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Darwin's Doubts and the Problems of Animal Pain

Eric Russert Kraemer
University of Wisconsin—La-Crosse

Introduction

It is a truism that the influence of Darwin's work on evolution is profound and ubiquitous. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the first chapter of Frans de Waal's book, *Good Natured*, is entitled "Darwinian Dilemmas." In this chapter, which sets the stage for his splendid discussion of observation of various kinds of moral behavior in primates, de Waal outlines the history of the debate over the biological status of morality since the implications of Darwinism began to be understood. Assuming Darwinism to be correct, moral behavior must have evolved along with all other features of living beings. The rest of de Waal's book goes on to make a strong inductive case for the evolution of moral behaviors. In so doing, he provides a powerful attack on the traditional supernatural understanding of the origin of morality which takes morality to requ*ire* a supernatural creator. Although most mainstream Western religious institutions now claim that evolution is c*onsistent* with their doctrines of the supernatural creator,[1] the present discussion challenges this alleged consistency of traditional religion and evolution. The main contention of this paper is that if we take both evolution and concern for animal suffering seriously (as Darwin did), then we should reject traditional theism.

If one is earnestly moved by the sufferings of nonhuman animals, must this *really* affect the religious views one holds? For those concerned about animal rights who are not philosophically inclined, the question may not be one that causes any anxiety. But for serious thinkers, the relation between animal suffering and religion is one that needs to be examined. The present paper begins its exploration of the connection between traditional religion and animal suffering by considering the religious opinions of Charles Darwin, who had serious doubts about religion based on the problem of animal pain. Although not all of Darwin's views on animal suffering have been appreciated by defenders of animal rights,[2] Darwin's religious progress is of considerable interest, as it demonstrates the development of a persuasive agnostic stance out of a strong concern for animal suffering.

The structure of my paper is as follows. Before setting out and defending Darwin's arguments concerning religion, I begin by considering Alvin Plantinga's recent (and influential) discussion of a controversial Darwinian passage (dubbed by Plantinga "Darwin's Doubt") which casts doubt on the standard interpretation of Darwin as a

defender of both the rationality of accepting evolution as well as the view that human rational powers evolved from those of nonhumans.3 After critiquing Plantinga's interpretation of Darwin, I set out Darwin's real doubts, those about religion, which involve an animal variation on the traditional problem of evil. As this particular problem has recently received much attention from serious theistic philosophers,[4] I defend Darwin's views against two of the best recent attempts by traditional theists to deal with the problem of animal pain. Both efforts are shown to be seriously flawed. After discussing and rejecting some non-traditional attempts to save religion from Darwin's argument, I conclude with a general assessment of Darwin's claims about religion.

Darwin's Doubts

In several articles and a recent book, as well as numerous presentations, Alvin Plantinga has repeatedly drawn attention to words taken from an 1881 letter of Charles Darwin to William Graham to support Plantinga's bold contention that it is irrational to accept evolutionary naturalism.[5] Plantinga quotes with approval the following passage:

> With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind? [1898: I, 315-16]

Plantinga interprets this passage as follows:

> Darwin…seem[s] to believe that (naturalistic) evolution gives one a reason to doubt that human cognitive faculties produce for the most part true beliefs: call this 'Darwin's Doubt'. [1993: 219]

Those familiar with Plantinga's work in epistemology will remember that Plantinga goes on to argue, using what he takes to be backing from Darwin, that belief in evolution actually leads to a strong form of skepticism. As Plantinga rejects skepticism, he concludes that only a theistic epistemology—one based on God as the designer of reliable human cognitive faculties—suffices to explain how knowledge of the world is possible.

Although it may be tempting for Plantinga and his followers to read this passage from Darwin as supporting Plantinga's claims, were Plantinga's interpretation accurate, it would indeed be odd to learn that the most famous proponent of evolution thought his views on evolution led to a general skepticism which undermined confidence in all of our beliefs, including our ethical beliefs and scientific beliefs.[6] (The latter category would include even Darwin's own work on evolution!) But Plantinga's interpretation does not seem to be an careful rendering of Darwin, whose actual views on these matters are in fact much more insightful than the remarks by Plantinga would suggest.[7]

Darwin's mature view is better expressed by the following quote from another letter, written to Lord Farrer almost two months after Darwin's letter to Graham:

> On the other hand, if we consider the whole universe, the mind refuses to look at it as the outcome of chance—that is, without design or purpose. The whole question seems to me insoluble, for I cannot put much or any faith in the so-called *intuitions* of the human mind, which have been developed, *as I cannot doubt*, from such a mind as animals possess; and what would their convictions or intuitions be worth? [my emphasis; 1903: 395]

As this quote makes clear, Darwin's real doubts do not extend to evolution; they are restricted to the question of the nature of the origin of the universe, to the trust that one should have in the "convictions or intuitions" that humans have on this topic alone. But why should humans not trust these convictions? Darwin's surprising answer to this question appears in the following comment from his *Autobiography*:

> But then arises the doubt—can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animal, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions? May not these be the result of the connection between cause and effect which strikes us as a necessary one, but probably depends merely on inherited experience? Nor must we overlook the probability of the constant inculcation of a belief in God on the minds of children producing so strong and perhaps an inherited effect on their brains, not as yet fully developed, that it would be as difficult for them to throw off their belief in God, as for a monkey to throw off its instinctive fear and hatred of a snake. I cannot pretend to throw the least light on such abstruse problems. The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble to us; and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic. [1958: 93-94]

These passages again demonstrate that Darwin's real doubts apply only to "grand conclusions" about God and the ultimate origin of the universe. For Darwin these doubts may well have a purely naturalistic explanation. Just as a monkey cannot help reacting to a snake, Darwin wonders whether a Divine Purpose account of creation is also something we humans cannot help but have. He suggests that those who accept an evolutionary account of human existence need to be wary of "grand conclusions" humans make without adequate supporting evidence, since the having of these convictions may have played an important evolutionary role in human origination. For, just as monkeys who reacted to snakes in the past survived better than those who did not, perhaps, similarly, humans who had strong traditional religious beliefs may have also survived better in the past than those who did not.

So far we have seen that Darwin did not doubt the reliability of ordinary human beliefs about the world, but only "grand conclusions" about the origin of the Universe. What is not yet explained is why Darwin thought that standard theism was improbable. Once again, comments on religion from his *Autobiography* provide the answer:

> That there is much suffering in the world no one disputes. Some have attempted to explain this in reference to man by imagining that it serves for his moral improvement. *But the number of men in the world is as nothing compared with*

> *that of all other sentient beings, and these often suffer greatly without any moral improvement.* A being so powerful and so full of knowledge as a God who could create the universe, is to our finite minds omnipotent and omniscient, and it revolts our understanding to suppose that his benevolence is not unbounded, for what advantage can there be in the sufferings of millions of the lower animals throughout almost endless time? This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent first cause seems to me a strong one; whereas, as just remarked, the presence of much suffering agrees well with the view that all organic beings have been developed through variation and natural selection. [my emphasis; 1958: 90]

Although Darwin calls this a "very old argument," it is important to point out that standard discussions of the problem that suffering raises for the existence of God, usually called "The Problem of Evil," have been, until quite recently, almost always concerned exclusively with the suffering endured by human beings. It has been rather rare to find significant concern over the natural suffering of nonhumans.[8] I find it supremely fitting that Darwin the naturalist takes the existence of massive nonhuman suffering to counterbalance what he also admits to be strong arguments in favor of theism: namely, appeals to first cause, design and mystical experience.[9] But, just how problematic is the problem of animal pain for the theist? It is to this debate that we now turn.

The Problem of Animal Pain

The classic discussion of the problem that animal pain raises for the rationality of accepting standard theism is David Hume's 1779 discussion in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume remarks:

> Men pursue pleasure as eagerly as they avoid pain; at least, they might have been so constituted. It seems, therefore, plainly possible to carry on the business of life without any pain. Why then is *any animal* ever rendered susceptible of such a sensation? If animals can be free from it an hour, they might enjoy a perpetual exemption from it…[my emphasis; 1779: Book XI, 206]

Although certainly challenging to traditional theists, one can only speculate why Hume's concerns about animal pain were not generally found convincing. It is probably reasonable to suppose that the lack of a well worked-out alternative to Special Creation (the view that God specifically created each individual species) made it hard for skeptics to convince the religious orthodox. Hume had pointed out that there were various ways in which the design in nature could be explained without relying on a Special Creator,[10] but he also admitted that:

> So well adjusted are the organs and capacities of all animals, and so well fitted to their preservation, that, as far as history or tradition reaches, there appears not to be any single species which has yet been extinguished in the universe. [1779: Book XI, 207]

Saddled with the doctrine of fixed species, it was hard for Hume to make a really convincing case for an alternative to Special Creation, in spite of the moral problem that animal pain raises for the standard theist. Darwin, of course, changed all that. By providing a serious competitor to the Special Creation doctrine, Darwin enabled those who worried about the problem of evil to deflect the troubling criticism that any alternative to standard theism could not adequately explain the obvious evidence of design that we find in the world around us.

Until relatively recently, the attempt to reply to the problem of evil has focused on whether there is an adequate explanation for evil that would explain why God would permit its existence. The explanations typically rely heavily on reasons that would justify evil being suffered by human beings.[11] Human free will, human character building, and Original Sin are among the most popular of the score of traditional reasons typically offered to explain evil.[12] All of these are significantly flawed in their own right.[13] More importantly, for the purposes of the present discussion, all of these traditional reasons for evil clearly share a devastating common failing. They all fail to account for animal suffering. Only a theist who denied that animals other than humans ever suffer could consistently rest content with one of the old standard reasons.[14]

During the past decade or so, discussion of the problem of evil has importantly changed focus. Two of the most important concerns have been (1) the replacement of the search for a deductively compelling version of the argument from evil (which proved illusive) with discussion of the evidential worries that evil poses for the theist, and (2) a stunning realization of the serious problem that nonhuman animal suffering poses for the theist.[15] The two concerns powerfully come together in the work of Paul Draper.[16] In his important [1989] discussion Draper puts the problem as a comparison between the (epistemic) probability of evil given standard theism and the probability of evil given what he calls "the hypothesis of indifference." The hypothesis of indifference (HI) is the claim that "neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons."[1989: 332] Draper goes on to argue that the probability of evil given HI is much greater than the probability of evil given theism. Draper in particular observes that "sentient beings experiencing pain or pleasure that we do not know to be biologically useful" is much more to be expected given HI than given theism. In this, his view is similar to that of Darwin, who, as noted above, remarks: "the presence of much suffering agrees well with the view that all organic beings have been developed through variation and natural selection," but does not agree well with the traditional theistic view of a benevolent First Cause. Darwin's agnosticism is based on his own concern that the evidence the naturalists find does not support a theistic designer. Draper's and Darwin's claims have recently been challenged. I now turn to two such challenges.

In several discussions, Daniel Howard-Snyder has tried to rebut Draper's charges as follows:[17]

> What about biologically gratuitous pain? Draper is certainly right that we and the brutes experience a lot of prolonged and intense suffering that serves no

> biological purpose. And perhaps we should not expect anything else on HI.…But why, according to Draper, should we expect much less biologically gratuitous pain on theism…?…Draper doesn't give us any reason to think that the two cases are not equal in relevant respects and I can think of nothing plausible to fill the gap. [1994: 463]

Howard-Snyder's attack is based on challenging what he calls "Draper's Assumption," the claim that "we should expect on theism to discover a connection between morally justifying goods and pain."[463] (This assumption is also one Darwin seems willing to make.) Howard-Snyder's challenge is based on two specific arguments, the "Argument from Progress" and the "Argument from Complexity."[1994: 464] The Argument from Progress starts from the observation that human knowledge has progressed in a variety of fields of human inquiry and then points out that although there were periods in which new intrinsic goods were discovered, there were certainly also periods in which nothing new was discovered. From these two claims Howard-Snyder infers

> [I]t is at least as antecedently likely as not that there has been the sort of periodic progress in the discovery of goods that strongly suggests that there remain goods to be discovered, hence goods we are ignorant of.

From this he concludes that we "should hardly be surprised that, given theism, we would not discover a connection between morally justifying goods and pain."*[Ibid.]*

One objection that might be raised against Howard-Snyder's argument is it assumes that human progress in knowledge acquisition is equally probable on theism and on the hypothesis of indifference. The problem with this assumption is since knowledge is (by and large) an intrinsic good, it seems antecedently surprising on theism that human knowledge would evolve slowly and that there would be periods in which nothing new discovered was discovered. After all, would not a benevolent Deity regularly grant creatures large amounts of significant knowledge?[18] By contrast, the evolution of human knowledge is not at all surprising on the hypothesis of indifference. To respond to this complaint, the theist must resort to the claim that God must have had some hidden reason for allowing the incremental development of human knowledge. Why should there be hidden reasons? Answering this question leads to Howard-Snyder's second argument.

Howard-Snyder's second argument, the Argument from Complexity, repeats a very familiar refrain:[19]

> It would not be surprising if God…would pursue the realization of some very great goods. Now one thing that [such great goods] share when compared to [lesser goods] is…that each illustrates the fact that the value of a state of affairs is sometime greater since that state of affairs is more complex. So it is *at least* as antecedently likely as not that God…would aim to realize some very complex state of affairs. Since much of the suffering [we observe] is so horrifyingly bad as to defy adequate description, it would take correspondingly great goods to justify its permission. In that case, it's at least as antecedently likely as not that God's

> reasons for permitting these horrors have to do with very complex states of affairs. Now, one of the well-known drawbacks of the human cognitive condition is that we are able to conceive of states of affairs of fairly limited complexity. Therefore, it is at least as antecedently likely as not that were God to have a reason to permit [these horrors], it would have to do with good states of affairs that are too complex for us to grasp given our present cognitive capacities. And so…[we have] good reason to be wholly unsurprised that, on theism, we would not discover a connection between morally justifying goods and pain.*[Ibid.]*

Howard-Snyder's second complaint is that if we accept the limitations of human understanding, then we can explain away any tendency to be surprised by the evil we find in the world given theism by chalking up evil to incomprehensible greater goods that would require it. This argument also faces an important challenge regarding knowledge. That there would be truly remarkable, complex states of affairs we could not comprehend is presumably not more surprising on the hypothesis of indifference than on theism. But, whether, given Howard-Snyder's earlier reminder of the evolution of human knowledge, we should still expect massive human ignorance about the goodness of all such complex states of affairs is much less clear. Is it really reasonable to expect that a species capable of producing marvels of understanding such as Gödel's Theorem, the Periodic Table, Relativity Theory, Quantum Mechanics, and the Theory of Evolution could not fathom at least certain aspects of the justification of the distribution of the suffering we observe? Is it really beyond God's ability to teach us even the rudiments, no matter how sketchy or incomplete, of an adequate account of evil? Or, failing that, is it really impossible for God to make our defects sufficiently known so that we could see why we cannot grasp the sort of complex good that the world's present suffering requires?20 The inviting negative answer to these three questions shows that Howard-Snyder's argument from complexity is most unconvincing as an attempt to undercut Draper's Assumption.

Rebutting Howard-Snyder's attack on Draper's (and Darwin's) Assumption is all well and good, but it is still worth asking whether there are significant reasons that would support the assumption. The theist critic might urge that what might have persuaded Darwin and may still be influencing Draper is a false belief in the ability of human beings to understand anything worth understanding, combined, perhaps, with some version of inevitable progress left over from the influence of Social Darwinist thought. While one should be wary of such influences, it seems to me that our discussion so far has suggested that there are other reasons that would support Draper's Assumption. Darwin speaks of a being whose "benevolence is unbounded." It is reasonable to view benevolence as involving education on matters of great concern, such as the problem of evil. Also, Draper, following Hume's lead, speaks of the analogy between God and a good parent.[1989: 344] It is surely incumbent on good parents to provide sufficient education on important matters (even if limited to the level of a child's understanding). Whether these reasons are sufficient to support Draper's Assumption will, I expect, be controversial.

Part of the controversy will probably lie in there being radically different accounts of what "good parenting" requires. Some, following a more traditional, authoritarian model,

will urge that the good parent is a strict authoritarian, one who commands that the child does as she is told, that she does not ask questions and that she never challenges authority. A good parent on this model will not be expected to inform the child of what is going on or to explain how things work out for the best. Others, in line with a more modern trend, will insist that good parenting, while being protective, emphasizes nurture and care, and that good parents promote development of the child through increasing her understanding of the world. Such a mode of parenting establishes its authority through love, not fear. Since I clearly favor the second kind of parenting, as I regard it as morally preferable, I cannot help but try to conceive of a Divine Parent on such a model. On such a conception, Howard-Snyder's defenses against the problem of animal pain do not make sense.

Before proceeding, I think it important to consider in general why attempts such as Howard-Snyder's to explain away worries about animal pain are *prima facie implau*sible. My suggestion is that attempts to imagine a situation in which the existing animal suffering would be *counter-balanced* by some greater good remain most unconvincing. It seems clear that there is no good reason for animal suffering involving only animals themselves. As Hume pointed out long ago, the "necessities of nature" might be prompted not by pain but by a "diminution of pleasure."[21] There is also no compelling reason for animal suffering that involves humans. To claim that animal suffering is required for human character building, free will, etc. not only ignores the huge amount of animal suffering in nature which has no effect on humans at all.[22] To avoid this last problem, suppose we try to justify animal suffering in terms of requirements involving another kind of creature, for example a very large number of idiotic giants, modeled perhaps after the Cyclops, who live on other planets but are obsessed with observing all nonhuman suffering on Earth through powerful telescopes, so no bit of animal suffering ever goes unobserved. If there are enough giants on other planets and if every bit of animal suffering goes towards improving the moral situation of these pathetic giants, the theist might claim that earthly animal suffering was counterbalanced by creating greater goods elsewhere in the universe.[23] However unlikely this situation might appear to us, and even if we accept the crude Utilitarian calculations it presupposes, the Cyclopsian scenario faces a standard problem confronting most theistic attempts to explain away the existence of evil.[24] This is the problem of making it plausible to believe that God, an all-powerful and all-knowing being, really had no better method available for the moral improvement of the Cyclopsian race than to permit the huge amount of animal suffering we find on Earth. Since we can, with no apparent difficulty, imagine God making video tapes of animal suffering, or showing movies of animal suffering to produce the same good extra-terrestrial effect, to think of God's ingenuity being defeated by the mental limitations of the Cyclopsian hordes is a possibility that is hard to take seriously. Clearly a deeper reason is needed to make the necessity of animal suffering plausible. At this point it would seem instructive to turn to a second, and seemingly more promising way for the theist to deal with the problem of animal pain, namely Van Inwagen's appeal to natural order.

Van Inwagen's attack on the evidential argument from evil proceeds by suggesting that there is a defense the theist might use to explain nonhuman suffering based on an appeal

to order.[1991: 143] By "defense," Van Inwagen means not a conclusive theodicy but "a story, a story that is true for all I know." Van Inwagen's Order Defense claims that nonhuman suffering is due to the requirement of order, and that if there were not the amount of such suffering that we find in the world, then the world would be "massively irregular," which would be a defect at least as great as having nonhuman suffering.*[Ibid.]* Van Inwagen goes on to argue, as the title of his article, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air and the Problem of Silence," suggests that his strategy is the same as that employed by early defenders of naturalism who encountered difficulty with a particular scientific theory, *viz.* atomism. The beauty of his argument is that it shows how theists and non-theists alike need to rely on common defensive strategies.

One worry faced by Van Inwagen's strategy of comparing the problem of animal pain for the theist to the problem of air for the atomist is obvious for anyone who remembers Kuhn's [1970] contribution to the history of science. Kuhn pointed out the importance of *anomalies*, problems that resist explanation by the dominant theory. They often have a way of festering, eventually leading researchers to abandon the dominant theory in favor of an alternative account. Critics of Van Inwagen might urge that the problem of animal pain is just such an anomaly for the theist's theory that God is all-good, all-powerful and all-knowing. Van Inwagen could be expected to reply that whether the problem of animal pain turns out to be such an anomaly has not yet been established, so it is premature to make claims one way or another. Van Inwagen's Order-Defense against Draper is similar to Howard-Snyder's Argument from Complexity in placing the explanation of nonhuman suffering beyond current human capacity. Van Inwagen apparently leaves it open whether humans will ever discover enough details about the defense to count as a genuine understanding of evil. But, given his reliance on "extreme modal and moral skepticism (or, one might say, humility) in matters unrelated to the concerns of everyday life"[1991: 151], it seems unlikely on his view that humans will every have such knowledge.[25]

Given the paucity of information available to us about how order in the world is supposed to work, and also granted Van Inwagen's insistence on modal and moral skepticism, it is indeed hard to demonstrate conclusively that Van Inwagen's claims about order explaining animal suffering are incorrect. While with Hume we seem easily able to imagine alternative ways the world might have been ordered which would not have involved allowing the infliction of massive suffering on nonhumans, the reply to the Humean charge by defenders of order is to repeat the claim that, in spite of appearances, the order afforded by the present arrangement of nonhuman suffering in the world really does work out for the best.

On the other hand, it is hard to find *compelling* reasons to accept Van Inwagen's faith in order (which is very reminiscent of the famous satire in Voltaire's *Candide* of the Leibnizian refrain that this is the best of all possible worlds). In the absence of some reason to do so, it looks as though Van Inwagen's defense against animal pain is weak indeed: perhaps it will be somewhat comforting for those who desperately want to be theists, but still disconcerting for those who wish to understand why animals need to suffer. I find it revealing that Van Inwagen does not attempt to provide any reasons to support his appeal to order to account for God's allowing massive animal suffering.

Conversely, Peter Vardy, who accepts evolution but also appeals to an Order Defense to explain animal suffering, does try to offer reasons that would improve the plausibility of the order defense. Sensitive to the Humeans' worry, Vardy is well aware of the question:

> Could not God have created a universe in which the developing world could have been brought about with less extreme pain and suffering, where all animals only ate grass and did not prey on each other? [1997: 141]

Vardy's reply is:

> Clearly such a world would be radically different from this one. All animals would grow old and die of natural causes…Many species would die of starvation as the plant resources on which they fed were used up by other animals. The whole idea of evolution would have to be abandoned as the "survival of the fittest" is the most effective tool to ensure *evolutionary quality*. [my emphasis, *Ibid.*]

This leads Vardy to conclude:

> To reject evolution, therefore, is not to reject a harsh way of creating a world in favor of a gentler one. It is to reject the best and most effective way of creating a world of great beauty, richness, diversity and adaptability which has within it the possibility of love and the higher virtues. [1997: 142]

An important contrast in Vardy's discussion over that of Van Inwagen is Vardy's attempt to discover a cogent reason for animal pain. What is less than persuasive in Vardy's reasoning is the implication that God would have had to use exactly the historical record of evolution, replete with dinosaurs, etc., to achieve the level of beauty and richness that we find in the world, not to mention "evolutionary quality." Is God really so limited in terms of the methods that might have been used? Given the richness of the fossil record, what reason would we have to think that Vardy is right? Furthermore, there is some reason to think that Vardy's talk of evolutionary quality is not consistent with standard Darwinianism. Not only would Darwin be hard-pressed to explain what evolutionary quality comes to; he also points out bizarre adaptations, such as

> geese and frigate-birds with webbed feet, lining on the dry land and rarely alighting on the water.…long-toed corncrakes, living in meadows instead of in swamps…woodpeckers where hardly a tree grows. [1859: 132-133]

All of these are well explained using evolution, but none of them seem to count as cases of evolutionary quality. So, Vardy's attempt to justify an order defense seems to me to fail.

Suppose, therefore, that we find the appeal to order to explain animal suffering less than compelling. Is there any good reason to think that Van Inwagen and Vardy's approach to

this problem is problematic for the theist? I think there are indeed some significant costs associated with the Order Defense that should make it unattractive for the traditional theist. One worry that a theist who embraced Order Defense would have to face is what I will call the Problem of Prayer. It is common for theists to pray for such things as world peace and an end to hunger, ignorance, violence and suffering. It is also to be expected that theists who care about animal misery will pray that animals not suffer, either due to human causes or to natural predation. But, are these actions reasonable? For all we know, war, starvation, animal predation and suffering may well be part of the regularity created by God. So, should we pray for these things and be happy when we learn more of the many instances of them? A second worry closely related to this is what I will term the Problem of Action. Devout theists typically believe themselves required to act so as to improve the world around them. For many, this involves contributing monetarily to missionary work in areas far away from their everyday life. For others, this contribution takes the form of personal involvement. This is especially the case for many concerned about animal rights. Some have argued that we have an obligation to try to interfere with predation in nature.[26] But, are such actions contributing to irregularity in the world, or do they preserve order? They certainly do change things, and the changes would typically be viewed by theists as being good, as making things better. Given Van Inwagen's strictures, these activities would need to be rethought. These two worries face the consistent theist who embraces Van Inwagen's Order Defense. They are but two problems associated with an approach that would justify a passive, defeatist, quietist approach to the problems in the world around us. And as this is a high price to pay, it seems to me that the reflective theist needs to think carefully before adopting Van Inwagen's way out.

Religious Alternatives to Standard Theism?[27]

A natural philosophical reaction to the discussion so far from those who take animal suffering to be important might be to suggest modifying the standard religious perspective so that the problem of animal suffering will go away. I would like briefly to consider two significant alternatives to standard theism that do not face the problem of animal suffering haunting the honest rational theist. The two obvious possibilities that suggest themselves are the Limited-God Defense and Reincarnation.[28] The problem of animal suffering is that it is unfair, given God's knowledge and power, for God not to interfere to prevent unnecessary animal suffering. Defenders of the Limited God Defense would suggest that animal suffering is n*ot* unnecessary: since God is limited with respect to power, God cannot prevent more evil, including animal suffering. Defenders of the Reincarnation Strategy would urge that animal suffering is n*ot* unfair, as there is a cycle of birth and re-birth that all living creatures, including all humans, are required to pass through. So, it is not as though human suffering is rewarded with a meaningful afterlife and animal suffering is not. Let us briefly consider each of these in turn.

A prominent defender of the Limited God Defense, Peter Bertocci, rejects the existence, not of God, but of a "God of absolute power." One of Bertocci's reasons for rejecting the traditional conception of God is the existence of "natural evil which produces more harm than good." Among the prominent examples of natural evil, he cites the following:

> Nor does the coupling of omnipotence and love easily satisfy the mind which holds before it the facts of evolution, such as the wiping out of whole species and the mutations making for maladjustment. The great amount of animal pain in the world must be taken into account. [1951: 416]

The obvious advantage for the theist of using the strategy of claiming God's powers are limited for dealing with the problem of animal pain is that it appears to remove God's responsibility for interfering in the world to prevent animal suffering. Defenders of this ingenious strategy have traditionally faced the objections that their view, which denies omnipotence, does not count as a true version of theism and, also, that their view casts doubt on God's ability to perform actions deemed necessary for a meaningful theistic perspective such as performing miracles and securing a just afterlife. It is difficult to fathom why a Limited God would be powerful enough to create the Universe but not powerful enough to prevent the more horrible cases of animal suffering that we discover. One has to wonder whether the Limited God that Bertocci and his followers embrace is only limited with respect to power. Perhaps their deity is also limited with respect to knowledge and/or goodness. Hume puts the criticism sharply:

> It would have been better, were [the Author of nature's] powers extremely limited, to have created fewer animals, and to have endowed these with more faculties for their happiness and preservation. A builder is never esteemed prudent who undertakes a plan beyond what his stock will enable him to finish. [1779: Book XI, 208]

This leads to the third and perhaps most troublesome worry for the theist who is flirting with the Limited God strategy, namely whether a limited, imprudent God, one who permitted massive animal suffering, really would be a being worthy, not merely of respect, but of worship. Other great but limited beings, saints and heroes, clearly merit respect, but not worship. Once God is similarly limited, the problem of justifying the worship-worthiness of God needs to be addressed.

Another strategy for dealing with the problem of animal pain is to urge that perhaps all living creatures do not only have one form of existence which culminates in their death but, rather, that all living creatures experience a cycle of reincarnation, being re-born into a series of different life-forms until they achieve sufficient merit to exit to eternal reward. This strategy avoids the problem of animal pain by maintaining that animal suffering is fair: those animals who suffer merit their misery due to sins they committed in previous lives. While such a view is typically not part of Western theism, it has been an essential ingredient of important non-Western religions. The theist concerned about animal suffering might well be tempted to adopt this scheme to explain animal pain.

The reincarnation proponent faces three groups of concerns. First, there are technical worries such as what the re-incarnation cycle is, how many stages there are, how it starts and ends, which behaviors merit which rebirths, etc. Second, there is a substantive complaint from those who worry about personal identity. If we and other suffering animals are supposed to be incarnations of the same person, then why is it hard to find

any strong memorial linkages from previous stages to our current stage?[29] After all, memory connections are an important ingredient of personal identity. Third, there is a deep moral concern about the basic presupposition of reincarnation that certain life forms are supposed to serve as the moral punishing ground for other life forms. Why should this be? Why shouldn't a particular life form merit its own punishment on its own terms? Those who accept re-incarnation also are forced to accept the idea that some forms really are better, more deserving than others. Many who are concerned about animals will find this claim highly problematic. Why would an all-good deity set up such a pattern of existence? One might be tempted to answer these disturbing challenges by retreating back to one of the previous strategies that we have discussed (for example, the Order Defense or the Limited God approach). So, it looks as though an appeal to reincarnation will not offer any additional help towards solving the problem of animal pain.

Conclusion

It is now time for summing up. The first goal of the paper was to show how Darwin's consideration of nonhuman suffering led him to embrace an evidential form of the problem of evil. I think that Darwin was considerably ahead of his time on this matter. The second goal of the paper was to evaluate recent criticisms of the animal pain version of the evidential problem of evil. My judgment is that these criticisms either miss the mark or entail burdens no reasonable theist would wish to bear. Some alternatives to standard theism have been considered and rejected. My tentative conclusion is that, in the absence of further argumentation, Darwin's agnosticism is more reasonable than standard theism.

Whether agnosticism is more reasonable than current versions of naturalism is another matter. As we have seen, Darwin is officially on record as claiming that evolution should not be trusted to produce accurate judgments as to the origin of the universe. Is he right? On the one hand, we must grant that evolution produces creatures adapted for survival. We know, given current existing religious disagreements, that human survival without religious truth must be possible for the majority of humankind. We have no guarantee human evolution will produce cognitive capacities that will yield reliable religious belief. On the other hand, as Darwin admitted, often a capacity which evolves for one purpose turns out to be able to perform other functions quite well. The same may be true of the cognitive capacities humans have evolved so far. Perhaps our powers of evidence gathering, reflection and argument will enable us to solve the problem of our origins. We should take comfort from parallel efforts, such as de Waal's, which help provide an evolutionary naturalistic grounding for morality. If we can trust our morality, this should give us some reason to have confidence in the power of evolution to produce meaningful insights about our origins.[30]

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Notes

[1] At this writing the most significant recent convert to evolution is Pope John Paul II's 24 October 1996 endorsement of evolution as more than merely a theory.

[2] For a critique of Darwin's defense of vivisection in medical research see Rachels' discussion [1990:212-221]

[3] This discussion is important not only for my purposes but also for those who see de Waal's work on the evolution of morality as following in the Darwinian tradition.

[4] See, for example, Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., 1996, and Peter Vardy, 1997.

[5] See Plantinga [1991] and [1993].

[6] It would, of course, cast extreme doubt on the value of de Waal's project.

[7] I am very grateful to Evan Fales for making me aware of Plantinga's misinterpretation. For an insightful review of Plantinga, see his [1994].

[8] The important exception to this rule is David Hume's discussion of animal pain in Book IX of his classic, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.*

[9] See Darwin [1958: 90]

[10] Hume [1779], Books VII and VIII.

[11] See Rachels' fine summary discussion, [1990: 105-6].

[12] For a careful analysis of the problem of evil and classic presentation of the Free Will Defense, see Plantinga [1977], Part I.

[13] For a critique of probably the most popular theistic strategy to explain evil, the Free-Will Defense, see Kraemer and Jones [1985].

[14] In retrospect one sees why William Rowe's attacks on theistic defenses against evil were so powerful, as Rowe often took examples of animal suffering that did not involve any human action. See Rowe's papers in Howard-Snyder, ed. [1996]

[15] See Howard-Snyder's introduction in Howard-Snyder, ed. [1996].

[16] See Howard-Snyder, ed. [1996]for two of Draper's papers plus extensive critical discussion of them.

[17] I have simplified my presentation of Howard-Snyder's quote to avoid complexity that does not affect the points I wish to make.

[18] The role of knowledge in the Garden of Eden story raises worries for the traditional Western theist: if knowledge is valuable, then why didn't God create Adam and Eve with more of it?

[19] Some would say that it involves an "Appeal to Human Ignorance." See Kraemer and Jones [1985].

[20] As, for instance, we are able to comprehend our limitations vis-à-vis other animals when it comes to observing other aspects of reality.

[21] See Hume [1779], Book XI.

[22] There are many other objections that come to mind. Here are two: this approach treats animals merely as means, and it makes humans out to be much more stupid than they are.

[23] For an insightful discussion of counterbalancing vs. defeating good and evil, see Chisholm [1968].

[24] For a classic statement of this problem, see Mackie [1955].

[25] This indicates an important disanalogy between Van Inwagen's order-defense against evil and the scientific defenses he considers concerning the problems of air and silence.

[26] For an extensive discussion, see Sapontzis [1987], Ch. 13.

[27] I am indebted to panel members from the SSEA session as well as spirited discussants from the audience for raising the alternatives discussed in this section.

[28] Rachels discusses and convincingly criticizes a third option, that of embracing Deism in his [1990: Ch. 3].

[29] While it is a curiosity that some people will claim having existed previously as other human beings, it is rare to find claims as to which suffering animal/s one previously was. If reincarnation were, indeed, the rule rather than the exception, as the reincarnation strategy requires, then one would expect reflective human beings to remember events from their own, past nonhuman lives, events which included significant suffering. One would also count on these recollections to trigger a more caring general outlook towards the treatment of nonhuman animals.

[30] I am indebted to comments from Evan Fales, Ronald Glass, Harlan Miller, Alvin Plantinga, Louis Pojman, S.F. Sapontzis, my excellent fellow SSEA symposiasts and the lively audience discussants at the Central Division SSEA Meetings in Pittsburgh, April 1997. I am also grateful for Joe LaPorte's comments on an earlier version.