God, she states that for most of us, at least, this kind of constancy is not an absolute certainty, and that "This side of the grave we are never 100 percent safe" (p. 308). So far so good, as pertains to her reading of Anselm.

But she goes on to maintain that the same is true on my view—this because God is on my view an unloving deceiver, who overnight could "rewrite my character as one fallen from grace, sinning and eternally damned" (*ibid.*). I need hardly, at this point, say that this is altogether misguided. Obviously, I reject utterly this characterization of God, and I have tried above to show that Rogers offers nothing that substantiates it. But Rogers's position here also, in my view, misunderstands the nature of salvation. Salvation is not a question of character but of where one's trust lies, and it can be lost only by the sinner rescinding the act of faith whereby he surrenders his autonomy to God. I do not claim that this is intrinsically impossible; the repentant sinner has as much freedom to rescind trust in God as he has to make any other choice. But for that to happen, God has to drop the ball: he must, after he has been accorded full trust by the sinner to secure his eternal destiny, betray that trust, by willing that the sinner turn away from him. A loving father would never do that. We may drop the ball, but he will not.¹⁰ And for my part I find it

¹⁰Someone might ask whether this statement is not too weak, whether the security of the believer does not require us to believe not only that God will not drop the ball but that he *cannot*. I would agree with this provided that the "cannot" is taken only as *de dicto*—that is, as reflecting the incompatibility of God's betraying our trust with his being perfectly good and loving. As a *de re* matter, however, I conceive God to be perfectly free in this, as he is in all things. He is as much able to drop the ball as we are. The measure of his goodness is, however, that he does not do so. God does not behave lovingly because he is perfectly good. It is much better than that: he is perfectly good because in all things, he acts with perfect freedom and yet with perfect benevolence.

incomprehensible that a supremely benevolent God would ever create a universe in which a question of such gravity was left finally to blockheads like us.¹¹

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