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Laura W. Ekstrom
College of William and Mary, lwekst@wm.edu

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Laura W. Ekstrom

Let me say, first, that I am very grateful to all three commentators for their probing comments and careful, thoughtful attention to the book.

Simon Kittle

Much of the difference of opinion expressed in Simon Kittle's comments concerns a kind of intra-party dispute among theorists who offer incompatibilist theories of the nature of free will, that is, between event-causal indeterminist account proponents and those who offer agent-causal indeterminist accounts.

Kittle sides with those who maintain that free will requires a power to be agent-causes *as substances* that bring about events in a way that is irreducible to event causation and which occurs in an event-causally indeterministic environment, requiring the falsity of causal determinism. Competing accounts of the nature of free will are inadequate and, in fact, are not accounts of free will at all, Kittle contends, but of something else instead. Further, he maintains that we know that we have this power to be agent causes as substances, and we know that determinism is false. Kittle suggests that the appropriate reply to a question I ask in the book—should a discovery that determinism is true, if it is true, make one think that what one believed to be an instance of genuine love was or is not an instance of genuine love? (54)—is that determinism would imply that practically everything we believe about anything is false and it's the end of the world.

I do not see how truth of causal determinism—the view that there is at every moment exactly one physically possible future—would imply that everything we believe is false and it's the end of the world. In ways that are, as I see it, natural, comprehensible, and in accord with much philosophical literature on the topics, the notion of *action* is used to mark the difference between agents and patients (agents are beings who act, like us, as opposed to patients, such as falling leaves in the wind); *free will* is the power to act freely, where acting freely describes the kind of control an agent must have over her action in order to be morally responsible in a desert sense for what she does; and, while *autonomy* is a default capacity of persons, autonomous action is an achievement, a matter of acting in

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a way that is authentic, true to oneself. (I defend a coherence account of autonomy that is compatible with causal determinism in other works.)[1]

On a standard and widespread conception of action, an event is an action just in case either it is intentional under some description or it is identical with, or generated by, an intentional action, such as alerting a burglar (action) by turning on a light (intentional action), and acting intentionally is acting for a reason or reasons. Acting for a reason is acting in a way that can be rationalized by a practical syllogism specifying a goal and a means of attaining it. On a causal account of intentional action and reasons explanation, intentional action is understood in terms of causation in a non-deviant way by mental states and events of an agent's that rationalize the action from the agent's point of view, such as beliefs and desires and combinations of these. Our counting as beings who can act, as opposed to our being things like leaves and stones that cannot act, does not require that there is sometimes more than one physically possible future. On leading accounts of autonomous action, our acting autonomously is compatible with causal determinism, too.

There is much more controversy over whether or not acting freely is compatible with causal determinism. I defend an account of free action that requires the falsity of determinism elsewhere.[2] Briefly, regarding the "disappearing agent" charge against event-causal indeterminist accounts of free will: the agent *is* the source of his decisions and actions when they are free in an event-causal libertarian way. What is the agent? It seems to me that the agent is, functionally or psychologically speaking, his intellect and his will and his collection of attitudes. In terms of our practical agency, we ourselves are involved by way of thinking, aiming, desiring, valuing, preferring, believing, and deciding. Derk Pereboom writes that "to be the source of one's decisions and actions is plausibly to be their cause."[3] I agree and think that *the way* one causes one's decision (or other action) is by exercising one's abilities to consider various reasons and to decide what to do taking into account these reasons, so that the decision (or other action) is caused and justified by reasons of one's own. That's what it is to cause one's decision. Agent-causal libertarians suggest that one can only cause one's decision if one is causally related to the event of one's decision as a substance. But I do not see why this is so. It seems to me that there is no lack of the presence of an agent on the event-causal libertarian account of freedom. The power to select one alternative (over another) is the ability to decide to act in that way such that one's decision to act in that way is caused, but not determined by, the inputs into one's decision process.

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[1]Including Ekstrom, "A Coherence Theory of Autonomy" and "Alienation, Autonomy, and the Self."

[2]Ekstrom, *Free Will: A Philosophical Study*; "Free Will, Chance, and Mystery"; "Free Will Is Not a Mystery"; "Event-Causal Libertarianism"; and "Toward a Plausible Event-Causal Indeterminist Account of Free Will."

[3]Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will*, 56.

On an event-causal libertarian account of free action, what we have is an agent who makes a decision for reasons that cause and justify the decision and who is not coerced, manipulated or compelled in doing so, and who, in a directly free action, could have instead done otherwise at the time, by making a different decision or by not deciding at all. It is not as if something has happened, leaving the agent passive with respect to it. Rather, she decided at a time when she also could have done otherwise: she had the ability to do otherwise and the opportunity to exercise her ability to do otherwise afforded by the non-necessitation of a unique outcome by past events given the natural laws.

But libertarian free will of either an agent-causal or an event-causal sort, I argue, is not required for a great number of goods, including human love, and truly good acts, and creativity, and joy, and meaning in human life,[4] and a loving relationship with God. Agents with control as depicted by Dana Nelkin's rational abilities account of freedom[5]—the ability to act from an appreciation of right reasons—and agents with self-directly agency as depicted by Harry Frankfurt[6]—the ability to act as one wants to act and as one wants to want to act—can love each other, and they can have meaningful lives, and they could love God and experience joy and union with God. I do not see at this juncture how to support the claim that a growing, sharing, loving relationship with God not requiring libertarian free will, such as the model John Schellenberg outlines, is incoherent.[7]

Kittle contends that adopting the agent-causal libertarian account of free action blocks the arguments that love and meaning in life do not require libertarian free will because that "precludes us asking things like, 'Do we really think that the act of marrying another is not an instance of the best sort of love if it is free only in the sense depicted, for instance, by Nelkin?'" Such questions "make little sense," he says. This suggests (implausibly, from my perspective) that Nelkin's view, along with alternative accounts of free agency including those offered by Frankfurt, Gary Watson, John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, and Susan Wolf, among others, are not about free will, but are about something that these agency theorists misunderstand.[8] Further, in commenting that, "if agency and free will are as I've sketched, then conscious experience in general (and decision, desire, intention, judgement in particular) will be significantly different in nature to the sorts of conscious states and events that reductionist, event-causalists label 'decision,' 'desire,' etc.," Kittle seems to be asserting that if causal determinism is true and agent-causal libertarianism is false,

[4]For instance, as on the view in Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters.*

[5]Nelkin, *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility.*

[6]Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person."

[7]Schellenberg, "The Atheist's Free Will Offense" and *The Wisdom to Doubt*.

[8]Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will"; Watson, "Free Agency"; Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*; and Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason*.

then we do not make decisions, we do not have desires, we do not form intentions, and we do not make judgments.

But our consciously forming intentions in an act of decision making does not require the existence of irreducible agent substance causation in an event-causal indeterministic setting, and neither does our being *persons* in the sense of our being members of a moral community, or beings with rationality and autonomy, or beings who have a sense of themselves as selves and a desire to continue living as such. Should we be open to the idea that nothing we call love or meaning in life *is really* love or meaning in life if we are not agent-causal libertarian free agents, and should we rationally be open to the idea that we are not really persons and that we do not really *act* at all, if we do not have agent-causal libertarian freedom? I don't think so—though perhaps this is part of Kittle's point: clearly we are persons who love and who decide and who act, he thinks, and, since these facts require that we be agent-causal libertarian free agents, we should see that we *must* be such agents with such powers. But I do not think that our acting or acting autonomously or acting freely or loving others or being persons requires substance causation in an event-causal indeterministic setting, and I do not think we can tell from the inside that we are agent-causes as substances in an event-causally indeterministic environment. This is not something we know *a priori*. It does not seem plausible to think that no parents love their children, and no partners love their partners, and no one loves their friends, if it is not the case that we are agent-causes as substances and causal determinism is false. Kittle thinks we should think this. However, it seems to me more a given of our experience that we love some people than that we have the agent-causal power of libertarian free agency—to, as substances, bring about events without changing or doing something in order to do so, since those are events—and that the thesis of causal determinism is false. The supposition that we are *not really acting at all*, if at every moment there is one physically possible future, simply does not accord with common sense and our linguistic and social practices.

Notice that it is important to ask if Kittle (and those who agree with him) thinks that agency, judgment formation, love, and meaning in life require *serious morally significant* agent-causal libertarian freedom (in the senses of *serious* and *morally significant* described by Swinburne and Plantinga),[9] and, if so, what he thinks about God's being an agent and a person who reasons, decides, forms judgments, and loves. On Christian theism, the three persons of God mutually love one another without the ability to do evil. If persons in heaven also love each other and love God without having the ability to cause harm or do anything evil, then love does not require serious morally significant libertarian free will, including the power to do heinously wrong actions. Serious morally significant libertarian free

[9]Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, and Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

will is what is appealed to in prominent free will theodicies and free will defenses, so it is *its* value we are aiming to discern.

Love itself, as I observe in the book, is somewhat challenging and controversial to define: it might be characterized as a feeling, a passion, a desire or complex of desires—such as a desire for appropriate union with, and a desire for the flourishing of, the beloved—a commitment to a person or to a relationship, a volitional necessity, or as complex of characteristic feelings, intentions, desires, and actions. Love understood as a feeling or passion does not require libertarian free will. Love as volitional necessity does not require libertarian free will.[10] What is most charitable toward one who would like to defend libertarian free will's value in part by its necessity for love is to use a characterization of love that most plausibly could be tied to human powers of free agency. So rather than speaking broadly about love, one reasonable way to proceed seems to be to examine actions that we could agree to exhibit love, that is, to count as loving actions, and then to ask whether or not their counting as loving actions requires that the person who performs the act has the power of serious morally significant libertarian free agency.

Consider a particular loving action: Jonas's helping Leah up the stairs when she is injured. This action need not be done freely in a serious morally significant libertarian sense in order to count as a loving action. For example, the action could be done by Jonas in exercise of his ability to do the right thing from an appreciation of right reasons, with freedom in the compatibilist sense Nelkin describes—it is still an act of love. I have not said that this action could count as loving even though the agent *could not have done otherwise at the time*, because libertarians can distinguish between directly free actions and derivatively free actions. An action can count as loving even if the agent could not have done otherwise in a categorical sense at the time. But the claim made in the previous sentence is, of course, not sufficient for showing that love does not require libertarian free will, and what I say in the book does not make that unconvincing suggestion.

Notice that, when Kittle quotes the "outcome of a libertarian free choice" phrase regarding loving actions,[11] the sentence from which this fragment is quoted does not unfairly saddle an opponent with the view that every loving action must be directly free, since an "outcome" can be a direct outcome or an indirect outcome. I hold that to count as a loving action, that action need not be either directly free or indirectly free in the sense of freedom depicted by a libertarian account of freedom. Free actions as depicted by compatibilist accounts of free action can count as loving actions. I also do not saddle someone who maintains that love requires libertarian free will with the view that every loving relationship was instigated by a single free decision.

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[10]Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*.

[11]From Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*, 54.

Consider this line of reasoning: we love people. The thesis of causal determinism may or may not be true. Thus our loving people must be consistent with the truth of causal determinism (and with its falsity). Does this argument, as Kittle says, "rely on the assumption that we might discover that determinism is true"? I do indeed think scientific knowledge might expand in such a way that allows a more general consensus than we have currently regarding the truth or falsity of the thesis of causal determinism and that neuroscience might develop to the point that we could know more than we do now about the human decision making process that could inform our thinking regarding whether or not we ever, in fact, decide and act freely. But I do not think that the argument for the compatibility of love and causal determinism relies on a discoverability assumption—it relies instead only on an agnosticism about the truth or falsity of causal determinism.

Tim O'Connor

I'll first briefly say something about what Tim O'Connor refers to as my "old-school" epistemology. In Spring of 1991, I had the chance to take Alvin Plantinga's graduate seminar at the University of Notre Dame called "How to Be a Christian Philosopher." In this course, Plantinga described an approach to Christian philosophy committed to natural theology as Thomistic and an approach taking as starting points doctrines of the religious tradition—*faith seeking understanding*—as Augustinian. O'Connor depicts me as advocating for a thirteenth-century Thomistic approach to philosophy of religion, so characterized, and he seems to be advocating himself for a fourth-century Augustinian approach—which, notice, is actually *more* "old school."

That said, though, regarding starting points and relevant considerations and epistemological outlook, I will say that I do not fully recognize myself or my book in some of what O'Connor writes in describing it. Consider this part of his comments:

> Now, if you successfully argue the case for theism (Ekstrom clearly doubts you will) you may then sensibly ask whether there is sufficient evidence for the truth of any theistic religion. If successful here, too, you'll finally have earned the right to appeal to religious teaching in thinking about philosophical questions. . . . An implication of adhering to this procedure: the problem of evil is a "*step one*" agenda item. Hence, in addressing it, you may not appeal to religious teaching concerning God's aims for His creatures, the existence (let alone the nature of) an afterlife, etc.—all that is inadmissible evidence.

First, I do consider at length throughout the book what could fall under the description of religious teaching, including human free will, sin, fault, soul-making, divine punishment, the goodness of God, and opportunities for created beings' closeness to God.

Second, I would reply to this passage that one's procedure depends on what one's goals are. If one wants to defend one's religious belief to an agnostic or to an atheist in the sense only of showing that one's own beliefs are logically consistent, then of course one is free to cite any religious teachings or beliefs. If one wants to move the agnostic or atheist to adopt one's position and to think that belief in God is rational based on the evidence around us, one will need to stick with what is agreed to be evidence, not what one believes only through adherence to religious tradition.

O'Connor comments, it would be "helpful to hear her explain in concise terms why she thinks what looks to be a broadly foundationalist epistemology is appropriate, at least in the sphere of religious belief."

I would not say that I call for adherence to a foundationalist epistemology. I have not asserted that there are basic beliefs that are justified in themselves. (In fact, O'Connor does, when he asserts that belief in our libertarian free will is properly basic.) I'd call what I have in mind a rational discussion involving the sharing of considerations, along with explanations of why we take these considerations to be relevant and to have epistemic weight. I wonder what the opposite is that O'Connor has in mind—is it an epistemology that begins with faith-based doctrines? If so, it is legitimate for the non-theist to ask what gives credence in those doctrines positive epistemic status, something other than that the theist comes to the table with them, saying that he holds them antecedently to the discussion or antecedently to considering the evils of the world.

These comments are relevant to O'Connor's case of Charity, who is raised in a religious community and confronts the problem of evil in college. O'Connor writes:

> As she tried to get her bearings, she found it natural to reflect on what her faith taught her about the ultimate good to which our lives are ordered and the ways that suffering can, in the fullness of time, take on redemptive aspects that we now see only dimly or not at all. But here Prof. Ekstrom threw the flag and (gently) explained that Charity needed to back up and confine her ruminations on possible divine permission of evil to the goods that are common ground in the outlooks of human beings generally and that appear in the observable (and sadly often quite short) span of human life. Thus constrained, the prospects for even modest advance on a theodicy seemed bleak indeed to Charity.

This seems to me not wholly accurate as a characterization of the book. There is an entire chapter (chapter 3) on the divine intimacy theodicy, on which the proposed justifying good is closeness to God, shared experience with God, and growth in intimacy with God. This is an appeal to "the ultimate good to which our lives are ordered" and "redemptive aspects"—if that means bringing one to closeness with God—and if it means bringing us to salvation by way of punishment for wrongdoing and original sin, or the development of our characters, then those goods are considered in chapter 2. Notice that an appeal to the afterlife is not made in Plantinga's

original free will defense and it is not a central part of the standard free will theodicy; and it is true that it is not going to be convincing to agnostics and atheists, who are looking at what the world before them is like and trying to decide what it is rational to believe concerning the world's origin and governance (or lack of it).

O'Connor writes,

> In pressing the argument from evil, the atheist needs to reason from within a plausible theistic metaphysical and value-theoretic perspective and imaginatively speculate about possible long-term aims God could have for his creatures, involving goods that are likely off the radar screen of actual or functional atheists in wealthy and technologically advanced societies. An excellent way to foster such imaginative speculation is to mine the deeper streams of thought constituting the broad Christian tradition and/or Jewish and Muslim traditions.

Demanding that the *non-theist* reason within a *theistic* outlook makes sense if what is at issue is defense (in Plantinga's sense), that is, the matter of the internal consistency of a theistic belief system. In my book there is effort to show openness to appeal to the goods involved in religious scripture and traditions. I do not think that these goods are "off the radar screens" of non-theists in advanced societies. I do wonder, what "deeper streams of thought" have been neglected, and what "goods off the radar screen" are being alluded to? What more does one want to add to the discussion concerning, in O'Connor's words, "what longstanding monotheistic religious traditions have to say about divine goodness, divine providence, the human good, and the human telos"? In chapter 5 of the book, there is detailed exploration and defense of a conception of divine goodness. Divine providence is, of course, an interesting issue particularly in relation to human freedom and discussion of it is not off the table. The human good is discussed throughout the book, and the human *telos* is as well, particularly in chapters 3 concerning human intimacy with God, religious experience, and union with God, and in chapter 6 about the doctrine of hell. O'Connor also writes that "God is not obligated to fulfill our natural and good desires precisely as and when we necessarily perspectivally-limited creatures wish them to be." I agree, if there's a God, and do not say the contrary to this.

It is worth thinking more about a very interesting theodicy that O'Connor goes on to describe. He writes:

> He [God] might well deploy a very long and complex process that involves unequally distributed difficulty, distress, shockwaves of pain, physical debilitation, psychological fragmentation, and, yes, outright horror—*if* He deems that torturous path through evil to *constitutively contribute* to a work of tremendous and terrible moral and aesthetic beauty. . . . [This process] will culminate not merely in great and lasting *individual* goods, but also (if Christian teaching be true) *transtemporal*, *communal* goods: the fulfillment of divine promises originally made to generations who hoped for but never

> saw them; deeper communal understanding of what the love of God calls us to that is achieved through difficulties and failures across generations and disparate cultures . . . and the shared joy and mutual love of the redeemed as they experience full union with God, making them *collectively* more perfect icons of the inter-penetrating love of the triune God.

Regarding union with God, O'Connor refers to "her brief remarks," which struck me as surprising, given an entire book chapter on the proposed good of deepening closeness with God through suffering. I do not think that my thinking about this topic fails to notice that we do not *fully* understand what *full* union with God would be like, or fails to notice that it would be the highest good for human beings, if there is a God. I do conclude that there does not seem to be good reason for thinking that a divine intimacy theodicy works in accounting for the full range of cases of evil in the world, including repeated instances in single lifetimes and horrors and chronic pain and non-human animal suffering. God could give rational beings growing relationships with God and experience of God without the full range of suffering we find in the world and without creating us with serious morally significant libertarian free will.

So I find it helpful that O'Connor gestures toward a theodicy of "individuals making asymmetrical contributions to the collective goods of a richly diverse community," in virtue of providing a proposal. But I think that the picture he offers violates an appropriate victim-centered constraint on successful theodicy. I do not think that a perfectly good agent would use an intrinsically valuable rational and sentient being *as a means* for the good of someone else or for a communal end. I think God would respect us as ends in ourselves. When O'Connor writes that, "Theodicy worthy of the name would require deep insight into the life to come, both the individual and profoundly communal aspects of the ecstatic experience of union with the Author of life," I wonder if this is suggesting that for all we know the suffering of this world is *all* needed—in its amount, intensity, and inequitable distribution—for the best communal afterlife experience of ecstasy. It is natural to ask: How is a particular girl's life in sexual slavery in southeast Asia required for our *communal afterlife ecstasy*? How is another girl's (and many girls') gang rape and physical mutilation causing oozing fistulas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other places necessary for the communal ecstatic union with the Author of life? To say, "God is sovereign and we just can't understand" is unsatisfying, and it needs at least to be shown consistent with other beliefs held by the theist, such as (depending on the theist in question) in the inherent dignity of every human being and in libertarian free will fitting somehow with divine sovereignty.

In Plantinga's seminal paper, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," he writes:

> We come to philosophy with pre-philosophical opinions; we can do no other. And the point is: the Christian has as much right to his pre-philosophical

> opinions as others have to theirs. He needn't try first to "prove" them from propositions accepted by, say, the bulk of the non-Christian philosophical community.[12]

We can understand his point. But notice that, preceding those comments, he remarks, "Of course we may come to change our minds by virtue of philosophical endeavor; we may discover incompatibilities or other infelicities," and he goes on just after the quoted remarks to say, "Of course if there were genuine and substantial arguments against them [Christian beliefs] from premises that have some legitimate claim on the Christian philosopher, then he would have a problem; he would have to make some kind of change somewhere." Further on in the paper he writes,

> We are all, theist and non-theist alike, engaged in the common human project of understanding ourselves and the world in which we find ourselves. If the Christian philosophical community is doing its job properly, it will be engaged in a complicated, many-sided dialectical discussion, making its own contribution to that common human project. It must pay careful attention to other contributions; it must gain a deep understanding of them; it must learn what it can from them and it must take unbelief with profound seriousness.[13]

I think this is an important message to all of us philosophers: "with profound seriousness," not with hostility, disdain or disrespect, not with mischaracterization or lack of care, but with rigor, fairness of mind, and openness of mind.

Tom Senor

Tom Senor's comments raise some really central and interesting questions worth further discussion.

Regarding his work on skeptical theism: Senor thinks that a natural thought is that the seemings produced by processes that generally produce true beliefs, i.e., by reliable processes, are *prima facie* justified, and those that aren't are not.[14] And if this is right, then appearances of pointlessness are *prima facie* justified only if they are grounded in a reliable process or capacity. But, he asks—and it's fair to ask—why should we think that we have a justifying-reasons-for-evil tracker? Senor thinks that, "even given theism, there's no reason to think we are so equipped."

Here's a reason to think we have a justifying-reasons-for-evil tracker: when we observe cases of agents who cause evil, and when we observe cases of agents who stand by, without intervening, to permit evil—for instance, the man who watches the gang rape of a teenage girl, while he has

[12]Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," 268.

[13]Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," 270–71.

[14]Senor, "Skeptical Theism, CORNEA, and Common Sense Epistemology," discussed in my book's chapter 4.

a powerful weapon and has the power to arrest and stop them without harm to himself (which, remember, God has, that is, the power to stop harm, without harming himself)—we can see and assess as justified or unjustified such actions and choices to remain inactive without preventing evil. In some of these instances, it seems that nothing could justify remaining inactive, watching, and allowing the harm to happen. What seems to be the case is that *that*—what is being done to her—could not possibly be in the service of, and necessary for, a greater good for her. Likewise, we are appalled when a parent mercilessly berates and beats his child, seeing it as unjustified by the alleged end of making the child a better person. We know that many adverse childhood experiences, including physical and emotional abuse, are not good for people—they are associated with a lack of flourishing later in life and poor health conditions.

We are moral agents who make decisions about the right and wrong ways to treat others, who discern and decide when causing or allowing some suffering is or is not justified. We do not simply behave; we reason, make moral choices, and act intentionally and according to moral norms. We thus have reason to think that we are equipped with the faculty in question, provided by our experience as moral and rational agents.

You might say that this only indicates that we have a faculty attuned to the moral justification of human actions and omissions. But, to reply: given theism (and skeptical theism is a form of theism), there is reason to think that we are equipped with the needed faculty in question. On theism, we are made in the image of God, to know and to love God, providing reason to think that we could understand the reasons that justify and move God to act as he does, so that we can know, and love, and worship God. I think it is crucial to notice that those who appeal to religious experiences as grounds for religious belief demonstrate commitment to the existence of a presence-of-God and a reasons-of-God tracker—giving rise to such beliefs as, God is forgiving me so that I can be reinstated in his good graces, and God is cleansing me of my sins and bad habits so that I can be closer to him and be a better witness for him to others.

In the case of a racist appearance that someone is not trustworthy in virtue of his skin color,[15] one gains a defeater in coming to learn that one's background was biased and prejudiced. We might ask, what is the defeater for the appearance of an instance of an evil's being pointless? The religious believer may say that it is her warranted belief that God exists and does not allow instances of pointless evil. We could ask what supports the belief that the belief in God is warranted. One reply is that we have a reliable sense of the divine. This does not seem to settle the matter of rationally defensible knowledge, given the unsettled question of whether or not we have such a reliable sense or faculty. One may come to think that, what one took in the past to be religious experience sourced in such

[15]Discussed in Senor, "Skeptical Theism, CORNEA, and Common Sense Epistemology."

a faculty was actually wishful thinking and a strong feeling of belonging, and a desire to belong, in a community.

Regarding Senor's insightful observations about hybrid theodicy and skeptical theism: he is right to point out the tension between holding, on the one hand, that we shouldn't have confidence that, if there were God-justifying reasons for every evil, we would be able to see them, but on the other hand, to offer a hybrid theodicy in response to the world's evils. His position is more nuanced than the claim that skeptical theism is obviously true or has been proven. I appreciate that he offers proposals working to develop further an account of the goods enabled by libertarian free will.

It seems to me that the central good Senor identifies in his list of goods in the worlds with libertarian free agents is moral responsibility. We can *act* individually without morally significant libertarian free will, and we can *act collectively* without it. Our relationships can be loving ones—in that those relationships can involve kindness and care, and active promotion of the well-being of our loved ones, and prioritizing time with and attention to those we love, and desires for an appropriate kind of closeness to them—and our loving relationships can have value and importance without it. When Senor says that when loving actions are freely undertaken, "their value increases dramatically," he doesn't explain why this is so on a libertarian conception of freedom but not on a compatibilist conception. Being morally responsible for our characters is an appeal to the value of being morally responsible.

Let's think more about the key question of whether or not the goods enabled by morally significant libertarian freedom outweigh the facts about the evil of our world, in other words, the question of whether or not such free will is worth it. There's also the critical question: are we in a position to make this kind of judgment? Senor thinks not.

Here are goods that can exist in worlds without morally significant libertarian free will: life, consciousness, health, and strength; pleasure, joy, happiness, contentment, and delight; agency, shared agency, and collective agency; rationality, truth, learning, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom; meaning in life; friendship, affection, and mutual affection; peace, safety, integrity, and non-alienation; beauty and aesthetic experience; good acts (of kindness, care, generosity, for example) and good characters (exhibiting honesty and respect, for instance); heavenly experience of the presence and glory of God; creativity; and love.

On the other hand, these are goods that seem to me only attainable in worlds with morally significant libertarian free will: a veridical self-concept as an agent who faces an open future (such that there is sometimes more than one physically possible future in front of us); and moral responsibility in a desert sense.

In our world we find evils—including chronic pain conditions, such as trigeminal neuralgia and interstitial cystitis and endometriosis and various forms of arthritis and neuropathies and persistent spinal pain;

sexual assault, including marital rape and incest and assault with deadly weapons; genocidal campaigns such as those in Rwanda, Germany, and Cambodia; global pandemics, such as COVID-19 and the 1918 flu; the transatlantic slave trade and sexual slavery and child slave labor; painful diseases including various forms of cancer and meningitis and autoimmune disorders; the physical and emotional abuse and neglect of children; poverty and starvation; systemic racism causing gross inequities and unjust treatment; violence; betrayal of trust; addiction that destroys homes and lives; botched surgeries that disfigure and disable; debilitating injuries that change people's lives so that they can no longer work to financially support themselves and their families; and various kinds of mental illness including depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia—and, on a version of theism that responds to arguments from evil by appeal to morally significant libertarian free will, *its costs* include these evils.

Regarding value comparisons of competing possible worlds, Senor writes,

> Ekstrom is proposing that the evil in the world is a defeater for theistic belief . . . to the extent that it is rational to withhold both the claim that the suffering in the world outweighs the good that freedom makes possible and the claim that we are not in an epistemic position to make that comparative judgment . . . Ekstrom's defeater is (to an extent, at least) neutralized.

I see his position, but I am not convinced that it is rational to withhold assent regarding the proposition that the suffering in our world negatively outweighs the goods that morally significant libertarian free will makes possible, or to refrain from believing that we are in a position to make that comparative value judgment.

The more I have reflected on it over time, with experience and increased appreciation of the depth and the extent of pain and of the extraordinarily varied, complex, and devastating ways rational and sentient beings suffer in our world, the more it has seemed to me we have to conclude that it is eminently rational to form both beliefs. It often strikes me that it is not even close: the worlds *without* serious morally significant libertarian free will that contain the goods I have enumerated—pleasure, joy, health, strength, meaning, friendship, peace, safety, rationality, delight, and so on—far surpass in value the worlds with serious morally significant libertarian free will and evils attributed to it of the types and amounts we find in our world. I'm aware this is worthy of further discussion.

Regarding the chapter, "Religion on the Cheap," concerning living a religious life as an agnostic or an atheist, Senor agrees with what I say about anti-realists concerning God, and he wonders what I think about non-doxastic religious faith, hope, and desire that God exists. This raises really interesting questions about the axiology of theism (rather than axiological judgments concerning free agency). Is it reasonable to hope that theism is true or to desire for theism to be true?

In the case Senor describes—which I think is a relatable one describing a place maybe many of us have found ourselves—the person (Cary) withholds his *full* assent regarding the proposition that God exists, though he does seem to have some relevant cognitive state (thinking "that there is something real beyond the natural world," thinking perhaps that it's just as likely to be true as not that God exists, or that Christianity, in particular, is just as likely to be true as any other worldview, which might indicate a full assent to the claim that there's a 0.5 probability that God exists, or it might refer to something like a *tentative cognitive hold* on the claim that God exists, something like a degree of belief or a belief-like, less-than-fully-endorsing, cognitive state concerning the claim that God exists); and he "plans to continue in his devotional life with the hope that it will lead to experiences that will restore his belief;" and he "thinks the world would be better if the Christian story were true." With regard to religious activities, such as reciting the Apostles' Creed in worship, Senor suggests, "he'll have to think of it aspirationally—it's what he wants to believe. But he can also think of it as a corporate, rather than individual, affirmation; it's what *the Church* believes" (emphasis added). Notice that, unless Cary changes his verbal affirmation to "*The Church* believes in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth . . ." he will be saying aloud, while in the pew, "*I* believe . . ."

But that aside, the questions raised here are intriguing ones. Why does Cary want to believe the Creed? It would be interesting to hear more about what his reasons are for hoping that his belief in God will be restored. We can note that he could make other friends outside a religious community, build a different kind of community and social connections, and still engage in charitable humanitarian work. Why does he think that it would be *better* if the Christian story, in particular, were true? It strikes me that it would not be better if some people go to hell for eternity after earthly death. If universalism is true, then maybe it is clearly better? Everyone would get an eternal blessed afterlife—or if some people are annihilated, at least no one suffers eternal torment, but then it is hard to see how the people who are annihilated after earthly death can be said to be compensated for their sufferings in this life, and it is unclear what *justifies* God's permission of them. But then again, on some versions of theism (such as van Inwagen's), unjustified instances of evil occur on earth because (for all we know) God decided to give us morally significant libertarian freedom. We'd have to stomach unfair, unjustified cases of suffering endured on earth while worshiping and loving the God who allows them. Is that better than the evils of the world simply occurring from bad luck, without any plan or justification? I'm not sure I can hope or want that there are pointless evils *and* God exists.

Senor says about Cary in the case, "Obviously, there's nothing problematic about going to services." I do not think that is so obvious, depending on the *features* of the religious community with which he aligns himself by participating in services. Worries that occur include harms done in

the name of God, ownership claims made in the name of God (such as to land), human rights abuses in the name of God (including affronts to bodily autonomy and marriage equality), inattention to gender and racial equity, and blocking medical research on religious grounds that could improve the lives of those who are paralyzed or in pain. Some of the questions Senor raises about non-doxastic faith seem to me to depend on the features of the particular religious community in question (its positions, including political, if any, and its practices).

College of William and Mary

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