

Creation and Theodicy: Protological Presuppositions in Evolutionary Theodicy

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There are different positions regarding the understanding of the doctrine of creation in the face of the challenge of the evolutionary concept of origins. In broad terms, while some deny the theory of evolution¹ in favor of a literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation, many scholars attempt to comprehend this doctrine in certain consonance with that theory.²

¹ The present study acknowledges the distinction between macroevolution and microevolution. The references to evolution in this text imply the concept of macroevolution. While microevolution refers to small changes within one species, macroevolution describes “the evolution of major new characteristics that make organisms recognizable as a new species, genus, family, or higher taxon.” Stanley A. Rice, *Encyclopedia of Evolution* (New York: Infobase, 2009), 253. This distinction between microevolution and macroevolution is used, for example, by Stephen Jay Gould. See S. J. Gould, *The Panda’s Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History*, reissued ed. (New York: Norton, 1992), 187-192.

² Edward B. Davis indicates “four main patterns” that “govern most religious responses to evolution today: *complementary*” (“theological truths exist in a higher realm apart from scientific truths”), *conflict* against evolution (“rejection of evolution”), *conflict* against Christianity (“rejection of Christianity”), and “*doctrinal reformulation*” (“rejection of divine transcendence and the wholesale reformulation of traditional Christian doctrine”). Edward B. Davis, “The Word and the Works: Concordism and American Evangelicals,” in *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation*, ed. Keith B. Miller (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 56. Three of the four patterns mentioned by Davis accept the theory of evolution. Likewise, among the four models of relationship between theology and science (conflict, independence, dialogue and integration) proposed by Ian Barbour, the majority of them (independence, dialogue and integration) accepts evolution as a valid understanding of origins. See Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2000). Clark Pinnock indicates three different evangelical interpretations of the Genesis creation account, two of them (broad concordism and nonconcordism) attempt to harmonize exegesis and the evolutionary concept of origins: (1) narrow concordism, (2) broad concordism, and (3) nonconcordism. The first group “takes

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Nevertheless, considering that the understanding of creation affects the comprehension of other doctrines,³ the conception of God's character and His purposes seems to be significantly impacted by the notion of evolutionary creation.⁴ In fact, it appears that the most perplexing task for

the days of Genesis 1 to be literal twenty-four hour days and appeals to the tradition of flood geology to explain the difficulties this creates." In their turn, broad concordists are described as "more liberal in exegesis and more comfortable with the present scientific consensus, they construe the days of Genesis 1 as long periods of time as intermittent days of creation amidst the lengthy process of billions of years. In this way they are able to accept much of the evolutionary picture." On the other hand, nonconcordists "do not read early Genesis to gain scientific information or to discover history as it really was. They read it more as a theological text, best understood in its own context, and therefore do not come into such severe conflict with modern knowledge." Clark H. Pinnock, "Climbing out of a Swamp: The Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts," *Interpretation* 43, no. 2 (1989): 144-145.

³ See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 366-367. John Webster clearly connects the doctrine of creation with the doctrine of God by saying that "what Christian theology says about creation is a function of what it says about God." John B. Webster, "Trinity and Creation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 1 (2010): 6.

⁴ According to Denis Lamoureux, "there is difficulty with the term 'theistic evolution.' It has become a catch-all category that is applied loosely today." He adds, "It is for this reason that the categories 'evolutionary creation,' 'evolutionary creationism,' and 'evolving creation' are beginning to appear in some evangelical circles." Denis O. Lamoureux, "Gaps, Design, and 'Theistic' Evolution: A Counter Reply to Robert A. Larmer," *Christian Scholar's Review* 37, no. 1 (2007): 101. For further instances of the use of these categories, see Dorothy F. Chappell and E. David Cook, *Not Just Science: Questions Where Christian Faith and Natural Science Intersect* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2005), 220-221; Keith Miller, ed. *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), xi-xii. Lamoureux provides the following summary of evolutionary creation: "(1) The creation is radically distinct and different from the Creator (Gen 1:1, John 1:1-3, Heb 1:10-12). God transcends the creation, yet He is immanent also to His works (omnipresent) and knows their every detail (omniscient). Also, the Lord enters the world to interact with His creatures at any time and in any way He so chooses (omnipotent). (2) The creation is utterly dependent on the Creator (Acts 17:24-28, Col 1:15-17, Heb 1:2-3). God ordained the universe and life into being and He continues to sustain their existence during every single instant. (3) The creation was created *ex nihilo* (Rom 4:17, 1 Cor 8:6, Heb 11:3). Absolutely nothing existed before God made the world. (4) The creation is temporal (Gen 1:1, John 1:1-3, Matt 24:35). It has a beginning and an end. (5) The creation declares God's glory (Ps 19:1-4, Rom 1:19-20). Through beauty, complexity and functionality, the Creator has inscribed a non-verbal revelation into the physical world, disclosing some of His attributes such as His divine nature and eternal power. (6) The creation is very good (Gen 1:31, 1 Tim 4:4, Rom 8:28). The cosmos offers the perfect stage for experiencing love and developing relationships with each other and between ourselves and the Creator. The doctrine of creation asserts that God created the world, not *how* He created it. His creative method, ultimately, is incidental to Christian faith." Lamoureux: 102.

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those who adopt this concept of creation is to construct an evolutionary theodicy.⁵

As Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson emphasize, although the best theodicean arguments are usually based on eschatology,⁶ “any theodicy that rests purely on the promise of some future compensation would be, in effect, to separate the God of creation from the God of redemption.”⁷ To put it differently, a legitimate theodicy must draw connections “between God’s purposes as creator and God’s purposes as redeemer.”⁸ Based on the assumption that the consistency of evolutionary theodicy relies on this compatibility between God as creator and God as redeemer, the present paper aims to analyze the main protological presuppositions⁹ which underlie evolutionary theodicy, in order to observe how they depict the divine purpose in creation. This task will be undertaken in the following steps: (1) a discussion of theodicy in the context of evolutionary creation; (2) a presentation of protological presuppositions in evolutionary theodicy; (3) a brief description of their theological implications.

⁵ See J. C. Polkinghorne, *Theology in the Context of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 111; Robert J. Russell, “Eschatology and Scientific Cosmology: From Conflict to Interaction,” *CTI Reflections* 8 (2004): 5; Christopher Southgate, “God and Evolutionary Evil: Theodicy in the Light of Darwinism,” *Zygon* 37, no. 4 (2002): 804. Theodicy may be defined as “the task of affirming the righteousness of God in the face of the existence of evil.” Christopher Southgate and Andrew Robinson, “Varieties of Theodicy: An Exploration of Responses to the Problem of Evil Based on a Typology of Good-Harm Analysis,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancy C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 67.

⁶ That is particularly true for evolutionary theodicy. See Russell, “Eschatology and Scientific Cosmology,” 5.

⁷ Southgate and Robinson, 83.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ In this study, protological presuppositions refer to key concepts of reality that influence the understanding of the origin of life on Earth. These concepts will be specified below.

Theodicy in the Context of Evolutionary Creation

In spite of the fact that the term theodicy was used for the first time in 1710, by Gottfried W. Leibniz,¹⁰ the necessity of defending God's goodness and power in the face of the existence of evil did not begin in the modern period.¹¹ In fact, several centuries before Leibniz, Lactantius indicated that the Greek philosopher Epicurus (342-270 BC) questioned these divine attributes because of the existence of evil:

God . . . either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both

¹⁰ See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy* (Teddington, England: Echo Library, 2008). The concept that God created the best of all possible worlds, which is mainly characterized by human free will, is central to Leibniz's theodicy. For a helpful summary of this theodicy, see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 154-166; Niels Christian Hvidt, "The Historical Development of the Problem of Evil," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 23-29.

¹¹ Some scholars argue that theodicy is primarily a product of the modern times, because only in the Enlightenment God is "the one in the court of justice accused by the problem of evil with the possible outcome that people can reject belief in God if the theodicy project does not yield enough evidence in favor of God's innocence." Hvidt, 2. See Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1986), 13; Terrence W. Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 41-42. However, in a sense, theodician questions appear in pre-modern writings, especially the Bible. As Marcel Sarot highlights, "the typically modern form of theodicy as a whole is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Nevertheless, the divide between the Bible and Enlightenment theodicy is much less sharp than is sometimes suggested." Marcel Sarot, "Theodicy and Modernity: An Inquiry Into the Historicity of Theodicy," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 22. For a helpful historical overview of theodicy in pre-modern and modern times, see Gary A. Stilwell, *Where Was God: Evil, Theodicy, and Modern Science* (Denver, CO: Outskirts, 2009), 40-251.

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willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?¹²

These questions seem to indicate the basic premises implied by the logical problem of theodicy: (1) God is omnipotent; (2) God is perfectly good; (3) Evil exists.¹³ This problem assumes that “a good being will always eliminate evil as far as it is able.”¹⁴

Hence, the understanding of God is fundamental to theodicy. For instance, in Reformed theology God’s sovereignty is beyond questioning. It means that the acceptance of the second premise (the perfect goodness of God) does not necessarily demand human comprehension.¹⁵ On the other hand, “some versions of process theology modify” the first premise (the omnipotence of God) “by suggesting that, by virtue of the divine nature rather than by voluntary self-limitation, God’s power over nature is limited.”¹⁶ In both cases the problem of theodicy seems to be avoided, whether because God’s goodness does not need to be understood or whether because God is not omnipotent. However, that avoidance is incompatible with several instances of theodicean questions found in the Bible, which assume and claim God’s power and goodness.¹⁷

¹² Lactantius *A Treatise on the Anger of God* 13. Translation taken from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, American Reprint of the Edinburgh ed., 10 vols., The Master Christian Library ver. 5.0 [CD ROM] (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997), 7:564-565. In the eighteenth century David Hume argued that those “Epicurus’s old questions are yet unanswered.” David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London: n.p., 1779), 186.

¹³ See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 3-5; Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 7-11.

¹⁴ Southgate and Robinson, 68.

¹⁵ See Eric Carlton, *Dancing in the Dark: Reflections on the Problem of Theodicy* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 129.

¹⁶ Southgate and Robinson, 68. See, for instance, David Ray Griffin, “Creation out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil,” in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis and John B. Cobb (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 101-119; David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991); David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 251-310.

¹⁷ For example, biblical authors and characters frequently attempt to understand and ask for God’s justice. As Marcel Sarot points out, “in the so-called ‘innocence psalms,’ . . . the psalmist underlines his own innocence and integrity as an argument to convince God to deliver him from his enemies [see Pss 17, 26, 59]. It can also be clearly seen from the book of Job, which is about the question of why a just man must suffer. An example of the way in which God’s providence could be doubted is that of Gideon, who, when the angel

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Another essential notion for theodicy is the concept of evil. Traditionally, theodicians maintain a distinction between moral (sin) and natural evil (suffering).¹⁸ The former refers to human actions, such as “cruel, unjust, vicious, and perverse thoughts and deeds,” whereas the latter defines the evil that seems to originate “independently of human actions: in disease bacilli, earthquakes, storms, droughts, tornadoes, etc.”¹⁹

Obviously, natural evils appear to be the most problematic category in the context of theodicy, which may be exemplified by the following question: why does not God eliminate the suffering of innocent victims of diseases, natural disasters, and so forth?²⁰ Nevertheless, the task of evolutionary theodicy appears to be even more formidable, because it does

greeted him with the words ‘The Lord is with you,’ replied, ‘But sir, if the Lord is with us why then has all this happened to us? And where are his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us[?] . . . (Judg. 6:13).’ Additionally, “we find numerous examples in the Psalms, for instance when the author of Psalm 10 complains that the wicked who renounce the Lord and believe that there is no God, prosper (3-5), whereas the believer finds himself in trouble (1).” Sarot, 23-24. For further information about the concept of theodicy in the Bible, see Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor, eds., *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 151-469, 605-684; Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Suffering and the Goodness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 47-140.

¹⁸ See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 12-13; Leibniz, 71, 99, 121; Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 30. Leibniz also mentions the metaphysical evil which is understood in terms of intrinsic limitation, finitude, and therefore imperfection. Since only God is not characterized by limitation and finitude, “anything other than God must therefore be imperfect to some extent.” Pauline Phemister, *Leibniz and the Natural World: Activity, Passivity, and Corporeal Substances in Leibniz’s Philosophy* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 244. It means that moral and natural evils derive from the inherent nature and structure of creation, that is, from the metaphysical evil. Actually, this is a problematic part of Leibniz’s theodicy. As Pannenberg points out, “the limit of finitude is not yet itself evil . . . we are to seek the root of evil, rather, in revolt against the limit of finitude, in the refusal to accept one’s own finitude, and in the related illusion of being like God (Gen. 3:5). We thus need to reconstruct the thought that would see the possibility of evil in the very nature of creaturehood. Not limitation but the independence for which creature were made forms the basis of the possibility of evil.” Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 2:171.

¹⁹ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 12.

²⁰ Nancey Murphy, introduction to *Physics and Cosmology*, xiii.

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not only need to explain why God does not eliminate natural evil, but also why God uses natural evil in his method of evolutionary creation.²¹

Models of Theodicy

Considering the fundamental importance of the relation between God's goodness and natural evil for the theodicean task, three broad models of theodicy may be drawn from three different conceptions of good-harm analysis: (1) Property-Consequence, (2) Developmental, and (3) Constitutive models.²²

According to the first conception, "a property of a particular being or system, is the possibility that possession of this good leads to it *causing* harms." Following this perspective, traditional theodicies based on free will defense²³ assume that "the existence of the property of free will in humans (a good) gives rise to the possibility of its deliberate or accidental use in such ways as may cause harm."²⁴ In this way, moral evil is the fundamental cause of natural evil. The names of Augustine²⁵ and most recently Alvin Plantinga have been associated with that position.

On the other hand, the Developmental approach conceives that "the good is a *goal* which can only be produced by a process that may or must give rise to harms."²⁶ Whereas in the Property-consequence view the good is a property that already exists, in the Developmental understanding the

²¹ Certainly, theodicy is a great challenge to Christian theology as a whole, but "the difficult task of the theodicy becomes even more formidable when the biological world is viewed from a Darwinian perspective according to which, both across all currently living species and far into the evolutionary past of the Earth, it is seen that the very process that has given rise to such diversity of ways of being alive is accompanied by pain, suffering, and extinction." Southgate and Robinson, 67.

²² Ibid., 70.

²³ For a helpful distinction between theodicy and defense, see Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 27-29; Tilley, "The problems of Theodicy: a background essay," 35-37. Concisely, a theodicy "attempts to tell us why God permits evil," while in the defense "the aim is not to say what God's reason *is*, but at most what God's reason *might possibly be*." Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 28. In this sense, "a defense is not used to show that" beliefs about God and evil are "true, but to defend them from an attack of incompatibility." Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: a Background Essay," 36.

²⁴ Southgate and Robinson, 70-71.

²⁵ For further information about Augustine's theodicean ideas and his conception of evil, see Anne-Marie Bowery, "Plotinus, the Enneads," *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 654-657; Gillian Rosemary Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 38-89.

²⁶ Southgate and Robinson, 70.

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good is being produced via a process. In this context, suffering plays an educative role, since it “is necessary to our individual moral or spiritual development.”²⁷ As Niels Hvidt highlights, “in developmental theodicies, God allows destruction and suffering as means towards the refinement of both biotic and non-biotic nature, and especially human character, both individual and collective.” Hence, “destruction and suffering [are understood] as fruitful catalysts in the development towards greater goods.”²⁸

In its turn, the Constitutive position presumes that “the existence of a good is inherently, constitutively, inseparable from the existence of harm or suffering.”²⁹ It means that, in opposition to the Developmental understanding, “the good does not derive from a process leading to a goal, with the suffering as instrumental to the process: the good finds its meaning only in relation to the harm.”³⁰ In other words, suffering is intrinsic to life, rather than an instrument to the good. Furthermore, according to that notion, God is not normally regarded as a loving personal agent, but is conceived as the “ground of being,” that is, “the ground of both creation and destruction.”³¹

Generally speaking, proposals of evolutionary theodicy adopt the Developmental and/or the Constitutive model, but tend to reject the Property-Consequence conception and the Free Will Defense. Robert Russell points out that “traditional Augustinian theodicy” is not

²⁷ Ibid., 75. Hick argues that Irenaeus and Schleiermacher held this position. See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 211-235.

²⁸ Hvidt, 30. From a philosophical perspective, the modern ideas of development and process were strongly influenced by Hegel. In fact, he believes that his entire philosophical account of the history of the world “is the true *Theodicea*, the justification of God in History.” George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (New York, NY: American Home Library, 1902), 569. See also Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 383.

²⁹ Southgate and Robinson, 70.

³⁰ Ibid., 76.

³¹ Ibid., 77. Wildman labels Paul Tillich as “one of the best-known ground-of-being theists,” and affirms that Tillich “uses many pages in the third volume of this *Systematic Theology* to say that there is no overall direction of progress in the universe as a whole even though there is abundant meaning.” Wesley J. Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancy C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 290. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 300-426.

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“intelligible to contemporary theology as it wrestles with biological evolution,” due to the fact that “it seems too closely tied to the now abandoned Biblical depiction of the Fall as an actual event in the past.”³² Similarly, although acknowledging that the Free Will Defense is logically undefeated, Terrence Tylley criticizes Plantinga’s explanation of natural evil because it implies the action of fallen angels.³³ For evolutionary theodicy, the idea of Fall is part of a pre-scientific worldview. According to John Hick, this idea “is radically implausible,” since

for most educated inhabitants of the modern world regard the biblical story of Adam and Eve, and their temptation by the devil, as myth rather than as history; and they believe that so far from having been created finitely perfect and then falling, humanity evolved out of lower forms of life, emerging in a morally, spiritually, and culturally primitive state. Further, they reject as incredible the idea that earthquake and flood, disease, decay, and death are consequences either of a human fall, or of a prior fall of angelic beings who are now exerting an evil influence upon the earth. They see all this as part of a pre-scientific world view, along with the stories of the world having been created in six days³⁴

³² Russell, “Eschatology and Scientific Cosmology,” 15.

³³ Tylley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God,” 199, 207. In fact, Plantinga maintains that this Augustinian explanation of natural evil is logically consistent. In other words, it is possible but not necessarily true. See Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 150; Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 57-59; Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 191-193. The ambiguity of Plantinga’s position is also evidenced by these two statements: (1) “consider that list of apparent teachings of Genesis: that God has created the world, that the earth is young, that human beings and many different kinds of plants and animals were separately created, and that there was an original human pair whose sin has afflicted both human nature and some of the rest of the world.” Alvin Plantinga, “When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible,” in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Robert T. Pennock (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), 121. (2) “God certainly could have used Darwinian processes to create the living world and direct it as he wanted to go . . . I am not hostile to evolution as such, but to unguided evolution.” Alvin Plantinga, “Evolution, Shibboleths, and Philosophers,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 11, 2010, Letters to the Editor. <http://chronicle.com/article/Evolution-Shibboleths-and/64990> [accessed April 3, 2011].

³⁴ John Hick, “An Irenaean Theodicy,” in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis and John B. Cobb (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 40-41. See also Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 28-29.

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In contrast, the Developmental and the Constitutive models are considered coherent with biological evolution. To Hvidt, scientific theories portray “destruction and subsequent suffering as part of” the “inherent fabric” of the natural world.³⁵ This concept is associated with the Constitutive model. Moreover, he points out that in agreement with evolutionary biology, “destruction is a necessary requirement for the refinement of races and species.”³⁶ This notion is more related to the Developmental model.

Proposals of Evolutionary Theodicy

Many scholars deal with evolutionary theodicy.³⁷ However, not all of them work on the protological issues as a fundamental part of that theodicy. In this section, I will shortly describe some relevant proposals of evolutionary theodicy, as far as they discuss or imply how protology fits in their proposal. Firstly, I will show how the Developmental model may be observed in John Hick’s theodicy. Secondly, I will depict how Robert Russell and Nancey Murphy deal with the Developmental and the Constitutive models. Finally, I will explain how Wesley Wildman understands protology and theodicy from a Constitutive framework.

John Hick

John Hick is one of the most important theistic evolutionists to articulate theodicy and protology. His theodicy is presented prominently in the book *Evil and the God of Love* (1966). Before a description of the theodicy advanced in this book, a methodological note must be introduced here. After *Evil and the God of Love*, Hick had a shift in his methodological approach, particularly in publications from 1981 onwards, that was characterized by the influence of Kantian philosophy. Even though a reflection about this shift may indicate some implications for his theodicy developed in *Evil and the God of Love*, this methodological turn does not seem to have affected his earlier basic theodicean arguments. Rather, he essentially sought a more nuanced terminology for God, namely “the Real,”

³⁵ Hvidt, 30.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For a helpful taxonomy of evolutionary theodicies, see Ted Peters and Martinez J. Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 115-157; Southgate, “God and Evolutionary Evil.”

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and proposed that “the ‘Real is equally authentically thought and experienced as personal and non-personal.”³⁸

Hick’s approach is normally known as the *soul-making* theodicy.³⁹ In fact, he claims to follow an Irenaean theodicy. According to his perspective, Irenaeus built “a framework of thought within which a theodicy became possible which does not depend upon the idea of the fall, and which is consonant with modern knowledge concerning the origins of the human race.”⁴⁰ Basically, there are two protological ideas in Irenaeus’ theology that are particularly important for Hick: (1) the purpose of Creation and (2) the method of Creation. First, the fundamental purpose of God’s Creation is the development of creatures. For Irenaeus, he points out, “man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker.”⁴¹ Consequently, the fall of Adam is not “an utterly malignant and catastrophic event, completely disrupting God’s plan.” Rather, “Irenaeus pictures it as something that occurred in the childhood of the race, an understandable lapse due to weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt.”⁴²

Second, Hick emphasizes the Irenaean two-stage method of human creation, which is based on the distinction between the image and the likeness of God. In his modern interpretation of this method, the author thinks that “the first stage was the gradual production of *homo sapiens*, through the long evolutionary process.” Therefore, “existence ‘in the image of God’ was a potentiality for knowledge of and relationship with one’s Maker rather than such knowledge and relationship as a fully realized state. In other words, people were created as spiritually and morally immature

³⁸ John Hick, “Straightening the Record: Some Response to Critics,” *Modern Theology* 6, no. 2 (1990): 1991. For further information about Hick’s Kantian shift, see Paul R. Eddy, “Religious Pluralism and the Divine: Another Look at John Hick’s Neo-Kantian Proposal,” *Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 (1994): 467-478; Hick, “Straightening the Record: Some Response to Critics,” 187-195; Haejong Je, “A Critical Evaluation of John Hick’s Religious Pluralism in Light of His Eschatological Model” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2009), 72-100.

³⁹ For helpful interpretations of Hick’s theodicy, see David Cheetham, *John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 40-66; R. Douglas Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick’s Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski and Timothy Miller, *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: Ancient to Contemporary* (Chichester, England; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 369-379.

⁴⁰ Hick, “An Irenaean Theodicy,” 41.

⁴¹ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 214.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 214-215.

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creatures.” Afterwards, in the second stage, “of which we are a part, the intelligent, ethical, and religious animal is being brought through one’s own free responses into what Irenaeus called the divine ‘likeness.’ The human animal is being created into a child of God.”⁴³

In the context of the development of this second stage of human creation, natural evil is necessary because “with no interaction with a challenging environment there was no development in its behavioral patterns.”⁴⁴ To put it in another way, “the development of human personality—moral, spiritual, and intellectual—is a product of challenge and response.”⁴⁵ Hence, sin and suffering are instruments by which God is gradually creating children for himself out of human animals.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Hick thinks that God creates on the basis of “epistemic distance.” It means that the world “functions as an autonomous system and from within which God is not overwhelmingly evident.” Actually, he argues that only in that situation “there is the possibility of the human being coming freely to know and love one’s Maker.”⁴⁷ Indeed, this idea assumes that freedom and development demand distance.

In short, Hick adopts the Developmental model for his theodicy. Suffering exists because it is an essential instrument used by God in His creation. Thus, natural evil precedes moral evil, since natural evil constitutes the environment in which human development takes place. And that development is characterized by the practice of moral evil.

Robert Russell and Nancey Murphy

Roughly speaking, Robert Russell and Nancey Murphy attempt to provide scientific arguments for evolutionary theodicy. It seems that, in comparison with Russell and Murphy, Hick’s ideas are essentially based only on philosophical and theological assumptions. However, in spite of differences between them, they agree with Hick in some important points.

Robert Russell

To Russell, the most relevant aspect of Hick’s theodicy is the idea of epistemic distance. He argues that this concept is not only necessary for “faith and moral freedom,” as Hick maintains, “but also for scientific

⁴³ Hick, “An Irenaean Theodicy,” 41-42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 46. Hick believes that “in the context of this struggle to survive and flourish, that they can develop the higher values of mutual love and care, of self-sacrifice for others, and of commitment to a common good.” *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

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research.” Since science is based on methodological naturalism, “a scientific explanation of the processes of nature should rely on natural causes alone without the introduction of divine causation.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Russell prefers to refer to it in terms of “non-interventionist divine action,” which means that “God acts not by suspending or breaking into the processes of nature but by acting in, with and through them.”⁴⁹

On the other hand, he disagrees with the instrumental understanding of natural evil. In his perspective, the gravest challenge to Hick’s “‘moral growth’ theodicy . . . is both excessive suffering in the world *and* the attempt to justify it by a ‘means-end’ argument.”⁵⁰ According to Russell, God did not choose natural evil as a means for the development of His creation, rather “natural evils are an unintended consequence of God’s choice to create life through natural means.”⁵¹ In other words, “God had no choice but to permit *biological* natural evil because God’s intention is to create life.”⁵²

The fundamental presupposition that underlies this argument is the idea that the present biological conditions, which are characterized by natural evil, represent the only possibility for life in this world. In a sense, Russell’s conception of suffering assumes the Constitutive model of theodicy, since suffering is intrinsic to life.

Nancey Murphy

Whereas John Hick explains natural evil essentially in terms of moral growth, and Russell attempts to understand suffering on the basis of

⁴⁸ Robert J. Russell, *Cosmology: From Alpha to Omega, the Creative Mutual Interaction of Theology and Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 262.

⁴⁹ Russell, “Eschatology and Scientific Cosmology,” 12. Russell explains that “there are at least four ways to render non-interventionist divine action in light of science. Top-down (or whole part) causality involving God’s relation to the mind/brain problem and God’s relation to the universe-as-a-whole (cf., Arthur Peacocke); lateral amplification, involving God’s action in relation to chaotic processes in the macroscopic world (cf., John Polkinghorne); bottom-up causality involving God’s action in relation to quantum processes in the microscopic world (cf. Nancey Murphy, George Ellis, Tom Tracy); a process philosophy-based discussion of divine action at every level in nature (cf. Ian Barbour).” Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁵¹ Robert J. Russell, “Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenge to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 109.

⁵² Ibid., 110.

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scientific arguments, Nancey Murphy seems to employ both approaches. She agrees with Russell's conclusion that a moral conception of suffering is insufficient for theodicy. In opposition to Hick's suggestion that God permits suffering "in order to create a morally challenging environment for human development[,] . . . the disorders of nature seem to go far beyond what is needed for human learning." In addition, natural evil "cannot be justified as leading to moral development for themselves or for the human race," because "the disorder and waste in natural processes long preceded human existence."⁵³

Hence, in consonance with Russell, Murphy argues that "suffering is seen not so much as a means to good for humans but as an unwanted but unavoidable by-product of conditions in the natural world that have to obtain in order that there be intelligent life at all."⁵⁴ Thus, she assumes that "any rich and complex world will be one in which there will be waste, damage, destruction."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Murphy also agrees with Hick that this condition is necessary for a loving response to God.

In this sense, she indicates the choices of God as creator in terms of non-interventionist action,⁵⁶ with its necessary results and implications: (1) Fine-tuned world: necessary for the existence of life, but requires the presence of the second law of thermodynamics; (2) Complex life: necessary for the existence of free will, but demands the reality of pain. Overall, these choices are necessary for a free response to God, nonetheless the "unwanted but necessary by-products of those choices" are the existence of moral evil (sin), of metaphysical evil (limitation), and of natural evil (suffering).⁵⁷

Therefore, it appears that Murphy combines the Developmental and the Constitutive models of theodicy, by saying that suffering is inherent to complex life (a constitutive idea), and that this heavy cost for the existence of complex life is, in a sense, an instrument to achieve a goal: "the free and

⁵³ Nancey C. Murphy and George Francis Rayner Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 245.

⁵⁴ Nancey C. Murphy, "Science and the Problem of Evil: Suffering as a by-Product of a Finely Tuned Cosmos," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵⁶ For further information about Murphy's conception of non-interventionist divine action, see Nancey C. Murphy, "Divine Action in the Natural Order: Buridan's Ass and Shrodinger's Cat," in *Philosophy, Science and Divine Action*, ed. F. LeRon Shults, Nancey C. Murphy, and Robert J. Russell (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 263-304.

⁵⁷ Murphy, "Science and the Problem of Evil," 137.

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intelligent cooperation of the creature in divine activity”⁵⁸ (a developmental idea).

Wesley Wildman

Even though Russell and Murphy conceive suffering from a Constitutive perspective, they seem to describe God as a moral and personal entity who makes choices. For them, God made the good decision to create life, and that choice implied the existence of natural evil. In opposition to that notion, Wesley Wildman defends that God must be understood as the “ground of being,”⁵⁹ which implies the “rejection of a personal center of divine consciousness and activity,” and consequently the “refusal to align God with a particular moral path.”⁶⁰ This comprehension allows “both suffering and blessing to flow from the divine nature itself.”⁶¹

As a result, Wildman adopts a radical view of the Constitutive model of theodicy. According to his idea of creation, suffering “is part of the wellspring of divine creativity in nature.” In contrast to Russell and Murphy, “suffering in nature is neither evil nor a by-product of the good.”⁶²

Taking into account the assumptions that God is the ground of being and that suffering is “fundamental to the whole of reality,”⁶³ Wildman does not need to defend the goodness of God. Rather, his purpose is to suggest that people must accept “the world as it is.”⁶⁴ Perhaps, Wildman’s proposal could not even be considered a theodicy, since the character of God is not

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁹ This concept may be found passim in his works. See Wesley J. Wildman, *Fidelity with Plausibility: Modest Christologies in the Twentieth Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998); Wesley J. Wildman, *Religious and Spiritual Experiences: A Spiritually Evocative Naturalist Interpretation* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Wesley J. Wildman, *Religious Philosophy as Multidisciplinary Comparative Inquiry: Envisioning a Future for the Philosophy of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010); Wesley J. Wildman, *Science and Religious Anthropology: A Spiritually Evocative Naturalist Interpretation of Human Life* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009). He acknowledges that that notion is “close to some forms of religious naturalism, to some forms of apophatic mysticism, to some forms of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, to some forms of Chinese philosophy, and to some forms of atheism.” Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty,” 280.

⁶⁰ Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty,” 279, 282.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 294. For further information about Wildman’s distinction between evil and suffering, see Wildman, “The Use and Meaning of the Word ‘Suffering’ in Relation to Nature,” 53-66.

⁶³ Wildman, “Incongruous Goodness, Perilous Beauty,” 285.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

at stake. Even though his ideas do not represent the traditional understanding of evolutionary theodicy,⁶⁵ they will be helpful in the analysis of the use of the Constitutive model in evolutionary theodicy, especially in the context of its theological implications.

Protological Presuppositions of Evolutionary Theodicy

On the basis of the discussion above, the main protological presuppositions underlying evolutionary theodicy may be divided in three parts: (1) the concept of evil; (2) the understanding of the world; (3) the notion of divine activity.

The Concept of Evil

The concept of evil comprises many specific assumptions. First, evolutionary theodicy essentially denies the existence of malevolent spiritual entities, namely, Satan and the fallen angels.⁶⁶ As a result, natural evil seems to be caused by God's activity in His creation, which means that evil is part of divine creation. In this context, there are four possibilities for the meaning of natural evil: (1) an instrument for human development (Hick); (2) a by-product of God's creation (Russell); (3) a by-product of God's creation and, in a sense, an instrument for human development (Murphy); (4) or fundamental to the whole of reality (Wildman). The first option seems to imply that God intended natural evil in order to achieve His moral goals for His creation. In contrast, the other options appear to suggest that natural evil is physically necessary for creation, but not intended by God.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Southgate highlights that "the good-harm analyses most commonly found in evolutionary theodicies are developmental." Furthermore, he argues that the solution for theodicy proposed by Wildman, in terms of ground of being theism, does not agree with the God of the Bible, which portrays God as "knowable—insofar as God can ever be knowable—in Jesus . . . That includes the conviction that the God who raised Jesus from the dead—and so made the ultimate personal statement of the vindication of self-sacrificial love—is both the origin of all things and the universe's ultimate hope." Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 22, 42.

⁶⁶ Terrence Tilley points out that "pre-Enlightenment thought . . . presumes the possibility of preternatural 'spiritual' entities whose choices before or beyond the creation of the world have determined that the natural world must be afflicted with evil, effectively making them agents in the world." Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God," 207. In his turn, Hick thinks that the existence of the devil is "a mythological idea." Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 369.

⁶⁷ The second and the third options assume that God intended to create the world. In the fourth option, God is not an entity that makes choices but is the ground of being.

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In the first case, Hick's developmental approach needs to show how God's moral goals for humanity justify the presence of natural evil in His creation. Three main arguments may be drawn against this kind of justification: (1) if natural evil existed before the creation of humans, there is no developmental purpose for this evil; (2) the amount of suffering in the world goes beyond what is needed for human learning; (3) the lack of evidence for a progressive spiritual and moral development in the world.⁶⁸ With regard to the first argument, following an evolutionary perspective, David Griffin argues that

Hick provides no reason why God should have wasted over four billion years setting the stage for the only thing thought to be intrinsically valuable, the moral and spiritual development of human beings. And the high probability that hundreds of millions of years of that preparation involved unnecessary and unuseful pain counts against Hick's defense of the omnipotent God's total goodness.⁶⁹

Frederick Sontag considers Hick's theodicy as a bizarre training program, due to the amount of suffering involved: "if God designed this training program we need a new coach. We would not be able to develop without danger, it is true, but my problem is why the dangers were designed so that they actually break and destroy so many?"⁷⁰ In addition, John Roth asks, "how is the Holocaust compatible with the plan of person-perfecting that he describes? How does Auschwitz fit the claim that there is divine intent ensuring evolutionary progress where human character is concerned?"⁷¹

The third argument highlights the fact that there is "no convincing evidence that the human race is improving morally or spiritually" in terms of "a gradual spiritual evolution till human beings reach a full state of God-

⁶⁸ Nancey Murphy agrees with the first two arguments. See "Nancey Murphy" above.

⁶⁹ David R. Griffin, "A Critique of John Hick's Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis and John B. Cobb (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 53.

⁷⁰ Frederick Sontag, "A Critique of John Hick's Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis and John B. Cobb (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 56.

⁷¹ John K. Roth, "A Critique of John Hick's Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis and John B. Cobb (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 61.

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consciousness.”⁷² Griffin emphasizes that “our lives are simply too short for the soul-making process to reach completion, at least for most people.”⁷³

Concisely, these assertions reveal two major flaws in Hick’s developmental theodicy. The first two arguments indicate that this theodicy tends to legitimize evil through a means-end logic, while the third argument infers that this approach is heavily dependent on eschatology.⁷⁴

In order to avoid the risk of justifying evil,⁷⁵ most recent evolutionary theodicians have concluded that natural evil must be understood in consonance with “natural law, and not in conformity to a moral principle.”⁷⁶ In this way, the Developmental model needs to be replaced by the Constitutive approach, which allows the possibility of conceiving natural evil as physically necessary for creation, but not intended by God. However, by using the Constitutive model, Russell, Murphy, and Wildman need to deal with the premises and implications of the belief that the existence of any form of complex life is not possible without suffering. Actually, this belief is related to another significant presupposition of evolutionary theodicy, namely, the evolutionary comprehension of the world.

The Understanding of the World

According to the Constitutive model of theodicy, complex life cannot exist without suffering. Hence, suffering must be an essential factor in the understanding of the world. Murphy maintains that “the better we understand the interconnectedness among natural systems in the universe, and especially their bearing on complex life, the clearer it becomes that it would be impossible to have a world that allowed for a free and loving

⁷² Stephen T. Davis, “A Critique of John Hick’s Theodicy,” in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis and John B. Cobb (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981), 58.

⁷³ Griffin, “A Critique of John Hick’s Theodicy,” 55.

⁷⁴ See Roth, “A Critique of John Hick’s Theodicy,” 62.

⁷⁵ Tilley points out that “the modern discourse of theodicy tends to claim that all evils, or types of evil, are instrumental. They implicitly deny that real evils are genuine evil.” Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God,” 198. In this sense, “theodicies may have a power that is practically demoniac.” Tilley, “The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay,” 47. See also Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

⁷⁶ Thomas F. Tracy, “The Lawfulness of Nature and the Problem of Evil,” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 165-166.

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human response to God, yet one without natural evil.”⁷⁷ Likewise, Russell emphasizes that “biological and physical evils” are “constitutive of life and *not* the consequences of a primordial human choice.”⁷⁸

This conception comprises two basic notions: (1) suffering always existed in the world; (2) there is no creation without suffering. Nevertheless, even though it is possible to say that suffering is part of life as we know it now, it is not possible to affirm with absolute certainty that suffering was, and always will be part of life. In order to support this conjecture it is necessary to assume the principle of uniformity, which is “the belief among scientists that the natural processes we witness today also operated in the past and will continue as they are into the future.”⁷⁹ As Reijer Hooykaas points out, uniformity is “the methodological principle underlying modern geology and evolutionary biology.”⁸⁰

Secondly, if the creation of the world automatically implies the creation of suffering as well, it is impossible for God to create complex life without suffering. According to that perspective, God’s power in creation is limited by the current assumptions of evolutionary biology. Indeed, Russell acknowledges this problematic implication by saying that “*in principle* any biologically framed response to natural evil must ultimately be an insufficient response to natural evil,” since “God’s choice is not grounded in the stand-alone requirements of evolutionary biology.”⁸¹ Still, his theodicy tends to be essentially restricted to eschatology,⁸² because he believes that currently there are “limitations in fundamental scientific theories in physics and cosmology”⁸³ for a theodicy somehow framed by protology.

⁷⁷ Murphy, “Science and the Problem of Evil,” 132.

⁷⁸ Russell, “Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenge to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy,” 123.

⁷⁹ Peters and Hewlett, 206. For further information about the principle of uniformity, see Reijer Hooykaas, *Natural Law and Divine Miracle: A Historical-Critical Study of the Principle of Uniformity in Geology, Biology, and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1959); A. M. Celâl Sengör, *Is the Present the Key to the Past or Is the Past the Key to the Present? James Hutton and Adam Smith Versus Abraham Gottlob Werner and Karl Marx in Interpreting History* (Boulder, CO: Geological Society of America, 2001).

⁸⁰ Hooykaas, 1.

⁸¹ Russell, “Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenge to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy,” 123.

⁸² See Russell, “Eschatology and Scientific Cosmology,” 5; Russell, “Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenge to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy,” 128-130.

⁸³ Russell, “Physics, Cosmology, and the Challenge to Consequentialist Natural Theodicy,” 128.

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The Notion of Divine Activity

A significant presupposition related to the principle of uniformity in the world is the notion of non-interventionist divine action. As Thomas Tracy indicates, “creation involves a particular sort of divine kenosis, a self-limitation or restraint in the uses of God’s power.” Hence, “God creates an order of natural causes and respects the integrity of that order by allowing it to operate according to its own immanent lawful structure with little or no divine intervention that would disturb its causal history.”⁸⁴ In this way, evolutionary theodicians tend to think about God’s action at the quantum level.⁸⁵ This notion of divine action is fundamental for evolutionary theodicy to support God’s creation in an evolutionary framework.⁸⁶

Theological Implications

Among the several theological implications of the protological presuppositions discussed so far, this section will briefly deal with the main implications for the doctrine of creation and eschatology.

The Doctrine of Creation

The idea assumed by evolutionary theodicy that natural evil precedes moral evil has a major implication: death is part of God’s creation (whether in the Developmental or Constitutive approaches). As Murphy indicates, “natural history shows that there must have been millions if not billions of years of death before humans entered the scene.”⁸⁷ In this sense, John Baldwin correctly points out that, “generally, theistic evolutionists claim

⁸⁴ Tracy, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God,” 162.

⁸⁵ See Murphy and Ellis, 214-218; Lou Ann Trost, “Non-Interventionist Divine Action: Robert Russell, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and the Freedom of the (Natural) World,” in *God’s Action in Nature’s World: Essays in Honour of Robert John Russell*, ed. Robert J. Russell, Ted Peters, and Nathan Hallanger (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 205-216. Some evolutionary theodicians propose that the divine activity also occurs at the spiritual or mental level. See Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, “Divine Action and the ‘Argument from Neglect,’” in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 186, 189.

⁸⁶ For limitations of space, it is not possible to analyze this concept of divine activity in this paper. However, this concept should be analyzed in future studies.

⁸⁷ Nancey Murphy, introduction to *Physics and Cosmology*, xii.

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that God indeed is somehow involved in the creation of species and the development of the geologic column over 3.7 billion years.”⁸⁸

The development of the geological column portrays a terrible story. According to David Raup, “there are millions of different species of animals and plants on earth—possibly as many as forty million. But somewhere between five and fifty billion species have existed at one time or another. Thus, only but one in a thousand species is still alive—a truly lousy survival: 99.9 percent failure!”⁸⁹

This picture of creation seems to be incoherent with two biblical ideas usually affirmed by Christians: (1) the goodness of God and (2) the goodness of creation. The first incoherence raises theodicean questions about the character of God, such as “Does God create through death and extinction as his method of choice? Is God, thereby, involved in the serial genocide of species?”⁹⁰ As a matter of fact, evolutionary theodicy does not seem to provide “a satisfactory response to the problem of evolutionary suffering and extinction.”⁹¹

Furthermore, the Genesis account affirms the goodness of creation. After God finished His creative work on the sixth day, He declared creation to be very good. As a result, he rested and blessed the seventh day (cf. Gen 1:31-2:2). However, for the sake of consistency, evolutionary theodicy needs to reinterpret this biblical teaching. In this case, the goodness of creation is “understood in terms of fruitful potentiality . . . rather than initial perfection.”⁹² In other words, “creation is good in its propensity to give rise to great values of beauty, diversity, complexity,”⁹³ and so forth. Secondly, creation is interpreted as “a continuous process, rather than something completed at the beginning.”⁹⁴ Following this conception, the goodness of creation can be affirmed “only in the light of the eschatological

⁸⁸ John T. Baldwin, “Telos and the God of the Geologic Column: Toward Mapping Theodicean Questions as a First Step in the Discussion of What God Purposes to Do, Chooses Not to Do, or Cannot Do,” a paper presented at the Gloria Patri Creation Conference, June 4-8, 2009, 7.

⁸⁹ David M. Raup, *Extinction: Bad Genes or Bad Luck?* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1992), 4.

⁹⁰ Baldwin, “Telos and the God of the Geologic Column,” 7.

⁹¹ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 15.

⁹² J. C. Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship between Science and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1991), 99.

⁹³ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* See also John F. Haught, *God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2008), 153-172.

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consummation.”⁹⁵ To Southgate, creation “will finally be very good at the eschaton . . . and God’s Sabbath rest will be with God’s creation.”⁹⁶

According to that interpretation, the doctrine of creation is basically absorbed by eschatology. This means that it is almost impossible to see God’s purpose with creation apart from eschatology, which implies that theistic evolution seems unable to find arguments for theodicy in creation, apart from eschatology. As David Hull emphasizes,

What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomena epitomized by the species on Darwin’s Galapagos Islands? The evolutionary process is rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain and horror . . . Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural selection may be like, he is not . . . the loving God who cares about his productions . . . The God of the Galapagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.⁹⁷

The incoherence of evolutionary theodicy appears to be evident when the conception of creation as a continuous process, which reaches its completion only in the *eschaton*, is compared with the understanding of natural evil as a by-product of God’s creation. If the whole creation will be very good in the *eschaton*, which implies the extinction of natural evil, how can Murphy and Russell say that suffering is intrinsic to complex life, and that God did not intend evil in evolutionary creation? If life without natural evil is possible in the context of eschatology, why did God include suffering, death, and extinction in His creation? These questions appear to push evolutionary theodicy to developmental arguments,⁹⁸ but Murphy and Russell know that Hick’s soul-making approach is not a consistent position.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Pannenberg, 645.

⁹⁶ Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 16.

⁹⁷ David L. Hull, “The God of the Galapagos,” *Nature* 352 (1991):486.

⁹⁸ Murphy acknowledges that, in this respect, soul-making arguments are relevant for evolutionary theodicy: “if Christians are looking forward to a new creation, the eschaton, understood as a radically transformed cosmos no longer subject to the laws of nature, why not create it this way in the first place? . . . Soul-making arguments are relevant here.” Murphy, “Science and the Problem of Evil,” 146. See also Polkinghorne, *Theology in the Context of Science*, 158.

⁹⁹ For Murphy’s and Russell’s critique of Hick’s developmental theodicy, see “Nancey Murphy” and “Robert Russell” above. For other critiques of Hick’s theodicy, see “The Doctrine of Creation” above.

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Finally, theistic evolutionists generally claim that the Genesis account of origins is a “primeval saga,” because it has “the same pre-scientific view of the visible universe as the Mesopotamian creation stories.”¹⁰⁰ However, at the same time, they believe that death is part of God’s original creation. In a helpful comparative study between Mesopotamian texts and the Eden narrative presented in Genesis, Tryggve Mettinger indicates that the fundamental difference between the biblical and the Mesopotamian theodicies is the understanding of death.

What we have in Mesopotamia is a type of theodicy in which death is not the result of human guilt but is *the way that the gods arranged human existence* . . . on the other hand, what we have in the Eden Narrative is a theodicy that derives the anomic phenomena from human guilt. Death is not what God intended but is the result of human sin.¹⁰¹

Ironically, by affirming that death is part of God’s creation, evolutionary theodicy seems to be closer to Mesopotamian creation stories than the Genesis account of origins.

¹⁰⁰ Denis Edwards, “Evolution and the Christian God,” in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cosmology and Biological Evolution*, ed. Hilary D. Regan, Mark William Worthing, and Nancey C. Murphy (Adelaide, Australia: Australian Theological Forum, 2002), 175-176. Randall Younker and Richard Davidson point out that this “common understanding among most modern Biblical scholars . . . is built around the idea that the Hebrew word *raqia*’, which appears in Genesis 1 and is usually translated ‘firmament’ in English Bibles, was actually understood by the ancient Hebrews to be a solid, hemispherical dome or vault that rested upon mountains or pillars that stood along the outer most perimeter of a circular, a flat disc—the earth.” Randall Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heaven Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew רָקִיעַ,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49, no. 1 (2011):125. For helpful arguments against that conception, see *Ibid.*, 125-147. Gerhard Hasel argues that Genesis cosmology “represents not only a ‘complete break’ with the ancient Near Eastern mythological cosmologies but represents a parting of the spiritual ways which meant an undermining of the prevailing mythological cosmologies. This was brought about by the conscious and deliberate antimythical polemic that runs as a red thread through the entire Gen cosmology. The antimythical polemic has its roots in the Hebrew understanding of reality which is fundamentally opposed to the mythological one.” Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10, no. 1 (1972):20.

¹⁰¹ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2-3* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 133 (emphasis supplied). Mettinger also acknowledges that “we should not overlook the role of the serpent” in the understanding of Eden Narrative’s theodicy. For further information about the conception of death in Genesis, see Jacques B. Doukhan, “When Death Was Not Yet: The Testimony of Biblical Creation,” a paper presented at Andrews University, October 20, 2010.

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Eschatology

Eschatology is probably the most important issue for evolutionary theodicy. Since eschatology is the final step in the process of evolutionary creation, only the last things may reveal God's purposes with creation. In other words, evolutionary theodicy appears to be totally dependent on eschatology.¹⁰² Nevertheless, as Russell acknowledges, the prognosis indicated by physical cosmology is that "the future of the universe is endless expansion and cooling, and with the eventual and irrevocable extinction of all life in the universe."¹⁰³

Considering the presuppositions of a non-interventionist divine action and the principle of uniformity, "how can Christian eschatological hope be reconciled with cosmology's bleak predictions about the future of the universe?"¹⁰⁴ Russell's response to this question is based on Jesus' bodily resurrection: "just as Jesus' body was transformed into a risen and glorified body, God will transform . . . the universe, into the new creation."¹⁰⁵ However, that answer raises the following challenging question, "how precisely can resurrection be thought of in noninterventionist terms?"¹⁰⁶

Based on his Developmental approach, Hick describes his conception of eschatology by saying that the "person-making process, leading eventually to a perfect human community, is not completed on this earth." He assumes "a continuation of our lives in another sphere of existence after bodily death."¹⁰⁷ Therefore, Hick avoids the scientific challenge for eschatology by using the concept of immortality of the soul, which presupposes a dichotomous human nature. However, it seems that this option is not viable for current theistic evolutionists such as Nancey Murphy and John Polkinghorne.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² See Russell, "Eschatology and Scientific Cosmology," 21.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Denis Edwards, "Why Is God Doing This? Suffering, the Universe, and Christian Eschatology," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey C. Murphy, Robert J. Russell, and William R. Stoeger (Vatican City State; Berkeley, CA: Vatican Observatory Publications; Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), 265.

¹⁰⁵ Russell, "Eschatology and Scientific Cosmology," 25.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God," 265.

¹⁰⁷ Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 51.

¹⁰⁸ Leading theistic evolutionists, such as Murphy and Polkinghorne, reject the idea of immortality of the soul and the dualistic conception of human nature. See Nancey C. Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Polkinghorne, *Theology in the Context of Science*, 74, 152-155.

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Nonetheless, the Constitutive approach does not offer a solution either. If natural evil is intrinsic to life, the logical conclusion is that the eschatological hope (understood in terms of complete eradication of death and suffering) cannot be accomplished. In this sense, Wildman presents a conclusion coherent with the presuppositions of the Constitutive model: “there is no science-supported basis for picturing a new heaven and a new earth that is free of suffering.” To put it differently, “a new heaven and a new earth without suffering would be so spectacular a transformation that it would have to be supernatural in character, so we should probably assume that our scientific knowledge should be ignored as irrelevant.”¹⁰⁹

Since the complete eradication of death and suffering is the core of biblical eschatology and the center of the Christian hope (cf. John 3:16; Rom 6:23; 1 Cor 15:26, 54-57; 2 Tim 1:10; Rev 21:4), I do not conceive Wildman’s position as a Christian approach to the problem. However, I do think that his conclusion reveals the inconsistency of evolutionary theodicians who assume a Constitutive understanding of natural evil and attempt to defend an eschatological goal of God’s creation.

Conclusion

Protology is essential for evolutionary theodicians because they need to explain why God uses natural evil in His evolutionary creation. Nevertheless, their basic presuppositions—such as the non-existence of Satan and fallen angels, evil as intrinsic to life and/or as an instrument to human development, the non-interventionist divine action, and the principle of uniformity—imply that God’s creation does not have any purpose apart from eschatology. According to the Developmental approach, God’s purpose with creation is the moral development of the creatures. This approach tends to legitimize evil, and its means-end logic is highly dependent on eschatology.

By affirming that evil is a by-product of creation and that God did not intend evil, the Constitutive model (as employed by Russell and Murphy) implies that God’s purpose with creation is found only in eschatology. Yet, its protological presuppositions prevent the possibility of a world free from death and suffering. Conversely, if its proponents want to affirm this possibility, they need to explain the fact that if life without natural evil will be possible in the context of eschatology, why did God include suffering, death, and extinction in His creation. The response to this question probably will be developmental, which means that this answer will ultimately attempt

¹⁰⁹ Wildman, 291.

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to justify evil, and will be unable to explain why the suffering in this world goes beyond what is necessary for human development.

In short, this study indicates the inconsistency of evolutionary theodicy and calls for a different model of theodicy. However, such model needs to carefully articulate the foundational concepts of evil, the world, and divine activity. In fact, the present study can be used as a preliminary step in the articulation of these concepts, in the sense that it provides ideas and implications that could be explored or avoided.

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