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An Alternative to the Privation Theory of Evil

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The privation theory of evil was developed by St. Augustine largely as a response to the Metaphysical Problem of Evil: If all things that exist are God or come from God, how can there be evil? I begin by noting that the simple theory that all evil is a privation is subject to decisive counterexamples, and that a refined theory due to Avicenna and Aquinas requires an implausible "Goldilocks ontology": bloated by including certain odd items like tokens of truth or authorization, but not so bloated as to include privations. Instead, I shall argue that we can drop the privation theory of evil and still answer the Metaphysical Problem of Evil in the same spirit, by denying that evils really exist, albeit without insisting that they are privations. The result puts much less pressure on one's ontology.

1. Introduction

Augustine formulated his privation theory of evil in his *Confessions* in part as a response to what I will call the *metaphysical problem of evil* (MPE), the problem of the incompatibility of the following four propositions:

1. Everything that exists is God or is created and sustained by God.

2. God is not an evil.

3. God does not create and sustain anything that is an evil.

4. There exists an evil.

After dabbling in Manicheanism, Augustine's eventual solution is to deny the *Existence Thesis* (4). One might of course deny the Existence Thesis in an implausibly pollyannish way by claiming that there is nothing wrong with the things that people normally consider to be evils—suffering, death, injustice, etc.—or by denying the obvious empirical facts of the occurrence of such things. But instead, Augustine offered an account on which common-sense evaluative and empirical claims about evils are correct, but ontologically the evils are nothing but privations, i.e., lacks of a due good. I will use the word "privation" only for lacks of something

that should be there. Not every lack is a privation—the holes in Swiss cheese[1] are not a privation nor an evil, but a mere lack.

A modern analytic formulation would be to say that if we understand "exists" in (4) to be existence in the sense that ontologists talk about—in the "ontology room" language of van Inwagen[2] and Merricks[3]—then (4) is false. The ordinary language speaker's claim "There exists an evil" is then made true by the fact that some due good is lacking. This is just like saying that "There exist holes in the road" is false in the language of the ontologists, but the ordinary language speaker's homophonic claim is true in virtue of absences of road material surrounded by road material. The ontologist who denies the existence of holes need not have a pollyannish view that all roads are perfectly maintained! To avoid needless awkwardness, I will talk of *real* existence when it is necessary to clarify that we are using "exists" and cognates in the ontologist's sense.

On the other hand, if we understand "exists" in the ordinary-language sense, then (4) is true. However, on that ordinary reading of "exists," (1) is false. After all, in the ordinary language sense of "exist," there exist all sorts of "things" that plausibly are uncreated, such as shadows,[4] holes, and absences in general. God does not need to create a shadow, but only the light around it, nor a hole, but only the material around it, and surely the absence of square circles is entirely uncreated. The MPE should be formulated with premises about non-divine things that exist in the ontologist's sense of "exists," since the theist is committed to the creation of such things.

The MPE is a puzzle about the metaphysical origins of evil and it is this that drove Augustine's interest in evil in the *Confessions*. Another way to see the metaphysicality of the MPE is to note that according to important versions of classical theism, especially Christian ones, the existence of all non-divine beings is a participation in God.[5] But how could the existence of an evil be a participation in God? The metaphysics of creation and/or sustenance simply does not allow God to create an evil.

The metaphysical problem of evil is quite different from modern concerns about what we may call the justificatory problem of evil (JPE).[6] The JPE is driven by the question whether God would be morally justified in permitting the evils of this world. A solution to the MPE does not automatically yield a solution to the JPE. Even supposing Augustine's solution to the MPE is correct, the JPE remains in the guise of the question whether God would be morally justified in permitting the relevant due goods to be lacking. Conversely, a solution to the JPE need not provide a solution to the MPE. Suppose that my stubbing my toe can be shown to be the best

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[1] I am grateful to a referee for this illustration.

[2] Van Inwagen, *Material Beings*.

[3] Merricks, *Objects and Persons*.

[4] Notwithstanding the arguments that shadows exist in Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things*.

[5] E.g., Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I.44: "all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation."

[6] Cf. Brachtendorf, "The Goodness of Creation and the Reality of Evil," 84.

way of providing me with some significant growth in the virtue of fortitude. This could solve the JPE with respect to my stubbing my toe. But if my toe stubbing is something that exists, then the MPE is unsolved with respect to my toe stubbing: no story is provided as to how the evil that my toe stubbing constitutes could be created and sustained by God.

Some readers may find the MPE uninteresting, with only the JPE being of interest to them. They may feel that if there is a justification for an evil, then there would be no difficulty with God's creating and sustaining that evil. Such readers are simply happy to deny (3) in the MPE.

Note that while for Augustine the reasons for holding to (3) may have been metaphysical, there are non-metaphysical reasons for accepting (3). Arguably, whatever entity a perfect being creates and sustains, it creates or at least sustains intentionally: sustaining is a direct divine activity of such a sort that one cannot plausibly say it is unintentional or even not intentional (the distinction is due to Wasserman).[7] But a purity of intention whereby only good things are intended is a plausible attribute of a perfect being—even if it is conceded that *we* need to get our hands dirty, a perfect being would neither need to nor do so.

I will begin by arguing that if we take Augustine's theory as it stands, it is very easy to find clearly decisive counterexamples. I will then introduce a distinction from Avicenna, taken over by Aquinas, that allows one to refine the theory. This refined theory is, in fact, what most people have charitably taken to be "the" privation theory. I will argue that to take care of apparent counterexamples (mostly though apparently not entirely ones that have been previously discussed),[8] the more refined theory requires an implausibly bloated ontology, and that the most plausible ontologies that include the relevant kinds of bloat are ontologies on which the Existence Thesis (4) is actually true, which makes the theory useless as an escape from the MPE. The privation theory, even refined, saddles the theist with an implausible "Goldilocks ontology," one that is carefully but implausibly calibrated to have neither too much nor too little bloat.

Finally, I will offer an alternative way out of the MPE. This will involve sketching a *misarrangement* theory of evil. This theory draws on contemporary sparse ontologies and offers more ontological flexibility than privation theories, and hence provides a more plausible escape from the metaphysical problem of evil.

2. The Simple Privation Theory

The Simple Privation Theory takes at face value the claim that an evil is nothing but a lack of a due good. The Simple Privation Theory is easily shown to be false, however. Indeed, a paradigmatic murder is a counterexample to the Simple Privation Theory.

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[7]Wasserman, "Intentional Action and the Unintentional Fallacy."

[8]Kane, "Evil and Privation"; Anglin and Goetz, "Evil is Privation"; Cress, "Augustine's Privation Account of Evil"; Calder, "Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?"; Schäfer, "Augustine on Mode, Form, and Natural Order."

Suppose that Alice murders Bob by hitting him on the head with a club. Then:

5. Swinging a club is a part of Alice's murder of Bob. (premise)

6. Swinging a club is not a part of any lack. (premise)

7. So, Alice's murder of Bob is not a lack.

But Alice's murder of Bob is an evil, hence not all evils are lacks, and since every privation is a lack, not all evils are privations.

Of course, a murder very plausibly *causes* a lack of a due good, namely a lack of life. But a typical murder is not *itself* a lack of anything, as can be seen by the fact that the typical positive physical movements that are parts of a murder are not parts of any lacks. Indeed, surely, all the parts of a lack are lacks, and positive physical movements are not lacks.

The argument generalizes to every wrongdoing that has a positive physical movement as a part. At best, the privation theory can handle the cases where the wrongdoing is entirely performed by omission. And even among the omissions, there will be cases where the omission is intentional. In those cases, the evil is typically the greater for the intentionality, and the intention to omit what is required will itself be an evil, but an intention is not a lack.

The argument assumes that ordinary language is correct to talk of events as having other events as parts. Thus, the Battle of Britain is a part of World War II, and a penalty kick can be a part of a soccer game. Not all event theorists accept this intuitive view. The main alternative is exemplification theories on which an event is the exemplification of a property at a time,[9] and may even be identified with an ordered triple $<x, P, t>$ of an object, property and time, where the object exemplifies the property at the time.[10] Exemplification theories are of no help to the privation theorist, however. For the exemplification of a property is not a lack or absence, and an ordered triple has an internal structure—it has three constituents[11]—while a lack or absence does not.

3. The Avicenna Refinement

3.1 Two Kinds of Evil

The wrongdoing cases may seem to be deeply unfair to the privation theorist to the contemporary reader. This is because eventually the privation

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[9]Kim, "Events as Property Exemplification."

[10]I am grateful to an anonymous reader for suggesting that I consider exemplification theories.

[11]It's worth noting that in modern set theory, following Kuratowski, one constructs an ordered pair $<a, b>$ as the set $\{ \{a,b\}, \{a\} \}$, and the ordered triple $<a, b, c>$ out of pairs, say as $<a, <b, c>>$. On this picture, an ordered triple is a set of sets, specifically $\{ \{ a, \{ \{b, c\}, \{b\} \} \}, \{a\} \}$ which bottoms out in a, b and c, which may be reasonably thought of as constituents, though perhaps not technically parts. However, it seems exceedingly unlikely that events really are such sets for reasons similar to the famous objection to taking the set theoretic constructions of the naturals ontologically seriously in Benacerraf, "What Numbers Could Not Be."

theory became refined by a distinction that Aquinas attributes to Avicenna and summarizes as follows:

> [Avicenna] says that something is called evil in two ways: either essentially or incidentally. Evil 'essentially' means the privation of the perfection itself whereby something is evil, this is also called 'evil taken abstractly' by some . . .
> There are, in turn, two kinds of evil in the incidental sense: either that which is the subject of this kind of privation, or that which causes this kind of privation in another.[12]

An essential evil is what we might call an *evilmaker*: it makes the subject of the evil be evil. It is only evilmakers that the Avicenna refinement of the privation theory claims to be privations, and hence I will call this the Evilmaker Privation Theory. The murder argument against the Simple Privation Theory no longer works. For it could be maintained that the action of murder is only incidentally evil, being either made evil by some essentially evil aspect of the action or by having an essentially evil effect or both. Perhaps the essentially evil aspect could be taken to be the lack of justification in the killing and the essentially evil effect could be taken to be the privation of life in the victim. But the positive physical action of swinging the club can be a part of the incidentally evil action without being a part of either proposed essential evil—it need not be part of either the lack of justification or the privation of life.

While the Simple Privation Theory escaped the MPE simply by denying the Existence Thesis, the defeat of the MPE is more complicated on the Evilmaker Privation Theory. First, one can deny the Existence Thesis in the case of essential evils—these are mere privations. Second, in the case of incidental evils, i.e., subjects and causes of evil, we can uphold the Existence Thesis, but deny the claim that God does not create or sustain them. For to create and sustain the subject or cause of evil is not problematic in the way in which creating and sustaining the evilmaker is. For to create and sustain the mere subject of evil is just to create and sustain its positive reality: the lack that is the evilmaker needs neither creation or sustenance. And that which is evil merely in the sense of the cause of evil, the instrumental evil, is unproblematic for creation or sustenance as long as there is a moral justification for permitting the resultant evil—and whether there is such a justification is a topic falling under the head of the JPE, not the MPE.

3.2 Problems for Evilmaker Privation Theory

A privation is a lack of something that should be there. Thus on the Evilmaker Privation Theory:

8. Wherever there is an evil, some entity is lacking and the evil is evil because of the lack of that entity.

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[12]Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, II.D34.Q1.A2.

I will now argue that in a number of cases, a plausible ontology does not include the entity that the above Lacking Thesis calls for the lack of, the entity that would have existed absent the evil.

Errors

Suppose I falsely believe that there are unicorns. My belief is an error and hence an evil. On Evilmaker Privation Theory, the belief had better only be evil in the incidental sense, since a belief is not a lack.

Now false existential beliefs like the belief that there are unicorns might be thought reconcilable with the Lacking Thesis. For it seems that what makes my belief an evil is the lack of unicorns. But even that is not clear. When a proper desire for an extra-mental state of affairs is unfulfilled, what makes the situation unfortunate is the extra-mental world's not fitting the desire. But the direction of fit of belief is opposite to that of desire, and when a belief about an extra-mental state of affairs is false, it is the mind, not the extra-mental world, that has gone wrong. The reason for the evil being there seems to be in my mind, rather than outside it, in the lack of unicorns. But rather than pushing this objection, let us turn to a different kind of erroneous belief.

Consider a false non-existential belief. Let's say that I falsely believe there are no platypuses. The natural analogue to the lack of unicorns in this case would be the existence of platypuses. But of course platypuses are positive beings, so taking the evilmaker to be platypuses is no help to the privation theorist.

A more promising move is to say that what is lacking in my belief is *truth*. This would not only satisfy the Lacking Thesis but fit with our intuition that what makes my belief that there are no platypuses (as well as my belief that there are unicorns) an evil is that it is lacking truth.

But what *is* this truth that is lacking? It is not the universal property of truth. For if universals exist at all, the universal *truth* exists regardless of what I believe.[13] Thus, the truth that is lacking would have to be an instance or token of truth, a truth trope rather than a universal.

However, the idea that true beliefs have a truth trope leads to some implausible consequences. For suppose that yesterday you believed that today I would have breakfast. Then your belief yesterday had a truth trope. But then by having breakfast today, I made that truth trope to have existed yesterday, and had I skipped breakfast today, I would have made it be the case that that truth trope did not exist yesterday. In other words, we would have backwards causation or at least backwards explanation of the existence of something, namely the trope. But while it is reasonable to think that backwards production (whether causal or explanatory) is metaphysically possible, it seems very implausible to think that backwards production is such an ordinary occurrence in our world that any

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[13]Even on a theory that says that only instantiated properties exist, the universal truth exists regardless of what I believe, as long as someone else has a true belief.

time our actions verify someone's prior predictive beliefs, we produce a past entity—a trope of truth.

Here is another way to see the oddity of truth tropes attached to beliefs. It is metaphysically possible that agents like us live in a multiverse. Now, normally, the island universes in the multiverse are held to be isolated from each other. But suppose that you live in a multiverse and correctly believe that in another universe someone is having breakfast. Then, magically, the people who are having breakfast in other universes make a trope of truth exist in your universe and attached to your belief.

Perhaps, though, instead of supposing that true beliefs come with a trope of truth, we can suppose sort of token of truth to exist alongside the objects of true beliefs. Thus, when you believed yesterday that I would have breakfast today, there was a token of truth existing today, when I was having breakfast.

But we still have problems with backwards production. If I have breakfast this morning, and if a token of truth exists alongside the object of belief, then when you later come to believe that I *had* breakfast this morning, you thereby produce a token of truth alongside my breakfast. And, similarly, if in the multiverse I come to believe that someone in another universe is having breakfast, I cause a trope of truth to be present in all universes other than mine where breakfast is being had.

Perhaps a better move would be to say that regardless of how the belief and the object of belief are located in time, the token of truth is timeless. On this view, we routinely contribute to the production of timeless objects: namely, whenever we come to believe something true and whenever our actions make someone's belief be true. While this may not be quite as odd as routine production of objects in the past, it is, nonetheless, rather counterintuitive.

Next, regardless of how we locate the tokens of truth in or out of time, it is counterintuitive to think that we are easily capable of collaborative activity with entities in the distant past or the distant future, with beings in other galaxies, and even, if it turns out we live in a multiverse, with beings in other universes. For the token of truth exists because of the formation of the belief *and* whatever makes the belief be true. If I correctly believe that some dinosaur flew, or that one day the sun will burn out, or that an alien in another galaxy or universe is happy, then a token of truth exists because of a combination of my belief formation with the dinosaur's flying, or the sun burning out, or an alien being happy.

Granted, there are other theories on which such collaboration is possible. Thus, on a universalist mereology on which any collection of objects composes a whole, if I make a pizza and an alien "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" made a sandwich, we are collaboratively producing the fusion of the pizza with the sandwich. However, surely the possibility of such collaboration transcending the usual limitations of space and time counts against such theories.

Furthermore, we get a very odd kind of cooperation between things and absences. Let's say that I correctly believe that there are no unicorns. Then the global absence of unicorns somehow cooperates with my belief to produce the truth of that belief. But remember that in order for the Privation Theory to do its job of responding to MPE, we need an ontology on which absences don't really exist. But if they don't really exist, how do they cooperate with beliefs to produce entities, tokens of truth?

Next, the most intuitive way to think about tokens of truth is that they are tokens of correspondence relations between the belief and that which makes the belief true. But in the case of my belief that there are no unicorns, given an ontology where absences don't really exist, the relation would have to be one between an entity (my belief that there are no unicorns) and a nonentity (the absence of unicorns).[14] We see, thus, a pressure for the privation theorist to start thinking of absences as real things.[15]

Some Wrongdoings

Suppose Alice attempts to unjustifiedly kill Bob by pulling the trigger of a loaded gun. On the Lacking Thesis, some entity needs to be lacking here such that the evil obtains because of that lack. What is the lacking entity? If Alice actually kills Bob, the privation theorist can point to the subsequent lack of life in Bob. But suppose Alice's attempt failed because she missed. Her action is still evil, but it is now harder to point to the lacking entity.

Of course, Alice lacks some relevant virtue, such as justice. However, while that lack may be a part of the causal explanation of her action, it does not *make* the action be evil. For what makes her action evil is simply

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[14]An anonymous reader suggests instead that what we should take to be lacking in error is a correspondence to reality. There are two ways to take this. If what is lacking in error is correspondence to a particular reality, i.e., an aspect or part of reality, then this is essentially the same suggestion we are now considering and subject to the same objection. But one might also say that what is lacking in error is correspondence to reality as a whole. This suggestion has two difficulties. First, it seems overbroad: What is lacking in the belief that some politician is a reptile is not correspondence to reality as a whole, but correspondence to the reality of that politician. Second, an ontological commitment to reality as a whole, as something that could serve as the relatum of a correspondence relation, is theologically problematic, because it would make God be a proper part of something, namely "reality" (it won't do to make error be a lack of correspondence to non-divine reality, since some error is about God). God's being a proper part violates at least Aquinas's version of the doctrine of divine simplicity (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.3.8). Moreover, the arguments against the conjunction of Christian theism and unrestricted composition (Inman and Pruss, "On Christian Theism and Unrestricted Composition") can also be adapted against the thesis that reality is an entity that God is a part of.

[15]One might try for a theory on which some absences—say, of unicorns or leprechauns—exist but those absences that are invoked by the privation theory—say, of justice or truth—do not exist. However, this is not only ad hoc, but also fails to solve the problem of relations to nonexistent things. For suppose that the evilmaker of some action is a lack of justice in that action, and suppose that I believe that justice is lacking in that action. Then the token of truth would need to be a relation between my belief and that very lack of justice, thereby requiring the lack of justice to be in our ontology, and hence undercutting the solution to the MPE.

that it is an unjustified attempt at killing a human person, not dispositional features of character such as a lack of virtue. Similarly, what *makes* Usain Bolt be the winner of a race is that he is the first competitor past the finish line, not any dispositional features such as his being a fast runner that causally explain the victory.

If we think of Alice's attempted murder as evil because it is an unjustified attempt at killing a human person, then there are still two plausible places to look for a lack. There is a lack of justification, and the action is aimed at a lack of life.

In the case of a completed murder, as already noted, the resultant lack of life is plausibly a partial ground of the evil. But in a mere attempt, we do not actually have a lack of life, but an aiming at a lack of life. This aiming seems to be a positive mental act, even if its intentional object is something negative.

One may, however, claim that what makes Alice's attempting a killing wrong is a lack of justification. After all, there are justified killings, say in a just war, and attempts at them are also justified. For this observation to save the Lacking Thesis, the justification of an attempt at killing needs to be a token entity that exists when the attempt is justified. What is this token entity?

A token justification could be a trope of the attempt at killing. Given that the justification typically depends on present and past states of affairs—such as the actions of an aggressor—we do not seem to have the backwards production problems facing truth tokens.

But there is still something "magical" about token justifications inherent in the attempt at killing. Suppose Bob credibly threatens Alice's life and Alice attempts to kill him. The token justification J of her attempt is a contingent entity that comes into existence due to two things: Bob's threat T and Alice's attempt A to counter it. Now, it is plausible that if a contingent entity J comes into existence in part because of some past event T, that past event is a partial cause of J. But a causal connection between T and J seems magical. There is no recognizable causal process or power here.

Similar tokens would need to be posited to account for other kinds of wrongdoings. For instance, a theft is an unauthorized taking. A typical taking is a positive act, so to save the Lacking Thesis, we need to suppose that there is a lack of a token of authorization. One might initially think that authorizations are unproblematic. They are simply expressions of consent, such as Alice's saying: "Feel free to take my copy of *War and Peace*." But things are more complicated than that, especially if we consider conditional consent. Suppose what Alice says is: "Feel free to take my copy of *War and Peace* if unicorns don't exist." Then if there is such a thing as a token of authorization, that token is a strange entity whose existence is explained by Alice's utterance together with the absence of unicorns.

Perhaps the magic seems less if we insist that the explanatory connection between the justifying or authorizing events—threats or consents—and

the token justification or authorizing is one of grounding rather than causation. Perhaps the token justifications are simply socially constituted events, like Biden's present presidency being partly grounded in his past electoral victory.

But it's not that plausible that we should include entities socially constituted by nonoccurrent states of affairs, such as the lack of unicorns, into our ontology. For that line of thought leads to backwards production. Imagine a constitutional system on which a successful impeachment of a politician results in a retroactive invalidation, such that the impeached individual was never, say, a president. If a token of authorization can be partly constituted by the absence of unicorns, a token presidency could be partly constituted by the absence of future impeachments. But then we have the backwards production of entities: by preventing an impeachment, one makes a token presidency to have existed.

I suspect the social constitution response sounds credible precisely to the extent to which we do not take the socially constituted entities ontologically seriously. But in the context of privation theories, essential evil is supposed to be the lack something that would *really* exist. For if evil is merely supposed to be the lack of something that in ordinary language is said to "exist," then that does not do justice to the driving intuition that evil is something negative and opposed to being. For privations, holes and the like are said to "exist" in ordinary language, and so the fact that something is a privation of something that "exists" in the ordinary sense does not make it be negative (e.g., the privation of a hole need not be negative). Thus, the Lacking Thesis requires that the token authorizations and the like be said to exist in the ontology room, and that is implausible, except on ontologies that are too profligate for the privation theorist.

What if we try for a simpler solution? Instead of looking for tokens of justification or authorization, we might suppose that what is lacking in a murder or a theft is *permissibility*.[16] One problem with this is that there is some plausibility in thinking that *obligation* is more fundamental than permissibility, with φing being permissible just in case one is not obligated not to φ. Consider here how it is that it is obligation and not permission that has the infamous mysterious prescriptivity[17] and which some think needs theistic explanation.[18] Permissibility seems to be the unmysterious absence of a contrary obligation. Putting all that to the side, note that the permissibility that the privation theorist says is lacking in murder or theft cannot be a universal, since if there are any universals at all, the universal will exist at least as long as any permissible action takes place in the world, so it must be an instance or token of permissibility. But analogous puzzles now show up again. The token of the permissibility of my act of taking Alice's copy of *War and Peace* would be an entity whose existence would

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[16]The suggestion is due to an anonymous reader.

[17]Mackie, *Ethics*.

[18]E.g., Evans, *Natural Signs*, ch. 5.

be explained by my action (since it is my action that has the instance of permissibility), together with Alice's giving me permission conditional on the absence of unicorns, and the absence of unicorns.

Extra Noses

Having two (or more) noses is bad for a human (the example is due to Schäfer):[19] it seems that a two-nosed face would be a malformed human face.[20] But having an extra nose is an addition rather than a privation.

Perhaps, though, the badness of having two noses consists in not matching the form of humanity or in lacking due order.[21] This sounds plausible, but it only saves the Lacking Thesis if one reads the claim in a way that commit one to an ontology that includes an instance of a match relation or an instance of due order in the case of the single-nosed individual, an instance that would go missing in the case of the double-nosed.

But there is good reason to be skeptical of such an instance of a match relation or of due order existing in the one-nosed individual. For it is implausible that merely adding something to the world would automatically of logical necessity annihilate something else. Yet if there is a token of such a match relation or due order property, then adding a second nose to a person would immediately and of logical necessity annihilate the token.

Schäfer argues that Augustine allows for three sorts of privations: privations of species, natural order, or mode. Among other modes, God has disposed things by number and having the wrong number of noses "does not comply with the *modus* of a human being: and it is therefore to be considered a corruption of good by way of impairment of a nature's Nature-given realization."[22] But while it appears correct that an extra nose is an impairment of the realization of the human nature, this does not make the extra nose a negative item in the ontology. The extra nose would still need divine creation, and if that extra nose is an evil, then it seems that God has created this evil.

But perhaps the correct ontology includes concrete numerical facts such as *there being exactly one nose on Socrates's face*, and the evil befalling the double-nosed person is the privation of such a numerical fact. However, if the correct ontology includes such numerical facts, then in the case of the double-nosed person it will include the fact of *there being two noses on the face*. And that fact would seem to be just as good a candidate for an essential evil as the lack of the single-nose fact. We thus once again have the same pattern as in previous cases: the most plausible ontology rich

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[19]Schäfer, "Augustine on Mode, Form, and Natural Order."

[20]Analogous points might initially seem clearer for some other cases. Having five legs would be bad for a horse. It would be bad instrumentally, because the normal way for a horse to get around would be impeded, but it would also be bad non-instrumentally, due to being a distortion of the horse's body plan. We need not think this non-instrumental evil to be very great for the arguments to apply.

[21]See, e.g., Cress, "Augustine's Privation Account of Evil," 118.

[22]Schäfer, "Augustine on Mode, Form, and Natural Order."

enough to include that which the evilmaker is supposed to be a privation of is rich enough to include essential evils, which is unacceptable to the privation theorist.

Pain

Pain is one of the classic counterexamples to the privation theory, since pain seems paradigmatically something positive. It certainly isn't just a lack of pleasure, or else an unconscious person would be in pain. Nonetheless, it could turn out to be that pain has some crucial negative constituent.

We do not understand human pain well enough to spell out what the crucial negative constituent of pain could be. But one might see some plausibility in the claim if we imagined what it would be for an artificial intelligence system to be in pain. Presumably its pain would be consti- tuted by some sequences of ones and zeroes in its memory. But ones and zeroes in memory are typically constituted by the presence and *absence*, respectively, of an electrical potential. So there would likely be a lack be- hind the AI's pain, namely some zeroes. However, we shouldn't push this line of reasoning. For there are many ways to make a digital computer, and instead making zeroes and ones out of absences and presences of an electrical potential, one could make them out of negative and positive po- tentials instead. Still, it could turn out that the metaphysics of pain is such that pain has to have some absence as a component. After all, even in our negative/positive potential digital computer, the absence of potential in the empty spaces between the electronic components might very well be essential.

Augustine, of course, is a dualist and cannot make use of the material- ism that typically underlies strong artificial intelligence claims. But even on dualism, we have no generally accepted theory of what exactly con- stitutes pain, and it *could* still turn out that pain has to have a privative component. Nonetheless, it is a significant epistemic burden of a theory if it has to affirm, without further evidence, such a theory. For instance, this forces us to deny theories on which qualia, including those of pain, are simple properties.

But there is another strategy for saving privation theories from being counterexampled by pain: we can deny that pain as such is an evil. Rather, it is only in certain cases that pain becomes evil. There are three such the- ories, and they are even capable of combination.

The first theory says that pain has a cognitive role, and it is intrinsically good when it is fulfilling that cognitive role correctly. The cognitive role is typically taken to be the indication of harm. Pain is only bad when it is an incorrect indication of harm. Since harm is presumably itself some- thing privative on a privation theory of evil, we cannot say that the evil- maker of the bad pains is lack of underlying harm. Presumably, what we have to say here to defend the lacking thesis is something like what we said about error: in the bad pains, a token match between pain and reality is lacking.

Fortunately, the temporal issues are less problematic here than in the case of error, because the harm that the pain indicates is always simultaneous with or prior to the pain, and so when the indication is correct, we can locate the token of match at the time of the pain. Nonetheless, there is something implausible about the idea that when I stub my toe, the damage to my toe not only causes pain, but also causes this additional entity, a match between pain and harm. Moreover, it is implausible to think that this story exhausts the badness of pain. For many of our pains do seem to be correct indications of damage, and yet we think they are very much worth alleviating.

The second theory, developed by Grisez, Murphy and Oderberg,[23] says that what is truly bad about pain is a loss of inner peace, a disequilibrium, or a deprivation of mental harmony. But at first sight, lack of inner peace is not actually a lack, rather being something positive, an inner turbulence. Indeed Grisez talks of pain as involving a "tension," which sounds like a positive thing (note that Grisez's account is not explicitly offered as a response to worries about the privation theory of evil), while on Murphy's version pain involves a mismatch between desire and reality.

In any case, harmony does not appear to be an entity over and beyond the items in harmony. We intuitively think of harmony as a coordination between two items. Imagine that I have a disequilibrium between two passions A and B with B initially too strong. Then if harmony is an entity, if I decrease the strength of B, at exactly the right point, an entity, a token of harmony or balance, comes into existence. And then as I decrease the strength further, the entity disappears again. This *could be*, but it seems implausibly magical. A similar magic would be found in any view on which some relation of harmony is that whose lack makes for an evil: it can't be a universal of harmony, but must be a token, and a token that comes into existence precisely when things are well-coordinated and disappears when they are not.

Moreover, even if it is correct that pain is bad when it deprives us of an inner balance, the existence of a harmony *entity* is not what makes for the good of inner peace. On classical theism, anything that exists exists because God sustains it in being. Imagine that items A and B (maybe both are passions of the soul or maybe one of them is a desire and the other is reality) are in harmony, but then God stops sustaining the token of harmony without in any way affecting A and B. It will still be true that the two items match each other, and what more do I ask than that? What do I lose for the loss of the token of harmony? For instance, suppose that A is my desire for a pleasant state and B is my pleasant state. Then I am imagining that without any loss of desire for a pleasant state and any loss of pleasure, the token of harmony between A and B is no longer sustained by God. What loss is that? None at all, I think.

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[23]Originally due to Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, and more recently defended by Murphy, *An Essay on Divine Authority* and Oderberg, *The Metaphysics of Good and Evil*.

And even supposing that God cannot stop sustaining the token of harmony without the harmonized items changing, it is still true that what makes it be the case that I am well off with respect to inner peace are the facts about the harmonized items, not the existence of that token of harmony. We can still say that if, *per impossibile*, God were to stop sustaining the harmony while keeping the harmonized items unchanged, I would have whatever it is that it is worth having in inner peace. Thus, the good of inner peace is not constituted by the *existence* of a supposed harmony or balance entity whose lack makes for the evil of inner disequilibrium or imbalance.[24]

To reconcile the evil of pain with the Lacking Thesis, we thus either need a controversial and otherwise unsupported metaphysics of pain, or else we need to deny that pain is an intrinsic evil. The latter denial, while controversial, is defensible. However, once we fill out the most prominent theories on why pain is at least sometimes an evil, it is difficult to satisfy the Lacking Thesis without positing certain kinds of token relations—matches or balances—that are metaphysically dubious.

3.3 Easy Ontology and Goldilocks Ontology

There is an ontological theory on which all of the token match relations and other entities needed to save the lacking thesis exist: this is Thomasson's "easy ontology,"[25] on which anything that we can correctly predicate anything of in ordinary language or can say "there is" of also *really* exists. For instance, clearly the match between a true belief and reality is good, so the match exists (since "is good" can be predicated of it), and the privation theorist can say that it is lacking in cases of error. Similarly, there is an orderly arrangement of nasal features on the face of the one-nosed person, so that the orderly arrangement really exists, and the privation theorist can say that this orderly arrangement is lacking in the case of the two-nosed person.

However, whatever the merits of easy ontology may be, it is disastrous for privation theories of evil, since it is the point of privation theories to deny that evils or essential evils *really exist*. But we do say in ordinary language of the evils, incidental or essential, that they are there and we apply many predicates to them, such as "is undesirable" or "is awful." Thus, on easy ontology, even if the evils are privations, they really exist. Easy ontology is our best bet for making the Lacking Thesis true, but it is unacceptable to privation theorists since it makes evils really exist, and hence upholds the Existence Thesis (4) in the MPE.

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[24]Interestingly, even if a disequilibrium theory of the badness of pain is wrong, the case of disequilibrium seems to provide an independent counterexample to the Lacking Thesis. For a disequilibrium really does seem to be an evil, even if it is not the evil that makes pains bad, and the above reasoning shows that evilmaker of a disequilibrium is not plausibly taken to be a privation.

[25]Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy*.

What the Privation Theorist needs is not easy ontology, but what one might call "Goldilocks ontology," which has enough bloat to include such entities as tokens of match, authorization and order for the evils to be privations of, but not so much bloat to include the privations themselves. If responding to MPE requires such a carefully fine-tuned ontology, then this is a significant evidential burden on the theist.

In a rough-and-ready Bayesian setting, we might see this as lowering the prior probability of theism. Imagine a range of ontologies differing in how much bloat there is. We might intuitively assign equal priors to each of these ontologies. If so, the prior probability that the true ontology has the level of bloat needed to give a privation response to MPE will be low. Since theism entails the existence of a response to MPE, if a privation response is the only one, the prior probability of theism will be no greater than that of the disjunction of the ontologies that have the right levels of bloat. It is important to this line of thought that we don't have evidence independent of theism for the level of bloat that the privation theist needs: if we did, then that would boost the probability of these ontologies, and might even provide evidence for theism.

Fortunately, there is an alternative as we shall see.

4. Misarrangement

4.1 Hard Cases for MPE

Unlike the JPE, the MPE does not typically become more difficult for graver evils. It is much worse to lose one's arm than to stub one's toe, and it is typically more difficult to give a potential theodicy for the loss of an arm than for stubbing one's toe. After all, stubbing one's toe is such a minor evil that it would not take much for God to be morally justified in permitting it—the fact that it makes one a little tougher might be enough, and anyway which of us is so innocent that we don't deserve a toe stubbing as a punishment for something? However, the difficulty of handling particular evils in the context of the MPE does not similarly correlate with the gravity of the evil. What is evil in the loss of an arm—or even in the death of millions—is clearly a privation, and hence the Augustinian escape from the MPE works very nicely. However, the main evil in a toe-stubbing is due to pain, and we saw that pain is problematic for privation theorists.

When we look for hard cases with respect to the JPE, we are likely to gravitate towards evils of greater magnitude. But many of the hard cases with respect to the MPE can be minor evils, like a toe stubbing or someone's thinking giraffes don't exist, that appear to be resistant to a privative account.

Let us thus think about the resistant cases from section 3. We learned from Avicenna and Aquinas that we need only consider essential evils or evilmakers as problems for MPE.

Moreover, even if a privation theory is not a correct general theory of evil, we can agree with Avicenna and Aquinas that at least those cases

where there is a privative evilmaker are not problems for the MPE. Thus, a good way to look for hard cases for the MPE is to look at the cases that I argued were problematic for privation theories. We will do that, and then take stock of what we can say in general about evil on the basis of these examples.

4.2 Errors

Suppose I believe that giraffes don't exist. This belief is only incidentally bad. We can see that it is incidentally bad from the fact that if giraffes didn't exist, it wouldn't be bad at all. What makes it bad? A natural answer is that the belief is bad because it isn't true. And none of the existent entities in play—the belief and the giraffes—are essentially bad, and hence none present a problem for the MPE.

But isn't saying that the belief isn't true just saying that it lacks truth? Not necessarily. An ontologist who denies the possibility of the existence of property instances (say, a thoroughgoing nominalist or a Platonist who doesn't believe in tokens of instantiation) will say that the proposition that the sky is not red does not entail a lack of redness, because there couldn't really be such a thing a token redness for the sky to lack. But if my arguments in section 3.2.2 are sound, then we should all agree with the property-instance-denier in the special case of truth, since property instances of truth are ontologically rather problematic, and hence we should not take a proposition denying a belief's being true to be denying the existence of anything.

There are, however, cases of error that seem to present a special problem. The beliefs that there are no beliefs (a belief that eliminativists about folk psychological concepts have) or that 2+2=5 seem to be essentially bad: in any possible world where either of these beliefs exists, it's false. However, the Avicenna-Aquinas concept of an essentially evil thing is not just that of a thing that is *necessarily* evil. It is an explanatory or grounding concept. The point is clearer for the arithmetical case. There it is not the belief that 2+2=5 by itself that makes for evil, but that belief's mismatch to the necessary truth that 2+2≠5. But even in the case of the belief that there are no beliefs, we can say that what makes for evil is not just the belief itself, but the belief's mismatching of the relevant reality, a reality that in this case happens to be the belief itself, and which has to exist whenever the belief does.

If this solution does not satisfy, then another more move is available. One need not hold that beliefs *really* exist. There will be two versions of this story, on both of which although there are no beliefs, nonetheless I believe that 2+2=4, that the sky is blue, and so on, which distinguishes the story from the more standard eliminativism in the philosophy of mind.[26]

The first version is a denial of the existence of property instances (i.e., tropes and the like). On this view, while no beliefs exist, it is nonetheless

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[26]E.g., Churchland, *Neurophilosophy*.

true that I believe that the sky is blue. Explicating quantification over beliefs—such as in the claim that at least one of the things I believe is false—is a difficult task, but it is task that thoroughgoing nominalists are committed to for reasons independent of MPE.

A second and perhaps more promising approach is to say that to believe *p* is to have a complex plurality of mental and/or physical properties. Van Inwagen famously thinks there are no chairs, but only pluralities of simples arranged chairwise. One could similarly hold that there are no beliefs, but only pluralities of fundamental property instances arranged beliefwise. This is a variety of eliminativism about beliefs, but one that unlike the more usual eliminativism allows for the literal truth of ordinary claims about beliefs. It's just that this truth is secured not by beliefs but by the beliefwise-arranged states, much as van Inwagen's account allows for the literal truth of ordinary claims about chairs to be secured by chairwise-arranged simples. And this move is sufficient to get out of the MPE, since in the MPE the word "exist" and its cognates are used in the ontologist's sense rather than the ordinary sense. (If "exist" were used in the ordinary sense, then the privation theory of evil would not let one deny the premise that evils exist, since in the ordinary sense of "exist," there *do* exist evils, and many of them.)

In the above, I assumed that if there are beliefs, they are property instances. But perhaps beliefs would be members of a different ontological category, such as states or events. In that case, we still have two analogous solutions: either nominalistically hold that the relevant ontological categories are empty, or else hold that ordinary claims about belief existence are grounded in a proper plurality of members of the category rather than being made true by a single entity.

4.3 Wrongdoings

An attempted murder is made evil by a lethal intention together with circumstances in virtue of which the killing is not authorized. One might have an ontology on which there exists a complex entity composed of the intention and the circumstances. If so, then the situation could be a problem with respect to the MPE. However, it seems better to say that what makes the attempted murder wrong is a plurality (which is not itself an entity) consisting of the lethal intention and the circumstances (which themselves might well be a plurality, as suggested by the grammatical plural of the word). And in this case, we have no essential evil really existing, and hence no problem for the MPE.

The existence of a complex evilmaker *entity* made up of the intention and the circumstances seems quite dubious. It would be a strange entity consisting of a mental state of the evildoer together with various relevant mental and/or physical properties of the prospective victim. Moreover, a part of what makes the attempted murder wrong are what one might call the "moral circumstances," which are what ground the wrongness of

attempted murder—be they fundamental moral facts, human nature, divine commands, ideal contracts, or other posits of the correct metaethics. It is implausible to think there is a whole composed of such disparate entities as all these. Unlike common-sense entities like organisms, such an evilmaker entity is something we do not even have a name for, much less any direct intuition in favor of the existence of.

Moreover, what grounds the wrongness of the attempt is a proper plurality—i.e., a plurality of more than one thing—even *if* there is a whole composed by the above plurality. To see this point, imagine that Alice attempts to murder Bob despite Bob's complete innocence.

Suppose an entity *e* exists that is constituted by Alice's intention, Bob's innocence and any other relevant circumstances, but suppose also that in the middle of Alice's attempt God annihilates *e*, while keeping its constituents in place. Alice's attempt would continue to be a wrongdoing—she would still be making an attempt on Bob's life despite his complete innocence and in all the other relevant circumstances. Nor would the world be any better for *e* being annihilated, as it would surely be if *e* were an essential evil.

Admittedly, it might be that it is a logical impossibility for these constituents to exist without making up *e*. But even so, we can ask what would happen if *per impossibile* that whole were annihilated, and the answer is surely that Alice's attempt would be no less evil, and the world no better off for lacking *e*. When we bemoan the evil, we do not bemoan *e*, but the constituents' being combined. Granted, the existence of *e* entails that there is an evil, but that does not make *e* evil. (The existence of an instance of self-sacrifice entails that there is an evil—namely, whatever evil one accepted in the sacrifice—but the token of sacrifice is not itself an evil.)

A similar argument applies to any wrongdoing whose evil isn't simply constituted by the act of will itself. This leaves one last question: Could there maybe be an evil constituted simply by an act of will, one where there is no similar "plurality" escape from the MPE? Perhaps willing or "enthusing over" something evil could be a simple act of mind. One move at this point would be to say that there are no willings or enthusings, either because there are no property instances or because facts about willing or enthusing are grounded in proper pluralities of properties, much as in one of the solutions for the case of error. But even if there really do exist such acts of mind, to make them evil we also need the moral circumstances, i.e., the grounds of morality as such—be they primitive moral facts, aspects of human nature, or divine commands.

Previously, I was willing to grant for the sake of the argument that the Avicenna-Aquinas privation theory works for privative evils, such as omitting to keep a promise. However, now we can see that the theory is not quite right even then. The omission does not ground the evil by itself. Rather, the evil is grounded in the omission combined with the promise and the relevant aspects of the grounds of morality. Without these additional circumstances, the omission is not the omission of a *due* good.

4.4 Extra Noses

In the case of the two-nosed human, it is incorrect to say that the extra nose is an essential evil. For imagine that the two noses are side-by-side symmetrically arranged, a little bit away from the usual position of a nose. Then there would be too many noses, but we couldn't specify which nose is the "extra" nose.[27]

If the essential evil is not "the" extra nose, what is the essential evil? A first candidate is the numerical fact of there being two noses on a human face. But it seems reasonable to deny the real existence of such numerical facts. Moreover, there is some reason to doubt that even if there really existed such a fact, it would be the essential evil. Imagine, after all, that Socrates had two noses, and God—perhaps *per impossibile*—ceased to sustain the numerical two-nose fact in existence, while continuing to sustain both noses. Socrates' face would, surely, be no less deformed.

A second candidate for the essential evil is a mismatch between the noses and the human nature. There seems, however, to be little cost to denying the real existence of such a mismatch entity, and so there is no problem for the MPE.

A third candidate would be some fusion. One option is the fusion of the two noses, and the other would be the fusion of the two noses and the "human blueprint" (i.e., whatever grounds the normative claim that two noses are not appropriate for humans—perhaps human nature or human DNA or divine intentions). But, again, if God were to cease to sustain such a fusion while sustaining the two noses and human nature, our hypothetical Socrates' two-nosed face would still be deformed. Moreover, denying the existence of a fusion of two noses does not seem difficult: certainly van Inwagen and Merricks would deny it. And to deny the existence of a fusion of two noses with the "human blueprint" is even easier.

In any case, there seems to be little difficulty in extra noses escaping the MPE.

Perhaps, though, a tumor would be more problematic than an extra nose. However, a tumor is only incidentally evil. What makes for evil here is the tumor's deviating from the "human blueprint." Denying the existence of deviatings is unproblematic. And if one says that what makes for the evil is the combination of the tumor with the "blueprint," we can make the by now familiar moves: deny a cross-categorial fusion of the tumor with the "blueprint" or allow for the fusion but deny that it is the evil that we bemoan.

4.5 Pain

If pain in and of itself is evil, then we can get out of the MPE by denying that pains exist, in two familiar ways: by denying that there are property

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[27]Granted, even after one nose were removed by a plastic surgeon, there would still be the evil that the remaining nose would be off-center. But that is easily handled in connection with the MPE by denying that there are such things as instances of offcenteredness.

instances—pains would be instances of a mental property—or by holding that claims about the existence of a pain are grounded in a plurality of mental and/or physical property instances rather than a single thing.

If, however, we are open to the various accounts on which pain is not itself evil, but only evil when not matching reality, or going against desire, or disturbing inner peace, then we have another familiar solution. We either deny that there is an entity composed of both the pain and the things that the pain needs to be combined with to make for an evil—the mismatching of reality, the contrary desire or the inner turbulence—or we hold that even if there is such an entity, it is not itself the ground of evil, but the evil is instead grounded in a proper plurality.

4.6 The Misarrangement Theory of Evil

In light of the above, for each of the evils that were hard cases for privation theories, it was not difficult to get out of the MPE. We can see that there is a multiplicity of strategies available for defending the idea that a particular essential evil *E* does not really exist, including insisting on any one of the following claims:

9. *E* is a privation.

10. If *E* really existed, it would be a property instance, but there are no property instances (or states, events, etc.) at all or of the sort that *E* would need to be.

11. Ordinary language claims about the existence of *E* are grounded in the existence of a proper plurality of things.

12. *E* is only evil in a certain context *C*, and there is no really existing evil-maker entity composed of *E* and *C*, either because *E* and *C* do not compose a whole or if they do, because that whole is not the evil.

Having more strategies to escape the MPE is good news for the theist. And we can now formulate a misarrangement theory of evil:

13. Essential evils are undue arrangements of reality rather than really existing entities.

There are many ways that reality can be misarranged. One way is by a lack of something due, say of a body part (Aquinas gives the examples of hand or foot)[28] or of a faculty (say, sight or smell). But as the hard cases for privation theories showed, there are other kinds of misarrangement. We could have an undue combination of existing things. Or one or more things could be qualified or related in an undue way, without the ontology reifying the "undue way" into a really existing token entity like a property instance. And there could even be other ways of misarranging reality. What one must crucially defend, however, is that the undue arrangement is never a single entity.

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[28]Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, II.D34.Q1.A2.

As we saw, the difficulty with a number of the hard cases for the privation theory was not so much denying that the evil exists, but finding a real entity—a token match or authorization or ordering, say—for the evil to be a privation of. The misarrangement theory can embrace the denial of the existence of evil while eschewing the search for the entity that the evil is a privation of. It is worth noting that Augustine himself in the *Confessions* often describes evils as disorders,[29] without troubling to investigate if there is an "order" entity for the evils to be lacks of. Such language fits better with the misarrangement theory than with Augustine's official theory, and shows that the misarrangement theory may be more Augustinian than seemed at first sight.

With the broad and disorganized variety of ways that reality may be misarranged, it may seem that the misarrangement theory is too trivial to count as a theory of evil. The misarrangement theory is more of a denial of the claim that essential evils are really existing entities than an account of what all evils have in common. Almost all the evil-identifying work in the misarrangement theory is being done by the "mis" prefix in its name or the "undue" in (13).

However, it is worth noting that even in the case of Augustine's theory of evil, much of the evil-identifying work was also done by the "dueness" of the lacking goods.

Moreover, the misarrangement theory is not trivial. First, it places a mutual constraint on ontology and axiology: something that really exists cannot be an essential evil. Thus, since it is difficult[30] to deny that human beings exist, human beings cannot be essential evils. Similarly, fundamental entities have to really exist, so whatever is fundamental must be not be an essential evil. On the other hand, since it is plausible that at least some instances of properties—say, Stalin's murderousness—would be essential evils if they really existed, we cannot have an abundant trope ontology on which there is a property instance or trope corresponding to every true predication. Such mutual constraint is far from trivial and potentially allows for progress in both ontology and axiology.

4.7 Objection: Evil Organisms

It is worth considering one objection to the misarrangement theory: evil organisms, such as cholera bacteria, SARS-CoV-2, or parasitic wasps. A restrictive ontology solution that simply denies the existence of all such organisms is implausible. If parasitic wasps do not exist, neither do humans.

Here, I think the best move is to deny that these organisms are essential evils. A cat is surely not an essential evil. But it would be difficult to draw a principled line between the predation done by a cat and a parasitic

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[29]I am grateful to an interlocutor whose identity I can no longer remember (for which privative evil I apologize) for pointing this out to me and querying whether thus in fact the misarrangement theory differs from Augustine's theory.

[30]*Pace* Unger, "I Do Not Exist."

wasp, and between these and the activity of *Vibrio cholerae*. All of these *do* harm to fellow organisms. Being eaten by a cat is an evil happening to a squirrel. But it does not seem that a cat is an evil, and it is not even clear that a cat's eating a squirrel is an essential evil. If I am wrong, and a cat's eating a squirrel is an essential evil, then we can simply deny the existence of the relational property instance *Spot's eating Flufftail*.

Of course, there is a very serious justificational problem of evil regarding nature being red in tooth and claw. But that is beyond the scope of a response to the MPE.

5. Conclusions

The privation theory of evil was developed as a way to reconcile the claims that everything other than God is created and sustained by God and that God does not create or sustain evil. Unfortunately, to maintain the privation theory requires embracing a number of implausible claims, such as that the truth of a belief is a really existing entity and that every wrongdoing is made wrong by the absence of some entity that would be really existing if the action weren't wrong. Embracing these claims bloats one's ontology. But at the same time one must be careful not to bloat the ontology too much, for if privations get included in the ontology, the privation response to the Metaphysical Problem of Evil falls apart. What is needed is an implausible "Goldilocks ontology" with just the right bloat.

Fortunately for the theist, there is an alternative. Instead of insisting that every evil is a privation of a due good, one can hold that evils are misarrangements. The concept of a misarrangement is broader than that of a privation of a due good, so the theory is easier to defend than the privation theory: any evil that the privation theory can account for is automatically accounted for by the misarrangement theory. At the same time, challenges are still available: the misarrangement theorist still has to make *some* controversial ontological claims, especially about there not being tropes or instances corresponding to predications of evil. But progress has been made.[31]

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